

research snapshot

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Comparing the content of Twitter posting by British gambling operators and gambling affiliates

What this research is about

Online gambling has become very popular around the world. There are many reasons why online gambling has gained popularity. It is easier and more convenient to access than land-based gambling. Also, the Internet has expanded the chances for gambling operators to advertise their products to potential customers.

Recently, gambling companies have increased their use of social media to attract new customers and retain existing customers. Past research has found that 1 in 20 Twitter users in the UK follow an account dedicated to gambling. Little is known about the use of social media by gambling affiliates. Gambling affiliates are third-party firms that are paid to attract customers for a gambling operator. This study explored what type of content British gambling operators and affiliates posted on their Twitter.

What the researchers did

The researchers checked the Twitter accounts of the 40 highest-earning British gambling operators. They selected the five operators that had the most followers to study. The researchers also found the five most followed gambling affiliates on Twitter. These accounts had to post direct links either to sign up to a gambling operator, or to place a specific bet with a gambling operator within the past week.

The researchers used NCapture to download tweets from each of the 10 selected Twitter accounts over a two-week period - Thursday, June 14, 2018 to Wednesday, June 27, 2018.

The researchers used summative content analysis to count the number of tweets made for a range of different reasons. The researchers looked for common

What you need to know

This study identified nine categories of content that British gambling operators and affiliates posted on Twitter. Gambling operators used an indirect approach to market and build brand awareness. Their posts were more likely to include humour and sports content. Gambling affiliates were more direct in their use of social media to market gambling. Most of their Twitter content focused on direct advertising or giving tips for suggested bets. Gambling operators and affiliates dedicated very few posts to safer gambling.

content categories among the first 100 tweets from each account. Then, they applied the categories to classify the remaining tweets. The researchers also compared the number of posts belonging to each category between the operators and affiliates.

What the researchers found

The five gambling operator Twitter accounts were dedicated to sports betting. These accounts had about 5% more followers than the gambling affiliate Twitter accounts. The gambling affiliates posted around 40% more tweets per day than the gambling operators. However, the gambling operators' posts were more widely shared (i.e., more retweets per post).

There were nine main content posting categories among the tweets:

- 1) Direct advertising: Almost 30% of tweets directly advertised gambling. These were common for both the operators and affiliates, but more so for the affiliates. Direct advertising from the operators mainly included gambling odds for a

specific sporting event. Direct advertising for the affiliates mainly included sign-up offers.

- 2) Betting assistance: Just over 20% of tweets gave tips for specific bets. These were most common among the affiliates. Although not as common, tips posted by the operators were given by a celebrity or sports personality. The operators also gave match previews and links to statistics.
- 3) Sports content: Almost 23% of tweets contained sports news, reviews, and statistics. These were most common among the operators, and not as common among the affiliates.
- 4) Customer engagement: Just over 11% of tweets had content that encouraged followers to interact with the tweets (e.g., polls, retweets). These were common among both the operators and affiliates.
- 5) Humour: Humour made up just over 9% of tweets. The gambling operators most commonly used humour in their posts.
- 6) Update of bet status: Updates on bet status made up almost 4% of posts. Gambling affiliates most commonly updated their followers on the progress of bets they had tipped. However, they mainly focused on bets that won or were close to winning.
- 7) Promotional content: Few tweets (almost 2%) included specific hashtags or self-promotion to other social media sites.
- 8) Safer gambling: Few tweets (less than 1%) stressed the importance of safe gambling. All operators posted at least one tweet on safer gambling over the two-week period. Only one affiliate made posts related to safer gambling. None of the affiliate accounts had age screening set up for their followers.
- 9) Other: Very few tweets had other content, such as good causes, music lyrics, and celebrity news.

How you can use this research

Regulators could develop policies around gambling affiliate marketing. They could require affiliates to

place age restrictions and track the updates of all suggested bets to prevent unrealistic expectations of the odds of winning. Future research could examine how social media advertisements impacts gambling behaviours and attitudes, especially among populations at risk for problem gambling, like youth.

About the researchers

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