

research snapshot

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The reasons why young adults move from playing social casino games to online gambling

What this research is about

Social casino games are free-to-play simulated gambling games available on social networking sites, such as Facebook. They have become popular among young people. In these games, users play with virtual credits instead of real money. However, there are concerns that playing social casino games may act as a gateway to real gambling. Some studies have reported that people transition to online gambling after they have experience playing social casino games.

Online gambling is considered a risky form of gambling due to its ease of access. Gamblers can go on the Internet to gamble at anytime and anywhere they want. Moreover, social casino games portray gambling as a positive and glamorous activity, which may attract young adults to try real gambling. It is important to understand the factors that motivate young adults to gamble online, including the role of social casino games. Through three focus groups with young adults between the ages of 18 to 24, the present study explored the potential link between social casino gaming and online gambling.

What the researchers did

Participants were 21 university students, aged 18 to 24 years, from two large Canadian universities. These young adults reported gambling online at least twice per month. There were 18 males and three females.

Participants completed a short questionnaire that asked their socio-demographic information (e.g., gender, age), how frequently they gambled, and how knowledgeable they believed themselves to be on the topic of online gambling. They then participated in one of three focus groups during which they discussed a series of open-ended questions.

What you need to know

This study explored the factors that motivated young adults to gamble online, including the role of social casino games. Twenty-one university students, aged 18 to 24 years, participated in one of three focus groups. In the focus groups, the young adults mentioned the role of friends and incentives offered by online gambling sites as factors that attracted them to online gambling. Several young adults stated that they moved to online gambling after playing social casino games for free. They noted that social casino games had inflated rates of payout, which allowed them to win more frequently. This provided a sense of hope and confidence that one would also win when gambling for real. The young adults also indicated the constant advertisements of online gambling through social casino games as leading social casino gamers to online gambling.

For the present study, two questions were of importance. These questions were about the factors that influenced young adults to gamble online and the link between playing social casino games and online gambling. The researchers analyzed the focus groups for content related to these two questions.

What the researchers found

The majority of young adults reported gambling on one or two online gambling sites, with a few gambling on multiple sites. More than half (62%) had played social casino games before.

The young adults revealed that friends played an important role when they started gambling. Several

participants mentioned having first learned to gamble with friends and moved to online gambling as their friends were not always available. Incentives, such as sign-up bonuses, offered by online gambling sites were also mentioned by the young adults as important in attracting them to online gambling.

In all three focus groups, the young adults spontaneously brought up the topic of social casino games. They mentioned that the heavy advertisements of online gambling through social casino games might attract people to try gambling. Several participants stated that they moved to online gambling after playing social casino games on Facebook. Some of the young adults noted that they won more frequently on social casino games, which provided a sense of hope and confidence that they would also win in real gambling. The young adults generally agreed that social casino games offered an opportunity to learn rules and strategies to gamble.

It should be noted that not every participant perceived a link between social casino games and online gambling. These individuals stated that social casino games and real gambling games were different, with social casino games being less sophisticated. Thus, people who were attracted to one would not likely be attracted to the other.

How you can use this research

Policy-makers and regulators could use this study to develop regulations in regards to social casino games. For example, there should be regulations in regards to social casino game advertisements. There should also be mandate that social casino games inform players about the inflated rates of payout in comparison to gambling games. Inflated rates of payout raise players' hope and confidence about their skill in winning, which is problematically when the outcomes of gambling are based on chance only.

About the researchers

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Keywords

Online gambling, adolescent gambling, social media, social casino games, Facebook, focus groups, qualitative research

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