

Evaluating Stringency of Age-Gating in Online Sports Betting Platforms

Adam Wells

adamcwells2@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Online sports betting has expanded rapidly in the United States, yet little is known about the rigor and visibility of age-gating systems on major platforms. This qualitative comparative study evaluated eight leading sports betting websites between February 21 and February 22, 2026 using a structured rubric that assessed homepage access, registration-stage verification requirements, and responsible-gaming messaging. Four age-gating classes were observed, ranging from birthday-plus-SSN verification to birthday-plus-click confirmation only. Across platforms, promotional content was often accessible before full verification, while responsible-gaming information varied in prominence and accessibility. Platforms with more detailed underage-gambling statements often also displayed more robust verification steps, although this pattern was not uniform. These findings indicate that major online sports-betting platforms differ substantially in the rigor and visibility of their age-verification practices.

INTRODUCTION

The American Gaming Association (AGA) defines online sports betting platforms as regulated entities that integrate payment systems, live odds, and responsible gaming tools under state or national licensing regimes.¹ In recent years, the accessibility of online sports betting has expanded dramatically. For example, the total wagers placed grew in value from \$4.9 billion dollars in 2017 to \$121 billion dollars in 2023.² The legalization of online sports betting across 31 U.S. states has fueled rapid market growth, with the industry generating billions in annual revenue, with over \$72 billion dollars in commercial revenue in 2024, a 7.5% increase from 2023.¹

While sports betting is often promoted as entertainment, it carries high risks of addiction.³ Despite the rapid growth of online sports betting in recent years, important gaps remain in our understanding of how access to online betting platforms is regulated. Specifically, there is a lack of information about the stringency of age-gating procedures during the sign-up or login processes of many prominent platforms (e.g., FanDuel). While many companies frequently publish responsible gaming statements that emphasize their purported commitment to preventing underage gambling, it is unclear whether these statements are consistent with the actual age-gating processes of the platforms.

April 2026

Vol 6, No 1.

This study addresses these gaps by conducting a qualitative analysis of the age-gating practices of leading online sports betting platforms. I compare these practices with each platform's public statements regarding problem gambling and underage gambling to assess the degree of alignment between corporate messaging and operational safeguards. I hypothesize that: [1] Platforms with stronger public commitments to responsible gaming will not necessarily demonstrate more stringent age-gating procedures in practice, and [2] Age-gating processes on many major platforms will rely primarily on self-reported information and post-registration identity checks, creating potential vulnerabilities that could allow underage users to attempt to create an account.

METHODS

This study focused on the leading online sports betting platforms operating in the United States and selected international markets.^{4,5} For the publicly traded companies, I obtained revenue data reported in Securities and Exchange Commission 10-K filings for 2024. For publicly traded companies, I collected U.S. revenue disaggregation, adjusted EBITDA for 2023 and 2024, and 2024 adjusted EBITDA margin data.

Using these sources, the final sample consisted of the most prominent platforms by revenue and user reach including FanDuel, DraftKings, BetMGM, Caesars Sportsbook, theScore Bet, Fanatics Sportsbook, Betway, and Unibet. Together, these platforms likely represent a substantial proportion of the online sports betting market in jurisdictions where online wagering is legal.

Data was collected directly from the official websites of each platform. Website assessments were conducted between February 21, 2026 and February 22, 2026. All platforms were accessed using a standard desktop web browser with cookies cleared between visits to minimize personalization effects. At no point during my research were user accounts created beyond what was required to observe age-gating processes at the registration stage, and no wagers were placed. For each platform, data was extracted on homepage design, promotional content, visibility of responsible gambling information, and the structure of age-gating mechanisms encountered during browsing and account creation. Particular attention was paid to whether users could access promotional materials prior to verifying their age and whether responsible gambling resources were accessible without logging into an age-verified account.

To evaluate the stringency of age-gating practices, a structured rubric was developed based on prior research on age-gating in other regulated digital industries, including alcohol, tobacco, and e-cigarettes (see Appendix).⁶⁻⁸ At the lowest level of stringency for location verification, there was no location verification, followed by minimal confirmation through the user selecting a state of play or country of residence. The highest levels of stringency involved validation based on IP address. At the lowest level of stringency for age-gating, there was no age-gate, followed by minimal confirmation through clicking or verifying age or entering a birthday. The highest levels of stringency involved validation against official records or documents (e.g., Division of Motor Vehicles records). The rubric focused on both technological requirements and user-experience design, recognizing that age-gating is not solely a technical process but

also a behavioral and informational one. Each platform was assessed across multiple criteria that together reflected the overall robustness of its age-gating system.

