

research snapshot

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Evaluating responsible gambling practices across different online gambling operators

What this research is about

Online gambling allows people to gamble at anytime and anywhere via computers, mobiles or tablets. Concerns have been raised that online gambling may lead to problem gambling behaviour. However, it has also been argued that online gambling can have positive aspects. For example, online gambling may offer a safer environment for female gamblers. It may be easier to provide responsible gambling (RG) tools through online gambling websites than in a casino or other land-based settings.

RG tools are set up to help gamblers play in a responsible manner and minimize harm associated with gambling. Popular RG tools include setting limits on the amount of money or time. Another type of RG tool is self-exclusion, in which gamblers agree to be banned from a gambling site for a certain period of time. Little is known about the kinds of RG practices offered by online gambling operators to minimize harm for their consumers. Thus, this study aimed to explore and evaluate RG practices of the 50 most advertised online gambling operators in the world.

What the researchers did

The researchers used different online search engines to search for online gambling operators. They then chose the 50 most advertised online gambling operators. Each operator's website was examined for content about RG practices. These included a statement on the operator's commitment to RG, a warning about potential harm from gambling, information about RG tools, a self-assessment test for problem gambling, and initial age checks.

The researchers also evaluated each operator's RG practice in customer service communication. To do so,

What you need to know

Gambling operators have the responsibility to inform and help gamblers play in a responsible manner. This study explored and evaluated responsible gambling (RG) practices of the 50 most advertised online gambling operators in the world. All of the operators had a statement for their commitment to RG and a warning that gambling could be harmful. Many operators had information about RG tools that they offered on their website, but a large majority of these operators displayed commercial promotion on their RG page, typically some bonus offers.

While many operators had a message that their service was for people aged 18 and over, none did an age verification check after registration. The operators could be contacted for help via live chat or email. However, some of the operators engaged in bad practice after being contacted about problem gambling issues. These included providing information that was not relevant or ignoring the remarks about problem gambling issues. In one case, a bonus was offered to continue gambling. These results highlight the need for online gambling operators to strengthen their RG practices.

the first author contacted customer service representatives with two questions and a statement:

- 1) I would like to control my gambling. Do you have any information on how I can do that?
- 2) What happens if I increase or remove any of the limits I set?
- 3) I feel a bit addicted sometimes and cannot control my gambling.

Contact was made via live chat, or email if live chat was not available. The researchers then examined the content of the live chat and emails.

What the researchers found

All of the 50 online gambling operators had a statement on their commitment to RG and a warning that gambling could be harmful. Nearly two-thirds had a self-assessment test for problem gambling. Most operators provided an option for gamblers to have access to their gambling account history. Many operators (84%) had information about RG tools that they offered on their website. However, a large majority of these operators (88%) displayed commercial promotion on their RG page, typically some bonus offers.

About two-thirds of the operators had a prominent message that their gambling service was for people aged 18 and over, but none of the operators did an age verification check after registration. 47 operators sent an email to encourage gamblers to deposit funds into their accounts. Of the 47 operators, 22 mentioned RG and/or had a link to their RG page in the email sent. In five cases, the link led to other areas of the gambling operator's website, and not the RG page.

About three-quarters of the operators offered live chat, with the remaining being contacted via email. Of the operators that offered live chat, almost half suggested an RG tool to help control gambling, including limit setting, self-exclusion and doing a self-assessment test. But some operators closed down the account without the agreement of the first author and a few operators engaged in bad practice. These included providing information that was not relevant or ignoring the remarks about problem gambling issues. In one case, a bonus was offered to continue gambling. Of the operators that were contacted by email, six closed down the account, five gave generic information about RG tools, and four did not reply.

How you can use this research

This study highlights the need for online gambling operators to strengthen their RG practices. These include training their customer service agents on RG and having age verification checks to prevent minors

from gambling. Operators also need to provide RG tools that are easy to use and readily available upon request. Researchers should continue to investigate online gambling's impact on gamblers, their families, and the community, as well as effective RG practices.

About the researchers

Maris Bonello is an integrity analytics manager at Kindred Group Plc in Gzira, Malta, and a doctoral researcher at Nottingham Trent University in Nottingham, United Kingdom. **Mark D. Griffiths** is a professor in the Psychology Department at Nottingham Trent University. Questions about this study can be addressed to mark.griffiths@ntu.ac.uk.

Citation

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Responsible gambling, social responsibility, player protection, responsible gambling tools, harm minimization

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Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in responsible gambling policies, standards and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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