

# research snapshot

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## The impact of harm prevention messages presented in gambling advertising in Belgium and the Netherlands

### What this research is about

COVID-19 has increased the demand for online gambling worldwide. This increase in gambling demand calls for better protection from gambling-related harms. Gambling advertising has an impact on gambling participation. In many countries, gambling operators are required to show harm prevention messages in their advertising. Yet, the effectiveness of such messages remains unclear.

This study looked at whether, and how, harm prevention messages shown in gambling advertising affect gambling-related beliefs and intentions. The researchers carried out two experimental studies. The first experiment looked at the impact of message prominence, namely the size and design of the Belgian harm prevention message "Gamble in moderation". The second experiment looked at the effectiveness of this message when compared to other harm prevention messages in Belgium and the Netherlands.

### What the researchers did

#### Study 1

Participants were recruited in Flanders, Belgium, through social media. A total of 169 adult participants completed the experiment. Most participants were women (65.1%) and scored as non-problem gambling (79.8%) on the Problem Gambling Severity Index. About 15.3% were low risk, 4.3% were moderate risk, and one participant experienced problem gambling.

Participants completed the experiment online. They were randomly assigned to one of five conditions. In each condition, participants were exposed to a gambling advertisement with the harm prevention message "Gamble in moderation". This is a commonly used message in gambling advertising in Belgium. This

### What you need to know

It is unclear if harm prevention messages used in gambling advertising achieve their purpose. The researchers performed two experimental studies. The first study showed that a larger size version of the harm prevention message, "Gamble in moderation", increased recognition. But it did not affect what people thought about the risk of gambling and their gambling intention. "Gamble in moderation" is a message commonly shown in gambling advertising in Belgium. The second study compared this message to other harm prevention messages. "Gamble in moderation" increased normative perceptions (e.g., most people gamble) and even gambling intentions among people at-risk of problem gambling. In contrast, people with at-risk gambling thought about the harms of gambling more after they saw the message "What does gambling cost you? Stop in time".

message varied in size (following legal requirement of 4% of the height of the ad space vs. covering 20% of the ad space) and design (transparent vs. contrasting red background), depending on the condition. The control condition did not show any message.

Afterwards, participants filled out a questionnaire that asked about the following:

- Message recognition was assessed by asking participants which message they saw. They were given a list of six messages and the option "I did not see a message".
- Intention to gamble on eight online gambling games in the next two weeks.
- Risk perception regarding how risky gambling is.

## Study 2

Participants were also recruited in Flanders. A total of 212 adult participants completed the experiment. Most participants were women (77.8%) and scored as non-problem gambling (86.3%). About 10.4% had low risk and 3.3% had moderate risk; these participants were combined to form a category of at-risk gambling.

Participants were randomly assigned to a condition in which they saw an ad of a well-known gambling brand in Belgium. Each condition had a different harm prevention message or no message. The messages included "Gamble in moderation," "Play responsibly," "Play smart", and "What does gambling cost you? Stop in time". These messages are shown in gambling advertising in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Then, participants were asked about the following:

- Intention to gamble with the gambling brand shown in the ad in the next two weeks.
- Normative perceptions or beliefs regarding how common gambling is.
- Participants' opinion on whether the message made them think of the harms of gambling. A screenshot of the message that participants saw in the gambling ad was shown as a reminder.

## What the researchers found

**Study 1:** Participants' correct message recognition was higher after seeing the larger message when compared to those who saw the smaller message that followed legal requirement. The results show that larger harm prevention messages increase people's message recognition. There was no effect of message size on gambling intention or risk perception. Also, message design (transparent background vs. contrasting background) did not make a difference.

**Study 2:** The researchers found that exposure to the message "Gamble in moderation" increased gambling intention among people with at-risk gambling. This was when compared to the other three messages and no message. This effect was not seen in participants with non-problem gambling. Participants thought about gambling harms more after seeing the message, "What does gambling cost you? Stop in time". This

effect was seen for participants with at-risk gambling, but not for participants with non-problem gambling.

The researchers found that the message "Gamble in moderation" increased normative perceptions (e.g., beliefs that most people gamble). In turn, normative perceptions led to increased gambling intentions.

## How you can use this research

This research can be used to better understand the impacts of harm prevention messages.

## About the researchers

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## Citation

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