First, I assessed whether the platform required an explicit affirmative action to verify age (e.g., clicking an age-confirmation prompt) before accessing site content. Platforms were coded based on whether this step was mandatory or could be bypassed. Second, I evaluated the type of demographic information required at the point of registration, including date of birth entry, phone number verification, and the provision of government-linked identifiers such as a Social Security number. These requirements were treated as indicators of increasing stringency of age-gates. Third, I examined whether platforms relied on third-party identity verification services and whether these services cross-checked user information against governmental or credit-bureau records. Platforms that employed automated cross-referencing were considered more stringent than those relying solely on self-reported information. Fourth, I assessed whether documentation uploads (e.g., passport or government-issued ID) were required at any stage of the registration process and whether access to site features was restricted until verification was completed. Finally, I evaluated whether users were able to browse promotional content or site features prior to passing the age-gates, as partial access was considered a reduction in effective stringency.

Based on these criteria, each platform's age-gating practices were categorized into distinct classes reflecting increasing levels of rigor. In addition to technical age-gating measures, the study analyzed textual statements related to problem gambling, underage gambling prevention, and corporate social responsibility. These statements were collected from homepage footers, dedicated responsible gaming pages, terms of service, and registration interfaces. Statements were analyzed qualitatively to identify common themes, including references to legal age requirements, acknowledgments of gambling-related harm, and links to external support resources. Particular attention was paid to the consistency between stated commitments to preventing underage gambling and the actual stringency of age-gating mechanisms observed on each platform.

RESULTS

As of February 1, 2026, 31 states have fully legalized online sports betting, as well as the District of Columbia, and the remainder of states maintained prohibitions (Figure 1). As shown in Figure 1, legalization was concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest and was less common in the South and West.

Analysis of Securities and Exchange Commission 10-K filings from publicly traded sports betting companies showed common themes in revenue performance (Table 1). Table 1 provides the financial context used to identify major platforms for inclusion in the study. Among publicly traded firms with available disclosures, FanDuel, DraftKings, BetMGM, theScore Bet, and Caesars reported substantial U.S. revenue activity in 2024, although not all sample platforms could be compared directly because Fanatics is not publicly traded and Unibet and Betway are based outside the United States. Between 2022 and 2024, companies reported consistent revenue growth, with BetMGM and FanDuel demonstrating

year-over-year increases in 2024 exceeding 16%, while Caesar's parent company reported more moderate expansion of 10%.

Evaluation of homepages across major sports betting platforms revealed consistent design practices and similar promotional strategies (Table 2). Table 2 summarizes the information that was visible on each homepage before full age verification. Across platforms, users were often able to view promotional content, product categories, or sportsbook-related navigation before completing registration. Screenshots in Appendix Figures 1A and 1B show that DraftKings and FanDuel prominently displayed promotional graphics and multi-product navigation on their homepages, while Appendix Figure 1C shows Caesars emphasizing sign-up prompts and promotional offers. Appendix Figure 1E further shows that BetMGM presented a state-selection interface early in the browsing experience. Most platforms, including FanDuel, DraftKings, and Caesars, emphasize simple navigation, new-player promotions, and rapid access to live betting features, reflecting an industry-standard website design. Responsible gambling resources are displayed on all platforms but varied in visibility: some sites feature them prominently in homepage banners, while others place them as footer links. Caesars, for example, denied access to their Responsible Gaming page if a viewer was not logged in to an account that had not passed age-gating measures.

Promotions were prominent on the homepage, with sign-up bonuses, free bets, and odds boosts (i.e., promotional offers that temporarily increase the payout odds on specific bets, allowing users to win more money than they would with standard listed odds) being displayed openly, though presentation methods differed across platforms. FanDuel and DraftKings highlighted rotating promotional graphics, whereas Caesars and BetMGM utilized fixed banners with an emphasis on loyalty programs.

The analysis of age-gating practices revealed little variation in how platforms implemented and enforced age restrictions (Table 3). Table 3 summarizes the age-verification steps observed at login or sign-up, including click-based age confirmation, date-of-birth entry, phone verification, ID upload, and Social Security number entry. Among the tested platforms, four common classes of age-gating were present. The first class consisted of platforms that required a click for age verification, the user to enter a birthday, and enter a social security number. FanDuel, DraftKings, and BetMGM employed a click for the user to verify age, user to enter birthday, and user to enter social security number. The second class required users to click to verify age, enter a date of birth, and complete phone verification. theScore Bet, Caesars Sportsbook, and Fanatics all use this class of age gating. The third class of age-gating only contains Betway, and requires users to click to verify age, enter a birthday, and upload a passport or ID. The fourth class of age-gating only contained Unibet, which only required users to input a birthday and click to verify age. Most major platforms, including DraftKings, FanDuel, and BetMGM, relied on automated third-party identity verification services, requiring users to submit personal information cross-checked against governmental records. Some platforms, such as Betway, requested documentation uploads, like a passport or government-issued identification, during the registration process, while Unibet had less stringent initial checks. User interface approaches also differed, with some sites blocking access until full verification was completed, while others allowed limited browsing prior to account confirmation.

