

Responsible gambling disclosure strategies used by four Nordic state-owned gambling companies

What this research is about

Critics have argued that responsible gambling (RG) focuses too much on people who find it difficult to control their gambling. The emphasis is on individual responsibility. In doing so, RG downplays the harmful characteristics of gambling products. Gambling companies often use RG as a tool to present a positive image. Previous research has identified different strategies used by private gambling companies when disclosing their RG activities. Specifically, Leung and Snell (2021) identified the following RG disclosure strategies: ethical reflexivity, an assertive façade, a defensive façade, disclaiming ethical responsibility, curtailing disclosure, and zero disclosure.

For state-owned gambling companies, the conflicts of interest between running a profitable business and managing gambling as a threat to public health are even more evident. Therefore, it is important to consider how state-owned gambling companies engage in RG disclosure strategies. The purpose of this study was to examine the RG disclosure strategies used by four Nordic state-owned gambling companies. The researchers examined the rhetorical and strategic use of such RG disclosures in the companies' annual reports.

What the researchers did

The researchers analyzed publicly available annual reports from four Nordic state-owned gambling companies: Danske Spil (Denmark), Veikkaus (Finland), Norsk Tipping (Norway), and Svenska Spel (Sweden). The annual reports were from 2019 to 2021, with a total of 12 annual reports. All sections of the reports discussing RG and gambling harm were identified. The researchers then used Leung and

What you need to know

This study explored the responsible gambling (RG) disclosure strategies used by four Nordic state-owned gambling companies (Danske Spil, Veikkaus, Norsk Tipping, and Svenska Spel). The researchers analyzed these companies' publicly available annual reports from 2019 to 2021. They identified four RG disclosure strategies: assertive façade, defensive façade, disclamation, and reflexivity. Overall, there were not a lot of differences between the companies in terms of the types of RG disclosure statements made. All companies adopted an assertive façade, offering details on their RG measures. The companies also adopted a defensive façade, including the use of vague language and broad statements. Disclamation disclosure strategies involved a focus on the legality of the business, actions, and revenue, presenting RG as a cost. The reflexivity strategy, which involved acknowledging responsibility for gambling harm, was rarely used.

Snell's (2021) framework to code and examine the RG disclosure strategies used by the four companies.

What the researchers found

Svenska Spel and Veikkaus had longer annual reports than Danske Spil and Norsk Tipping. Veikkaus reported the most on RG and gambling harm. The researchers found that the strategies of zero disclosure and curtailing disclosure were not present in the reports. There were not a lot of differences between the companies in terms of the types of RG disclosure statements made. But Veikkaus and Svenska Spel tended to emphasize an assertive façade while Norsk Tipping and Danske Spil used a defensive façade more commonly.

Reflexivity: Reflexivity was seen in sections of the annual reports where the companies took responsibility for their actions, admitted conflicts of interest, or evaluated their actions in the face of new knowledge. For example, Veikkaus admitted that it did not do enough to prevent gambling harm. However, the four companies rarely engaged in reflexivity. In particular, reflexivity was not observed in the annual reports of Danske Spil, and it occurred only once in the annual reports of Svenska Spel.

Assertive façade: RG strategies that were categorized as presenting an assertive façade included mentioning RG achievements, certificates, and details of measures taken related to RG. For example, Veikkaus detailed its harm prevention measures, marketing guidelines, employee education on RG, and review of new gambling products. Danske Spil, Norsk Tipping, and Svenska Spel described how they contacted people who showed difficulties controlling their gambling behaviour. All four companies often used an assertive façade. RG strategies categorized as presenting an assertive façade accounted for 18–35% of all RG disclosure statements.

Defensive façade: A defensive façade included the use of broad statements and abstract language to list goals and aims, passive acceptance of current regulations, and taking credit for actions and their supposed effects. For example, companies often stated their aims of preventing and reducing gambling harm, but they did not elaborate on how they would do so. A defensive façade was the most common type of strategies used across all companies, accounting for 57–74% of all RG disclosure statements.

Disclamation: Disclamation disclosure strategies involved a focus on the legality of the business, actions, and revenue. Responsibility to address gambling harm was presented as a cost. There was also a transfer of responsibility to people who gamble or blaming offshore gambling companies. Disclamation was rarely used, accounting for 5–7% of RG disclosure statements made by the companies.

The researchers compared their findings with Leung and Snell's (2021) results. It was found that Nordic state-owned gambling companies used RG

disclosure strategies more often than private gambling companies in Macao or the United States. Nordic state-owned gambling companies seemed to put more effort into presenting a responsible image.

How you can use this research

Policy makers, regulators, and advocacy groups can use this research to identify potential gaps between gambling companies' public RG commitments and their actual practices.

About the researchers

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