

research snapshot

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The responsible gambling practices of leading online gambling operators

What this research is about

Responsible gambling (RG) practices and tools aim to help prevent and reduce harms due to gambling. Several reviews suggest that some RG tools may be useful, such as self-exclusion and setting limits on the amount of money spent gambling. Some studies have looked at the RG practices of online gambling operators. Their results suggest that RG practices are not consistently offered across operators. A 2017 study reported that while most operators had a webpage dedicated to RG, the webpage included commercial information to promote gambling. This study replicated the 2017 study to see if there had been notable changes in the RG practices of leading online gambling operators.

What the researchers did

The 2017 study evaluated the RG practices of 50 online gambling operators. Thirty-two operators were still in business. One operator was not included in this study because the first author is employed by its parent company. The researchers added 19 new operators for a total of 50 operators.

The first author created an account with all 50 operators using a fake name, date of birth, and address. The researchers then examined each operator for the following RG practices:

- A dedicated RG webpage that included warnings about possible harm from gambling, self-assessment test for problem gambling, links to gambling filtering software and organizations that could assist with problem gambling. There should be no commercial information on the page.
- Age checks and warnings about underage gambling when registering for an account.

What you need to know

This study replicated a 2017 study to evaluate the responsible gambling (RG) practices of 50 leading online gambling operators. The results suggested that RG practices had improved over the past few years. Most operators had a dedicated RG webpage and offered RG tools such as self-exclusion, limit-setting, and cooling-off periods. Many operators replied in a positive and helpful way when interacting with a customer about potential gambling problems. But, there are aspects that could be improved. These include better age checks at registration, no commercial information on the RG webpage, and better RG support when in communication with customers.

- Access to gambling account history.
- Availability of RG tools.

To evaluate customer service communication, the first author contacted each operator's customer service with the following questions:

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 addicted sometimes and cannot control my gambling."

The contact was done through live chat or email. The responses by customer services were categorized as:

- (i) Good practice when information was provided on RG and how to seek help for gambling problems.
- (ii) Closing account without providing support.
- (iii) Bad practice when the operator did not provide support or close the account.

What the researchers found

Out of the 50 operators, 48 operators had a dedicated RG webpage with a statement about RG commitment and warnings about possible harm. Most operators (92%) mentioned a self-help group where people could seek help for problem gambling. Most operators (82%) provided a self-assessment test. A few of the operators used a validated test, such as the Problem Gambling Severity Index. Eight operators provided a link to an external website to take the test. Ten operators used tests that had not been validated.

Most operators (92%) included information about RG tools. However, some of the information was misleading, or too technical and legal. Most operators (92%) did not include commercial information on their RG webpage. About half (54%) provided a link to gambling filtering software. Most operators (88%) made it clear that their gambling service was for adults over 18 years. However, none asked the first author to provide any ID during account registration.

Three-quarters of the operators (74%) sent an email as soon as registration was completed. The emails were mainly to encourage the customer to gamble. Only 21 operators included RG information or a link to a RG webpage in their email. Most operators (96%) provided an easy option to access one's gambling account history. Most operators (96–98%) offered limit-setting, self-exclusion and cooling-off periods (i.e., "take a break"). While RG tools were said to be available, two operators' RG tools could not be accessed. One operator claimed to offer many RG tools, but only a reality check option was available.

Customer service communication

Seven operators did not respond to any question. Regarding the first question, all the remaining operators showed good RG practice and suggested the use of limit-setting. Regarding the second question, most operators (78%) replied in a positive and helpful way, such as the customer would need to wait for 24 hours to increase their limits. Regarding the last question, 19 operators (38%) gave advice on how to handle gambling problems and where to seek help. Twelve operators (24%) closed the account

without providing support. Eleven operators (22%) showed bad RG practice.

How you can use this research

The researchers found that the RG practices of online gambling operators had improved compared to the 2017 study. However, there are many areas for improvement. These include better age checks, no commercial information on the RG page, and better RG support communication. These results could inform gambling operators and research.

About the researchers

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