

# The Kids Are All Right: Investigating the Susceptibility of Teens and Adults to YouTube Giveaway Scams

Elijah Bouma-Sims, Lily Klucinec, Mandy Lanyon, Lorrie Faith Cranor, and Julie Downs  
Presenting author contact: [eboumasi@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:eboumasi@andrew.cmu.edu)



Published at NDSS 2025

## What Are YouTube Giveaway Scams?

- Videos that purport to offer free digital goods for performing tasks or providing personal information
  - Thousands on YouTube, especially related to mobile games
- Prior work hypothesizes that minors may be especially vulnerable
- **Goal:** Investigate this hypothesis and other factors that may impact vulnerability

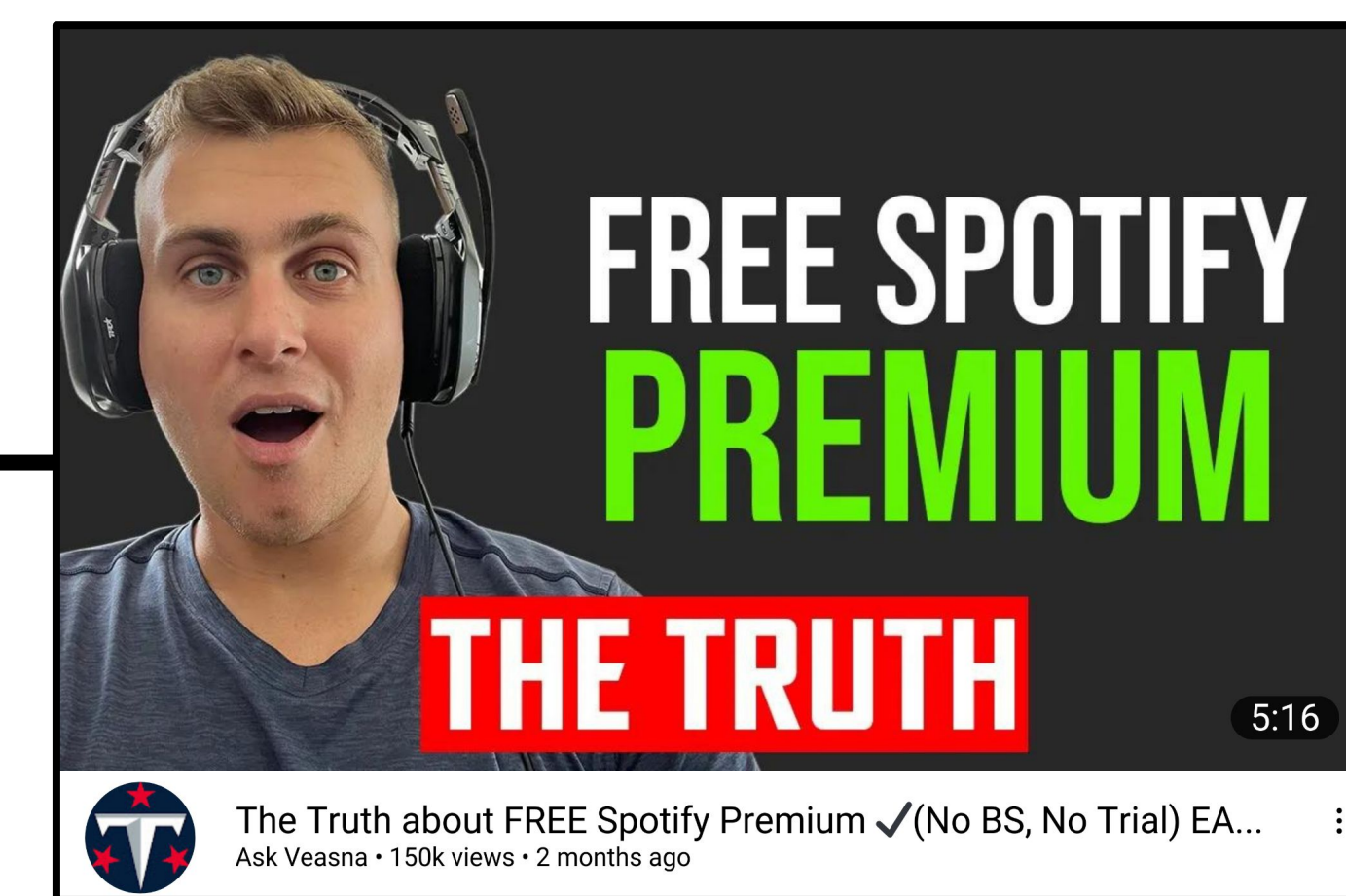
## Methods

- Recruited teens (n = 85) + adults (n = 205)
- Asked to imagine advising a friend searching for free “Spotify Premium” or “Roblox Robux” on YouTube
- Presented with 1 of 6 scam videos and 1 of 6 legit videos
- Asked to recommend action(s) to friend
  - e.g., Exit, report, comment, click link, etc.
- Analyzed participant behavior with respect to age and other potential confounding variables.

