

knowledge snapshot



A review of the slot machine zone: Proposing the gambling immersion model

What this article is about

People who gamble can experience negative consequences because of their gambling. Gambling experiences can be shaped by individual characteristics, such as personality traits. They can also result from features of gambling products. For example, some gambling products have structural characteristics that can make them harmful for people who gamble. Structural characteristics are the design features of gambling products.

Electronic gaming machines (EGMs) have been a focus of this type of research for a few reasons. EGMs can produce a unique state of mind in people who play them. This has been termed the slot machine zone. People in the slot machine zone describe themselves as being intensely focused on their EGM play. They may also lose track of time and report feelings of dissociation. Dissociation is where people temporarily feel like mental processes that normally work together are no-longer integrated.

Researchers have proposed that the slot machine zone is similar to a psychological state known as flow. This is when someone is fully immersed in an activity. Others have argued that the dissociation aspect is the main feature of the slot machine zone. The authors of this review argued that neither of these alone is a sufficient explanation of the slot machine zone. The aim of this review was to summarize current research on the slot machine zone. The authors then propose their own framework, called gambling immersion, for understanding this phenomenon.

What was done?

The authors reviewed the research available on why people experience the slot machine zone. They

Why is this article important?

People who gamble sometimes experience what has been called the slot machine zone. This is a unique state of mind in which the person is very absorbed in their gambling. They may lose track of time, become unaware of what is happening around them, and in extreme cases lose a sense of their own identity. The dissociation account and the flow account have each proposed their own views of the slot machine zone. This review summarized the existing literature on the slot machine zone. The authors then proposed their own account of the slot machine zone that combines the dissociation and flow accounts. Their model is called the gambling immersion model and suggests that people who gamble may become absorbed to varying degrees in their gambling.

summarized individual characteristics as well as features of gambling products that contribute to this experience. They discussed the dissociation and flow accounts of the slot machine zone. They then proposed their own gambling immersion model. The authors ended with a discussion on the implications of the gambling immersion model on public health and responsible gambling measures.

What you need to know

The authors reviewed research on individual traits that impact the experience of the slot machine zone. There is research to suggest that the zone can be experienced as exciting or relaxing. The zone is experienced by some people as a pleasant experience. However, other research has found that people who

are more depressed and less mindful are more prone to experiencing the zone.

The authors then looked at the characteristics of EGMs that encourage the experience of the slot machine zone. The speed of EGM play and the experience of near misses may contribute, although these have not been directly tested in a research study. Multi-line betting is one feature that has been tested in research studies. Multi-line betting refers to the ability to place multiple bets on different pay lines on modern EGMs. Several studies have found that multi-line betting increases the experience of the slot machine zone. The number of pay lines bet on, but not the amount bet, affects the slot machine zone in one study. Background music or noise could also affect the slot machine zone.

The dissociation account of the slot machine zone emphasizes depersonalization and derealization. These are notable symptoms of dissociative disorders. The flow account of the slot machine zone emphasizes a narrowing of attention on the slot machine. It does not provide a direct explanation for more dissociation-like experiences. The authors of this review proposed the gambling immersion model, which tries to reconcile the two views. It suggests that gambling immersion is a spectrum of experiences that occur with continuous, repetitive gambling activities (e.g., slot machines). At the lower end of the spectrum of gambling immersion, a person loses track of time and does not notice their surroundings (similar to flow). At the higher end of this spectrum, additional disturbances to people's senses of self and identity may occur (similar to dissociation). As engagement in gambling continues and harms resulting from gambling become more severe, a person's experience of the zone may move from a flow-like state to a dissociation-like state.

Who is it intended for?

This review is intended for gambling researchers and policy makers. Further research is required on the concept of gambling immersion. Whether gambling immersion causes gambling problems or whether they are a result of them is important information.

Gambling policy makers could use the information in this review to inform responsible gambling measures. For instance, incorporating pop-ups may be a useful way to disrupt the slot machine zone. As well, some gambling companies are encouraging "immersive" experiences in their products, which may further gambling-related harm. It may be advisable to limit strategies that encourage these experiences.

About the researchers

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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