Across the platforms that were examined, statements about problem gambling were fairly standard, with all including some form of a message about responsible gaming, and some referenced support resources

April 2026

Vol 6. No 1.

such as 1-800-GAMBLER, a free, around-the-clock helpline for individuals or families wanting help with a gambling addiction, operated by the National Council on Problem Gambling. However, the statements on underage gambling from each of these platforms have more variety. For example, theScore Bet had a simple statement of “Must be 21+”, while DraftKings stated “Underage gambling is a criminal offense. Facilitating someone under the age of 18 to gamble is also against the law. If caught, you’ll be prohibited from gambling online”. Most platforms based in the United States assert a strict requirement to be twenty-one years of age or older, while platforms based internationally, such as Betway and Unibet, express a requirement to be eighteen years or older.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study identified three central findings regarding the structure and stringency of age-gating on online sports betting platforms. First, the analysis of regulatory filings and website design features as a whole indicated a rapidly developing industry with stable revenue growth, geographical spread and common digital infrastructure. Second, platform homepages prioritized promotions and ease of navigation, while responsible-gambling information was often less visible and harder to access. Third, and most importantly, the stringent nature of age-gating practices differed markedly across platforms and was closely associated with the clarity and prominence of each firm’s responsible-gaming and anti-underage-gambling statements. Platforms that explicitly addressed their commitments to preventing underage gambling tended to have more stringent procedures of verification, while others were inconsistent between their public messages and the practical effectiveness of age-gating systems.

The findings of this research contribute to a growing body of literature on age-gating as a regulatory and technological approach to preventing youth from engaging in age-restricted products and practices. Studies on age-gating for tobacco sites, for example, have demonstrated that strong age-gating measures may reduce youth exposure to cigarette marketing and online sales while weak or symbolic age-gates are largely ineffective.^{9,10} Similar patterns have been observed in e-cigarette regulation, where relatively easy access to promotional content and purchasing paths is provided by a very low age check for adolescents.¹¹ These results suggest that online sports betting platforms share a similar regulatory space where age-gating alone is not enough if the mechanisms can be easily bypassed or inconsistently enforced.

Alcohol-based studies also point to the value of age-gates.¹² There is evidence that if adolescents are regularly exposed to alcohol-related digital marketing, particularly if the age-gates are weak or not open, they are more likely to drink at a younger age and to report increasing levels of drinking over time.¹³ In such cases, poor age-gating serves both to expose but also to normalize and desensitize youth, who become familiar with brands, and promotional language long before they are allowed to participate legally.¹⁴ The similarities between alcohol marketing and sports betting promotion are particularly striking in light of the emphasis on bonuses, loyalty programs and real-time engagement found in this study. These promotional tools function as behavioral incentives, rewarding continued participation and creating a sense of urgency or exclusivity that can be especially influential for younger users who are more responsive to immediate rewards and gamified experiences.

More generally, the results reflect international policy debates about access for youth to digital spaces. For example, Australia's recent ban on the use of social media by minors under the age of 16 reflects growing recognition that self-assessed age checks are not enough in highly risky digital environments. These findings are consistent with broader concerns that weak age-gates may expose youth to online gambling content. Age-gating, when applied rigorously, can be an effective prevention strategy, but when applied superficially, may offer a false sense of protection.

The apparent contradictions between corporate messaging and actual age-gating practice may present a policy and regulatory concern. Many online gambling sites write prominently of corporate social responsibility and responsible gaming in their public communications, but responsible gaming resources are often difficult to find and located in footer links or separate pages with considerably less traffic. This structural marginalization can undermine the stated intent of these policies and may reduce their practical utility. When age-gating policies are similarly weak or inconsistently enforced, it creates a regulatory climate in which responsibility is asserted verbally, but not fully realized in practice.

These findings may also be relevant to enforcement and oversight. Most jurisdictions now focus on licensing and revenue generation, while auditing the strength and consistency of age-gating systems is less common. A 2025 survey conducted by Common Sense Media found that 36% of boys aged 11-17 years reported gambling in the past year.¹⁵ The survey also found 45% of the boys who gambled were also exposed to online gambling content.¹⁵ A more stringent enforcement program may help limit youth exposure to online gambling content by including standardized age-gating requirements, third-party audits, and fines for noncompliance, in order to make sure that platforms' practices meet their public obligations. Without such oversight, platforms could still pursue user acquisition and participation rather than meaningful safeguards against access by minors.