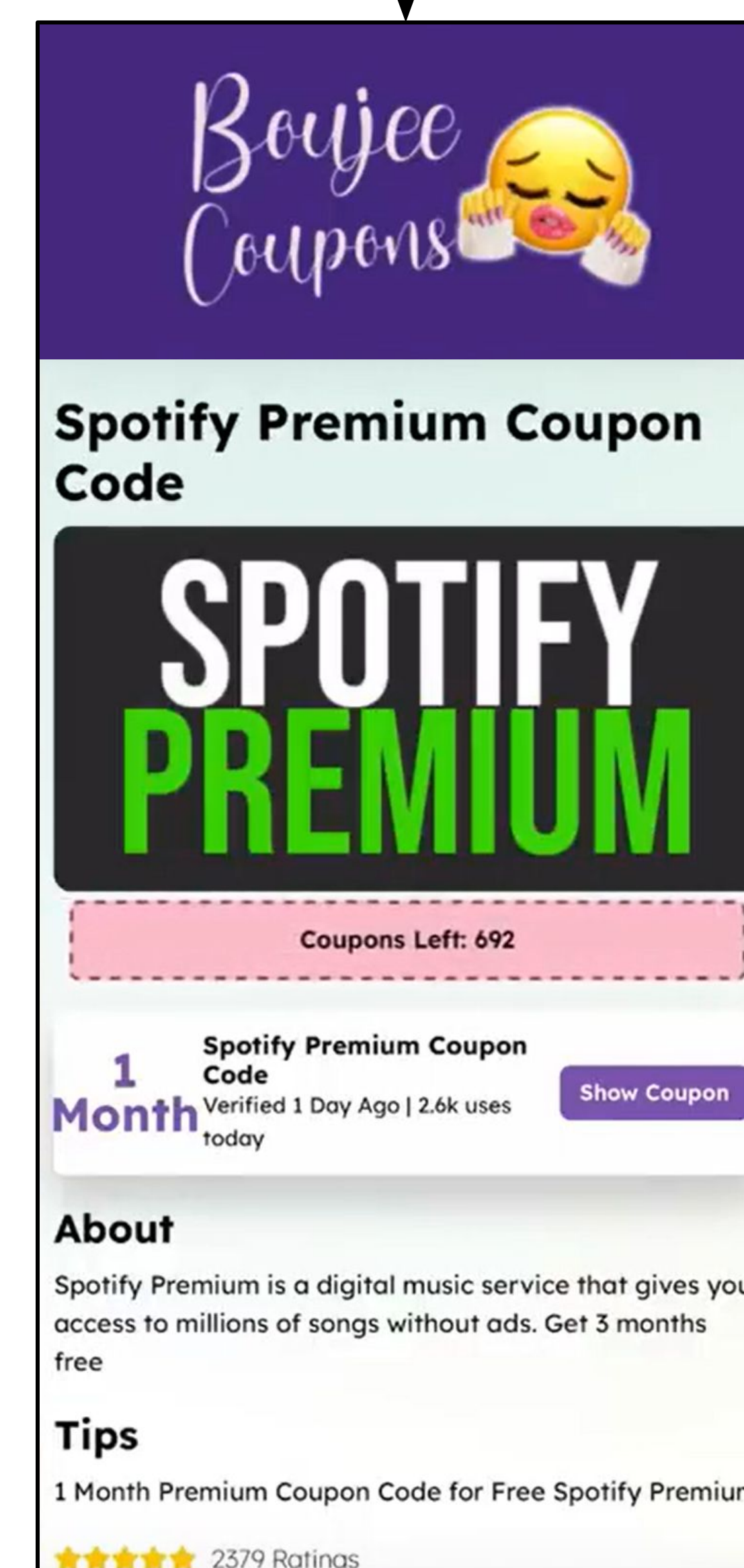
## Participants recognized the scam

- This varied by scam shown
  - 17% thought the most convincing scam was legit
  - 2% thought the least convincing scam was legit
- 48% of users recommended exiting the scam
- Teens did not perform significantly better or worse than adults

