

knowledge snapshot



Exploring the potential of player-tracking systems in reducing gambling-related harm

What this article is about

Technological innovation has had a large impact on gambling products. The effect is particularly evident for electronic gaming machines (EGMs) and online gambling, both of which are associated with a higher risk of gambling-related harm.

There is a growing interest in using player-tracking systems as gambling harm reduction tools. For example, in the United Kingdom, recent policy discussions have focused on developing a "single customer view" for online gambling. A "single customer view" would involve gathering data from multiple gambling operators to create a unified profile of a person's gambling activity, including their spending habits, frequency of play, and other relevant metrics. This would allow gambling operators to better understand their customers' behaviors and preferences. In turn, it would help operators detect and assist customers who are at risk of harm.

In this article, the authors discuss the potential benefits, as well as practical and ethical issues, of implementing player-tracking systems in the context of gambling, with a focus on electronic gaming machines (EGMs) and online gambling. Player-tracking systems can monitor the activities of people who gamble across multiple operators, providing valuable data to understand and mitigate gambling-related harm.

What was done?

The authors reviewed various research studies focusing on player-tracking systems. In this article, they begin by discussing the importance of understanding the distribution of gambling-related harm in jurisdictions to inform policy decision-making.

Why is this article important?

This article addresses the need to mitigate gambling-related harm through technological means. It explores the use of player-tracking systems to provide valuable insights into gambling behaviour and to facilitate harm reduction measures. By discussing practical and ethical considerations, the article contributes to the ongoing debate on the use of player tracking to detect and protect people from gambling-related harm. It also underscores the importance of using evidence-based approaches in policy decision-making.

They then discuss the benefits of player tracking for reducing gambling-related harm and evaluating harm reduction methods. The authors also discuss practical and ethical issues associated with player-tracking systems.

What you need to know

Prevalence surveys have long been used as the primary method for assessing the distribution of gambling-related harm. They offer valuable insights but also have several limitations. Prevalence estimates can vary depending on factors such as whether the survey is conducted online, over the phone, or in-person. Additionally, it can be difficult to accurately capture gambling behaviour due to potential biases in participants' responses. Such biases may stem from memory recall issues. The authors suggest that the limitations of prevalence surveys underscore the need for complementary methodologies, such as player-tracking systems.

Objective data from gambling operators can offer critical insights into the spending patterns and behaviors of people who gamble. However, researchers often do not have access to such data. A centralized player-tracking system may be able to offer a broader picture of gambling activities across multiple operators. A player-tracking system may also be a valuable tool in harm reduction. This is because it can be integrated with features like setting up spending limits, self-exclusion (i.e., voluntarily banning oneself from gambling activities), and age verification.

It is important to note that the implementation of player-tracking systems raises practical and ethical concerns. From a technical standpoint, challenges vary depending on jurisdictional regulations and the complexity of the gambling landscape. Tracking may be easier for some forms of gambling than others.

The creation of large datasets based on player tracking also raises concerns about data security and privacy. Mishandling or sharing of gambling data could lead to adverse consequences for individuals, such as unfair denial of banking services or targeting by law enforcement or gambling marketing. The authors suggest that player-tracking systems should be implemented independently of the gambling industry. A neutral entity, such as an ombudsman, may be necessary to address ethical concerns.

Additionally, the authors highlight the importance of evaluating harm reduction measures through field studies to provide real-world evidence. Field studies require collaboration between researchers and gambling operators. The authors advocate for independently administered player-tracking systems. Such a system must be evaluated before wide implementation to address practical and ethical concerns. Furthermore, any field study should be performed ethically (e.g., being transparent when data show that a solution is not working).

If implemented, the authors suggest a universal player-tracking system covering all regulated gambling activities in a jurisdiction. The system should be independent of the gambling industry to maximize

benefits (e.g., flagging people at risk of harm) and address concerns (e.g., ensuring the privacy of information for people who gamble).

Who is it intended for?

This article is intended for gambling policy makers, researchers, and public health professionals. It addresses complex issues related to understanding and mitigating gambling-related harm. The article's focus on player-tracking systems may be of particular interest to academics and professionals seeking to advance knowledge in the field of gambling studies.

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