Several strengths of this research are noted including being based on the leading online sports betting websites, all of which make up a large market share in the United States and globally. Moreover, this research assessed both the technological age-gating methods used on the websites as well as the responsible gaming messages present on the websites. Hence, it provided a more detailed analysis of the age-gating system as opposed to research based solely on messages. However, the research also contains a number of weaknesses. The research was carried out between February 21, 2026 and February 22, 2026; however, the online sports betting market keeps changing rapidly due to the regular updates of the websites' interfaces as well as the verification methods.

In conclusion, the current research illustrates that even though age-gates exist on each of the leading online sports-betting services, the level of their stringency and functionality differs greatly. Those platforms that took a more outspoken approach to supporting responsible gaming and preventing underage gambling often had a higher level of functionality in their age-gating processes, while some platforms had a significant disconnection between what they claimed to be doing and what they were actually doing. It is important to continue to monitor the functionality of age-gates among the growing online sports-betting services. In addition, future longitudinal-based studies could seek to determine the

impact of more stringent age-gates on the exposure to and engagement with online sports betting among youth. Ultimately, as online sports betting continues to grow at an unprecedented rate, it will be essential that age-gating measures are more than just a gesture towards protecting youth and that the integrity of an increasingly online gambling industry is maintained.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Mark Wells for helpful comments and suggestions.

REFERENCES

1. Miller WC. *State of the States 2025*. American Gaming Association; 2025.
<https://www.americangaming.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/AGA-State-of-the-States-2025.pdf>
2. Yeola A, Allen MR, Desai N, et al. Growing Health Concern Regarding Gambling Addiction in the Age of Sportsbooks. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2025;185(4):382. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2024.8193
3. Allami Y, Hodgins DC, Young M, et al. A meta-analysis of problem gambling risk factors in the general adult population. *Addiction*. 2021;116(11):2968-2977. doi:10.1111/add.15449
4. King B. 2024 handle share recap: DraftKings closed gap; Fanatics surged. *Sports Business Journal*. April 5, 2026. Accessed April 5, 2026.
<https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Articles/2025/03/07/2024-handle-share-recap-draftkings-close-d-gap-fanatics-surged/>
5. US sports-betting duo's growth wager is paying off | Reuters. Accessed April 5, 2026.
<https://www.reuters.com/breakingviews/us-sports-betting-duos-growth-wager-is-paying-off-2025-01-23/>
6. Soneji S, Gerling M, Yang J, Sargent J. Online Electronic Cigarette Marketing—Violation of Self-regulated Standards by Tobacco Companies. *JAMA Pediatr*. 2016;170(5):511. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.4501
7. Unger JB, Bartsch L. Exposure to tobacco websites: Associations with cigarette and e-cigarette use and susceptibility among adolescents. *Addict Behav*. 2018;78:120-123. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2017.11.012
8. Barry AE, Primm K, Russell H, Russell AM. Characteristics and Effectiveness of Alcohol Website Age Gates Preventing Underage User Access. *Alcohol Alcohol*. 2021;56(1):82-88. doi:10.1093/alcalc/agua090

April 2026
Vol 6, No 1.

9. Williams RS, Derrick J, Liebman AK, LaFleur K, Ribisl KM. Content analysis of age verification, purchase and delivery methods of internet e-cigarette vendors, 2013 and 2014. *Tob Control*. 2018;27(3):287-293. doi:10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2016-053616
10. Williams RS, Phillips-Weiner KJ, Vincus AA. Age Verification and Online Sales of Little Cigars and Cigarillos to Minors. *tob regul sci*. 2020;6(2):152-163. doi:10.18001/TRS.6.2.6
11. Ribisl KM. Internet Sales of Cigarettes to Minors. *JAMA*. 2003;290(10):1356. doi:10.1001/jama.290.10.1356
12. Noel JK, Sammartino CJ, Rosenthal SR. Exposure to Digital Alcohol Marketing and Alcohol Use: A Systematic Review. *J Stud Alcohol Drugs Suppl*. 2020;(s19):57-67. doi:10.15288/jsads.2020.s19.57
13. McClure AC, Tanski SE, Li Z, et al. Internet Alcohol Marketing and Underage Alcohol Use. *Pediatrics*. 2016;137(2):e20152149. doi:10.1542/peds.2015-2149
14. Padon AA. AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF ADVERTISING CONTENT IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ALCOHOL ADVERTISING EXPOSURE AND UNDERAGE DRINKING.
15. Caldwell J, Fisher JHN. Betting on Boys: Understanding Gambling Among Adolescent Boys.