

research snapshot

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An informative display with pop-up messages can help EGM players keep track of their gambling

What this research is about

People often overspend and underestimate their losses when playing electronic gaming machines (EGMs). EGMs have several features that entice people to keep gambling and lose track of time. First, EGMs have a rapid pace of play. The machines automatically convert any winnings into available credits for further play. Also, EGMs do not display enough information for people to use as cues to quit.

Providing people with more information about their gambling session may encourage them to reflect on their gambling behaviour. Past research has shown that pop-up messages that occur during play can encourage reflection. However, there are concerns that pop-up messages may reduce player enjoyment. This study evaluated the effects of an informative display showing people detailed information about their gambling session and pop-up messages. The informative display also allowed players to keep their winnings, instead of using them as available credits.

What the researchers did

The researchers used social media to recruit 213 adults living in Australia to complete an online survey. Participants were not necessarily regular EGM players. The survey had an experimental design. Participants were asked about their demographics and gambling history. They completed the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) to assess their level of gambling risk. Based on the PGSI, over half of the participants had no gambling problem (53.5%). About one-fifth had low-risk gambling (21.1%). The rest either had moderate-risk or problem gambling.

Participants were then randomly assigned to play one of four EGM versions: 1) standard display without

What you need to know

Electronic gaming machines (EGMs) do not display enough information for people to use as cues to track their gambling session. This study tested the effects of an informative display that provided more detailed information and pop-up messages. With the informative display, there was the choice to keep winnings, instead of using them as available credits. The results showed that an informative display had multiple benefits over a standard display. Participants kept track of the number of spins they played more frequently. They were more accurate in how much money and time they had spent. They were also more likely to use the additional information as cues to quit and were less likely to spend their winnings. The pop-up messages also helped participants estimate how much they had spent. Participants rated the game as most enjoyable when the pop-up messages were paired with the informative display, and least enjoyable when the pop-up messages were paired with the standard display.

pop-up messages; 2) standard display with pop-up messages; 3) informative display without pop-up messages; and 4) informative display with pop-up messages. The standard display showed the amount of credits available, the cost of the bet, and the amount just won. The informative display showed additional information, including total amount deposited, total amount spent, total won, number of spins played, net profit (total won minus total lost), and a session timer. It also gave participants the choice to use their winnings as available credits or not. One of four pop-up messages occurred every 35

spins, and asked participants if they knew their current amount spent, time played, profit made, or spins played. After four seconds, the pop-ups also showed the actual value and congratulated participants if they had estimated correctly.

Participants were given \$6 worth of credits to play. They could stop playing at any time. At 90 spins, the game was paused and participants answered questions about their session before returning to play again. Participants were asked to estimate how often they kept track of the amount of money spent, time spent, and spins played using sliders. Participants rated their game experience, including if they lost track of time, their enjoyment, and their frustration/annoyance while playing. The researchers also measured if participants quit on round numbers (i.e., a whole dollar, a whole minute, or a multiple of 10 spins), and if they quit after they had spent their deposit, rather than using up their winnings.

What the researchers found

The informative display had multiple benefits. Participants reported keeping track of the number of spins they played more often than participants who interacted with the standard display. They were more accurate in their estimates of how much money and time they had spent. With the informative display, participants were more likely to quit when the amount won was a whole dollar amount. These participants were over eight times as likely to quit after they had spent their deposit, rather than using up their winnings. However, the informative display had no effect on gambling persistence, as measured by the total amount spent. Participants spent a similar amount of money, regardless if they interacted with the informative or standard display.

The pop-up messages also helped participants be more accurate in their estimates of how much they had spent. There were no other effects of the pop-up messages on gambling behaviour. Importantly, participants rated the game as most enjoyable when the pop-up messages were paired with the informative display. When the pop-up messages were paired with the standard display, participants reported the lowest enjoyment.

How you can use this research

This research could be useful to policy-makers, regulators, and problem gambling service providers. The results show that an informative display, along with pop-up messages, could help EGM players keep track of their gambling. This approach may be especially helpful in preventing the development of problem gambling among casual and low-risk gamblers. Future research could test the effects on regular EGM players in real-life gambling venues.

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