

research snapshot

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Awareness and use of consumer protection tools among online gamblers

What this research is about

All licensed gambling operators are required to have some form of consumer protection. Usually, gambling operators have tools in place to help consumers gamble in a responsible manner. This is also done online, where gambling has become popular. While tools do exist, many operators do not promote or encourage people to use them. This means that use of these tools is often limited.

Examples of consumer protection tools include messaging, age restrictions, self-tests, activity statements, deposit limits, and temporary time-outs. Activity (summary/ transaction) statements let consumers track their gambling spending. Voluntary deposit limits (voluntary pre-commitment) let consumers set a limit on how much money they deposit in a specified period. Finally, temporary time-outs (or temporary self-exclusions) let consumers suspend their account for a specified period.

Previous research has shown that some of these tools are more effective than others. However, there is still limited research on the extent to which consumers use these tools online. This research aimed to fill in the gap by looking at what consumers know about and whether they use consumer protection tools when they bet online. Specifically, the researchers explored consumers' attitudes regarding three tools: activity statements, deposit limits, and time-outs.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 564 participants between the ages of 19 and 83 through 6 Australian online gambling operators. All participants had gambled online within the last 6 months. In the survey, the researchers asked for participants' demographics

What you need to know

This study examined what people know about and whether they use consumer protection tools when they gamble online. The researchers recruited 564 Australian adults who gamble online. Results showed that many participants were aware of three consumer protection tools: activity statements, deposit limits, and time-outs. Most participants had used activity statements and one-quarter had used deposit limits. Few had used time-outs. Participants showed high satisfaction with these tools, and many considered deposit limits and time-outs to improve their gambling. Most users of activity statements reported no impact on their play. Among participants who did not use a tool, many believed that they did not need it or thought that it was only useful for people with gambling problems. Participants with more severe gambling, and those who were younger, used more tools than participants with lower severity and who were older.

(e.g., age, gender, education, employment, income, and ethnicity). They also assessed gambling behaviour by asking participants how often they gambled online, how much money they spent, and how many wagering accounts they had. The researchers asked whether participants set a formal or informal budget and the strategies they used to stick to it.

To assess knowledge and use of consumer protection tools, the researchers asked about three tools: activity statements, deposit limits, and time-outs. Participants stated how satisfied they were with each tool, the reasons for using it, and whether it impacted their

gambling. To assess severity of gambling, the researchers used the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). Those who scored high (3 and above) were asked what type and mode of gambling contributed to their gambling problems. People who scored 3 and above were considered to have moderate-risk or problem gambling.

What the researchers found

The majority of participants (60.5%) were aware of all three tools. The activity statement tool was the most popular. Most of the participants (88.4%) had used activity statements and almost one-quarter had used deposit limits. Results showed that over half of the participants (55.5%) set formal or informal budgets for their online gambling. Most of the participants who set a limit stayed within the amount they budgeted. Another common strategy was to withdraw money on a regular basis or following large wins. Few participants (8.1%) had used time-outs.

Participants showed high satisfaction with the tools. Most users of activity statements did not think they had an impact on their gambling. Only one-fifth thought that activity statements had made a change. Many users of deposit limits and time-outs thought that these tools had help with their gambling. For example, they reported feeling in greater control of their gambling, and spending less money, time, and thinking less about gambling. When exploring the motivation for use, the main reasons included to increase gambling control and limit money spent. The main reasons for not using any tool included thinking that they did not need it, believing it to be only useful for people with gambling problems, and not knowing how to access or use the tool.

Low-risk gamblers were more likely to set budgets for online gambling than non-problem gamblers. However, if non-problem gamblers did set a budget, they adhered to it better. People with moderate-risk or problem gambling were more likely to use deposit limits and time outs than low-risk gamblers and non-problem gamblers. Activity statements did not vary by gambling severity. Finally, younger participants and those with higher gambling severity used more tools.

How you can use this research

This research could be used to inform strategies for harm minimization and promote the use of consumer protection tools. Service providers and clinicians could use the information to develop new prevention and intervention programs. Future research could examine the effectiveness of these three tools for different groups of gamblers.

About the researchers

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Citation

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