

research snapshot

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A large real-world study testing different lengths of mandatory play breaks on gambling behaviour

What this research is about

Gambling operators have introduced many responsible gambling (RG) tools. These RG tools are provided to help people gamble responsibly. There are many different types of RG tools including mandatory play breaks and personalized feedback.

It has been recommended for mandatory play breaks to be implemented for online gambling activities that can be played repeatedly (e.g., slots games). The break should be implemented after 1 hour of continuous play and should last a minimum of 5 minutes. This is because mandatory play breaks provide players with a chance to think rationally. Breaks can also disrupt the trance-like state that may develop with some gambling activities.

Insight into if mandatory play breaks are effective is important. But, only a few studies have tested mandatory play breaks with mixed results. Also, no study has tested how long mandatory play breaks should be. In this study, the researchers used real-world data to test the effectiveness of different lengths of mandatory play breaks. The researchers also tested if providing personalized feedback improved the effectiveness of the breaks.

What the researchers did

The researchers obtained real-world online gambling data from *Norsk Tipping*. Norsk Tipping is the Norwegian government's gambling operator. Before the study, players of Norsk Tipping received a mandatory break of 90s after playing for an hour. In total, 21,129 players experienced at least one break between April 17 and May 21 of 2020. The average age was 47.4 years old. There were more men (61%)

What you need to know

Gambling operators have introduced responsible gambling (RG) tools to protect people from harm. Two examples of RG tools are mandatory play breaks and personalized feedback. In this study, the researchers tested the impact of different lengths of mandatory play breaks on gambling behaviour using a real-world experiment. They also tested if including personalized feedback with mandatory play breaks increased their effectiveness. The participants were 21,129 online players of *Norsk Tipping*. These players triggered a total of 156,989 mandatory play breaks during the study period. The mandatory play breaks were triggered after 60 minutes of gambling. The breaks varied in length from 90 seconds, 5 minutes, and 15 minutes. A 15-minute mandatory break led to the longest voluntary play pause. The inclusion of personalized feedback did not increase the duration of the pause. Amount wagered decreased for some participants after a break, but a longer break did not lead to greater decrease.

than women (39%). In total, 156,989 play breaks occurred during the study period.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions. Seven were experimental conditions and one was the control. A total of 60% of the players were assigned to the control group, which was the standard 90s play break already available.

The remaining 40% were assigned to one of 7 experimental conditions. All the experimental conditions included a log out button. Three experimental conditions varied the length of the

mandatory play break. The three lengths were 90s, 300s, and 900s. The next three conditions included mandatory play breaks plus personalized feedback about how much players had won or lost. The length of the breaks remained the same with breaks of 90s, 300s, and 900s. The last condition included personalized feedback but did not provide a countdown. This condition had a break of 90s, but players did not know how long the break would last.

Two outcomes assessed the impact of the experimental conditions. The first was the time to next session (TTNS). The TTNS was the time between the end of the mandatory break and the next bet. The second outcome was the relative change in bet (RCIB). This was the change in the amount bet before and after the mandatory play break.

What the researchers found

Participants on average experienced 7.43 breaks. About 25% received only one break, 50% received 3 or less, and 25% received at least 8 breaks. Most players gambled again soon after the break. The median TTNS (the middle value separating the upper half from the lower half) was 0.8 minutes. The longest TTNS was found in the 900s break conditions. Overall, the longer the break, the longer the TTNS. The TTNS in the 90s break groups was smaller than the 300s break groups. The TTNS in the 300s break groups was smaller than the 900s break groups. This pattern remained the same when personalized feedback was included. Thus, personalized feedback did not increase the TTNS.

The median RCIB across all groups was -20%. This means that there was a median 20% reduction in the amount bet following the break. There were no differences in RCIB between the mandatory break groups with or without personalized feedback.

Overall, the inclusion of the logout button, not providing a countdown, and increasing the duration of the break increased players' TTNS. Including personalized feedback with the mandatory break did not increase the TTNS.

How you can use this research

This research can be used by gambling operators to implement mandatory play breaks on their online gambling sites.

About the researchers

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Citation

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