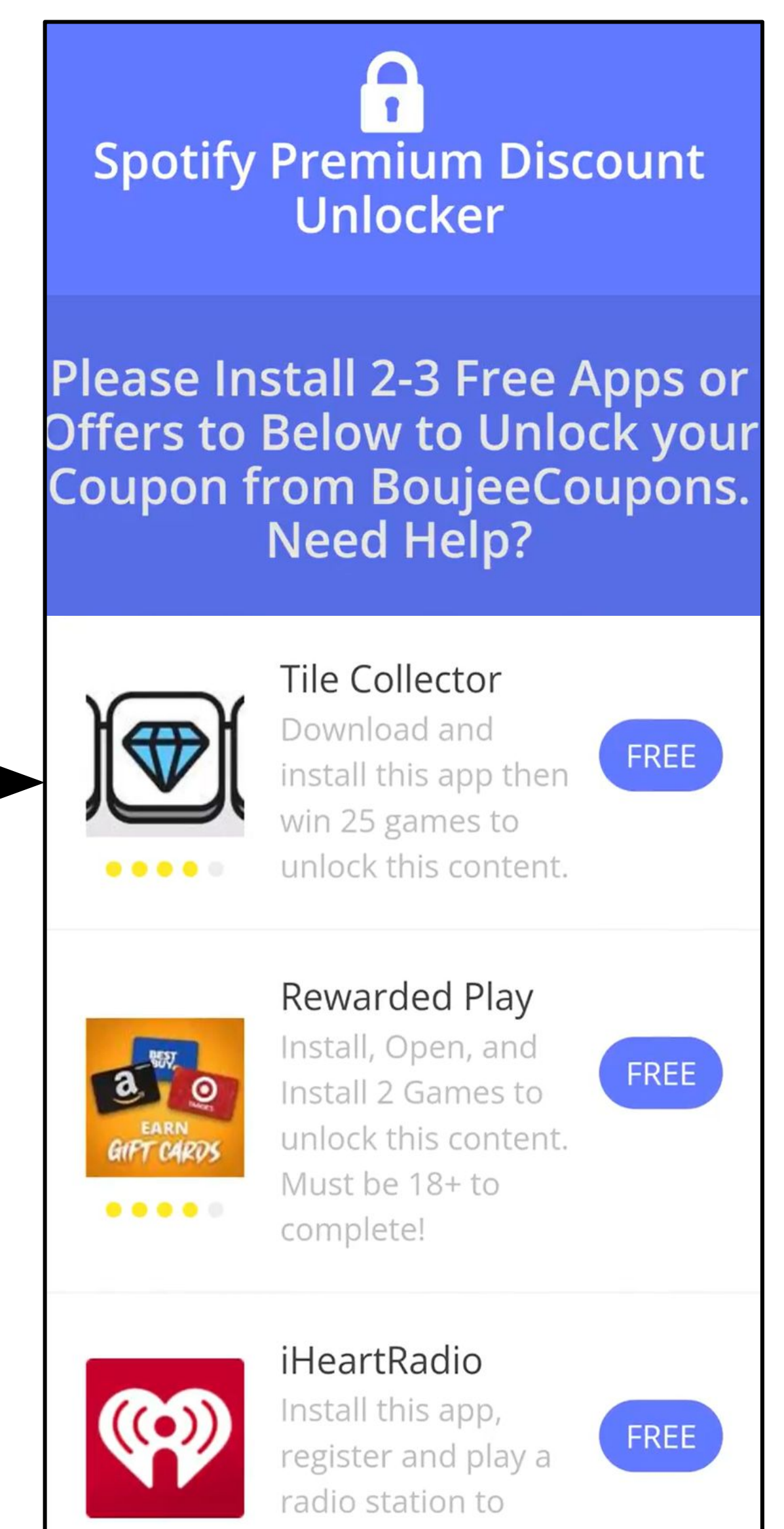
“Completing online offers most likely never gives you what you want.” - *Teenage participant*



1. Giveaway scam video



2. Fake offer page



3. Task interface

## Teens were more likely to search for the terms used to find scams

- 39% of teens vs. 6% of adults reported searching for “free Roblox Robux” or similar
- 77% of teens vs. 27% of adults had played Roblox at least once
  - May lead teens to be more exposed to giveaway scams online or serve as a protective factor (i.e., greater familiarity with these scams)

## Conclusions

- Teens are not *necessarily* more vulnerable to giveaway scams, but may be more likely to encounter them
- Warnings on videos that appear to discuss “free” offers could protect uninformed users
- The best solution is to eliminate scammers’ ability to post scams on YouTube