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The impact of warning messages about loss amounts during online roulette

What this research is about

Increased access to online gambling via a range of devices, like cellphones, speaks to the need for responsible gambling (RG) strategies. RG strategies aim to prevent casual gamblers from developing gambling problems. One RG strategy is pop-up messages. Pop-up messages draw the gambler's attention away from the game, provide them with information about their gambling session, and allow them to become more aware of their behaviours.

Pop-up messages may include different types of information. These include the length of the current gambling session, the amount of money spent, and net wins or losses. In Great Britain, gamblers only receive pop-up messages when they have been gambling for 30 minutes or have spent over £250. These messages are impersonal and may be ignored by the gambler. The current study explored the impact of tailored pop-up messages about specific loss amounts on the following bets.

What the researchers did

Participants were 45 university students in England, who self-identified as casual gamblers. All participants were aged 18 and older. They completed the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) to ensure that no one had problem gambling.

Participants played a simulated game of roulette for about 15 minutes. Each participant received a £1000 credit to play with and were asked to place £50 per bet. Game-play was fixed so that all participants lost and finished when their credit reached less than £50. When participants' spending passed £750, £500, £250, and £100, pop-up messages were displayed in the centre of the screen. Participants had to click an

What you need to know

This study compared the impact of tailored pop-up messages about loss amounts to genericand control messages. The tailored messages warned gamblers about the amounts of money they had lost at certain points of the gambling session. The generic messages only warned gamblers about the financial risks of gambling. The control messages had no warning content. During online roulette, pop-up warning messages containing specific loss amounts reduced the amounts placed on the following bets compared with the generic and control messages. These findings support the use of personally relevant information when aiming to reduce the negative impacts of gambling.

'OK' button to confirm the message and clear it from the screen. After each message, participants could choose to place an 'open bet' of £1, £5, £10, £25, £50, £75, or £100.

The researchers randomly placed participants into one of three groups. The first group received pop-up messages that were specific to their loss amounts (e.g., "Remember you started with £1000. You have now spent £500 of your money."). The second group received generic messages that referred to the financial risks of gambling (e.g., "Gambling is a financially risky activity"). The third group received control messages with no warning content (e.g., "Press OK to Continue").

The researchers added up the four 'open' bets after the pop-up messages to determine the impact on betting decisions. They compared differences in

wager amounts between the three groups receiving different message types.

What the researchers found

Participants who received the pop-up messages about specific loss amounts wagered less on the following bets compared to participants who received the generic and control messages. The generic messages did not reduce the bet amounts when compared with the control messages. Women and men did not differ in their bet amounts after receiving the messages. Also, participants who had more severe gambling behaviours did not differ in their bet amounts from those with less severe gambling behaviours.

How you can use this research

The findings suggest that using information about specific loss amounts may be an effective RG approach to reduce harms from gambling. Future research could test tailored pop-up warning messages about loss amounts in a wider range of gambling situations to examine their impact and potential for use in the gambling industry. Future research could also evaluate how gamblers engage with the pop-up messages, and the long-term impact of such messages. Finally, future research could study *when* pop-up messages should be displayed to have the most impact. Researchers could also compare pop-up messages about loss amounts to other types of messages.

About the researchers

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Citation

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