

Phone-in and win!

An exploratory study into phone-in games in The Netherlands

English summary

Aim and structure of the study

From September to December 2007, Research voor Beleid conducted a study into phone-in games in The Netherlands. Phone-in games are games of chance in which one can participate by texting or calling to a premium phone number. This study, commissioned by the Netherlands Gaming Control Board, set out to answer the following questions:

- What has been the attitude of the Dutch Government towards phone-in games since their first appearance?
- What are the main characteristics of the present phone-in games on offer in The Netherlands?
- To what extent do Dutch consumers participate in phone-in games, what is their profile and how much money is being spent?

To answer these questions, a combination of different research methods has been applied: a desk study, observation of phone-in games as offered by the various media, participation in a selection of games, a questionnaire among phone-in games suppliers, and a survey among Dutch consumers about participation in the games. This summary shows the main results of the study.

Attitude of the Dutch government towards phone-in games

The supply of phone-in games is very diverse: from Call TV they stretch out to games in magazines, newspapers, the internet and on the radio. They vary greatly in duration, rates charged and prize money. For a long period, the attitude of the Dutch government towards these games has been ambiguous. Finally, the government decided to regard them as 'promotional games of chance' and treat them as such. The rules to be followed were laid down in a code of conduct for promotional games of chance: they are to promote a service or product, participation costs should not exceed a set maximum (profit making is not allowed) and no false expectations on chances of winning should be aroused. Not until 2007, the Dutch government started to increase its supervision and enforcement regarding promotional games of chance.

Supply of phone-in games

Some phone-in games indeed follow the code of conduct for promotional games of chance. Others, however, show important bottlenecks. Most games lack transparency with regard to the chances of winning and the way winners are being drawn. Many also lack transparency in the prizes to be won, participation costs and other relevant terms and conditions. Some games in magazines and on the internet exceed the maximum set costs for participating. Call TV hosts often encourage viewers to participate by making misleading statements. Sometimes, allowance of participation by minors under the age of sixteen years remains unclear.

Participation in phone-in games

A survey among Dutch consumers shows there is great diversity of participants. Participants can be found among all education levels, and both among employed and unemployed consumers. The survey does not reveal much excessive participation behaviour. On a monthly basis, participants do, on average, not spend large amounts of money on the games. However, 3% to 4% of the participants reported ever to have encountered financial problems due to participating in phone-in games.