What this research is about

Online sports betting is a growing form of gambling. It is supported by the popularity of smartphones and the easy access to mobile betting apps. Previous research shows that some features of smartphone betting are linked to harmful betting behaviours. In this study, the researchers examined how using smartphones can influence sports betting by young adults. They also compared using smartphones to using computers and land-based venues to bet.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants through Qualtrics. The inclusion criteria reflected a purposive and theoretical sampling method. Participants had to be between 18 and 29 years old and live in New South Wales, Australia. They had to bet at least fortnightly on sports, esports, and/or fantasy sports. The researchers used soft quotas to ensure that the sample was diverse in terms of age, gender, types of sports bet on, and whether born in Australia.

A total of 33 participants completed interviews with the researchers. Participants were between 19 and 29 years. Most were male (85%) and born in Australia (76%). All bet on traditional sports. About 39% also bet on esports, while 9% also bet on daily fantasy sports and another 9% bet on seasonal fantasy sports.

The telephone interview included questions about the participant’s betting behaviour, platforms used, and the advantages and disadvantages of each platform for access to betting. Questions also asked about betting opportunities, ease of use, user-interface, sourcing betting information, financial transaction, wagering marketing, use in different locations, privacy, anonymity, and safety.

What you need to know

The researchers examined how using smartphones can influence sports betting by young adults. The researchers interviewed 33 Australians aged 19–29 years. These participants bet regularly on sports, esports, and/or fantasy sports. The researchers identified seven major themes. The themes included platform functionality; sourcing betting information; physical accessibility; financial accessibility; social influences; privacy; and marketing. The researchers created a model that shows how features of smartphones, online gambling, and betting apps combine in smartphone betting. This provides instant access to betting anywhere and at any time, which can lead to harmful betting behaviours. Such behaviours include increased betting participation; increased frequency and spending; placing a wider variety of bets; impulsive and spontaneous betting; placing riskier bets; chasing losses; and acting on social encouragement to bet.

The researchers coded the transcripts of the interviews. They created themes by grouping codes that shared a unifying feature together. Data analysis was based on an adaptive grounded theory method.

What the researchers found

Participants talked about the functionality of different betting platforms. Most participants (90%) used smartphones to bet. They generally felt that betting apps functioned well, were easy to navigate, and were streamlined. However, computers could facilitate navigation because of the larger screen. Better visuals also made it easier to see details. Participants
considered TAB machines at gambling venues to be poorly designed and inferior to smart devices.

Most participants felt that sourcing betting information was easier using a computer. But the portability of smartphones meant that betting was always available and convenient. It also allowed them to quickly place bets with multiple operators. For many participants, smartphone betting became part of their daily activities and was used to pass time.

Betting with a smartphone or a computer provided convenient and speedy financial transactions. Participants also felt it was easier to spend electronic money than cash.

Almost all the participants bet more when they watched sporting events in venues with friends. Many preferred private gatherings. Smartphone betting allowed them to bet during regular social gatherings at friends’ homes. Some participants also participated in online chat groups about sports betting.

For some participants, privacy was not important. In contrast, others wanted to avoid stigma and hide their gambling. Betting could be private on a smartphone or a computer, but not in land-based venues.

Participants were frequently exposed to advertisements on social media and through direct marketing (e.g., emails, in-app notifications). Inducements, such as bonuses, could cause them to place riskier, impulsive bets.

The researchers created a model that shows how features of smartphones, online gambling, and betting apps combine in smartphone betting. This provides instant access to betting, which can foster harmful betting behaviours. Such behaviours include increased participation; increased frequency and spending; impulsive and spontaneous betting; placing a wider variety of bets; placing riskier bets; chasing losses; and acting on social encouragement to bet.

How you can use this research

This study suggests that policy, regulation, and harm minimization measures should focus on risky structural features of smartphone betting.

About the researchers

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