

# research snapshot

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## Offering an auto-play feature in online casinos can increase the amount bet and number of spins

### What this research is about

One feature of online casino gambling is auto-play. Auto-play lets people commit to a fixed number of spin sequences of a pre-set length and value. With auto-play, spins are played automatically on behalf of the person unless they are aborted. Researchers have debated about whether auto-play might increase or decrease problem gambling behaviours. But there is a lack of direct, experimental research on the impact of auto-play in online casino gambling.

Recent survey data in Sweden suggest that auto-play is used by over 80% of people who gamble daily. This is almost twice the number of people who gamble weekly or monthly. In 2022, the Swedish Gambling Authorities proposed a ban on auto-play features. Evidence-based public health policy needs support from findings from real-world gambling context. The current study involved an experiment that explored the impact of offering an auto-play feature on slot machines on gambling behaviours and outcomes.

### What the researchers did

The experiment was an initiative of ATG, a large, licensed gambling provider in Sweden. ATG initiated the experiment to comply with responsible gambling regulations required by the Swedish Gambling Act. At the time of the experiment, ATG was one of the few gambling providers in Sweden that had not implemented an auto-play feature.

Before data collection, ATG identified a total of 80 online slot machines from two different game providers that showed similar trends. During the experiment, 40 slot machines were set to have the auto-play feature for a pre-set duration. The other 40 matched slot machines served as the control. Data

### What you need to know

Auto-play lets people commit to a fixed number of spin sequences of a pre-set length and value. With auto-play, spins are played automatically on behalf of the person unless they are aborted. There is not much direct, experimental research on the impact of auto-play in online casino gambling. The current study involved an experiment aimed at exploring the impact of offering an auto-play feature on slot machines on gambling behaviours and outcomes. The experiment was an initiative of ATG, a large, licensed gambling provider in Sweden.

Before data collection, ATG identified a total of 80 online slot machines from two different game providers that showed similar trends. From these slot machines, 40 were set to include the auto-play feature for a pre-set duration. The other 40 matched slots served as the control. The findings showed that offering an auto-play feature increased the amount bet. It might also increase the number of spins. But auto-play did not have an impact on net losses.

were collected over a period of 167 days. Data collected during the experiment from the slot machines with the auto-play feature were compared to expected data for the same period. Expected data were estimated based on data collected before the experiment from these machines, as well as data collected during the experiment from the slot machines without the auto-play feature.

The researchers analyzed the data by examining the following: (1) the amount bet; (2) net losses; and (3) number of spins. The researchers also examined two

different models that included either weekly or monthly seasonality. This is because gambling activity is often higher on weekends (weekly model) and around the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month due to payday frequency in Sweden (monthly model).

### What the researchers found

The researchers found that, regardless of seasonality, there was an increase of about 6.9–9.1% in the amount bet after introducing the auto-play feature. They did not find that the auto-play feature had a significant impact on net losses. But there was about 3% increase in the number of spins.

The researchers discussed these findings in light of previous observational research studies, which found that auto-play is used more by people with a higher risk of problem gambling. They also discussed the limitations of this study. One limitation is that the design of the study could not provide insight into the mechanisms that underlie the impact of auto-play on an individual level.

### How you can use this research

Policy makers can use this research to inform the development of balanced, evidence-based public health policy regarding auto-play. The findings can also inform future gambling research.

### About the researchers

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