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Speed-of-play limit can reduce gambling spending in an online roulette game

What this research is about

In the UK, there are no restrictions on how much money or how fast a person can gamble on online casino games. The Gambling Commission has recently announced that the speed-of-play for online slots will be limited to no faster than 2.5 seconds. But, there is still no limit for many other online games. A recent policy report recommends that no online game can be played at a faster speed than its land-based version.

The majority of studies investigating speed-of-play limits have focused on electronic gaming machines (EGMs) or slots. This experimental study examined the effects of a speed-of-play limit in an online roulette game. The limit was set at one spin every 60 seconds, which was comparable to the average speed-of-play limit for land-based casino roulette. The researchers also set the maximum stake to £2 to match the current stake limit for EGMs in the UK.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited UK adults as study participants through Prolific, an online crowdsourcing platform. Participants must be over 18 years of age and have prior experience playing online roulette. Participants completed the experiment online. They first completed a task to earn £4 as a fund to gamble. This task required them to successfully transcribe 7 or more out of 10 captcha codes. It was used to help screen out inattentive participants as well as to create a sense of ownership over the gambling fund.

Participants then played a commercial online roulette game called "Roulette Royale". They were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. The normal speed condition allowed participants to spin the roulette as soon as after they had placed a bet. The slow speed

What you need to know

In this experimental study, the researchers examined whether a 60-second speed-of-play limit would affect gambling behaviour when playing a commercial online roulette game. They randomly assigned participants to two conditions. In the normal speed condition, participants could spin the roulette as soon as after they had placed their bet. In the slow-speed condition, participants could only make one spin every 60 seconds. In both conditions, the maximum stake limit was set to £2. The results showed that a 60-second speed-of-play limit reduced gambling spending. This effect occurred because participants facing the 60-second limit made fewer spins. Further, this effect outweighed any potential increase in bet size.

condition allowed participants to make only one spin every 60 seconds. During the 60 seconds, a greyed-out "wait" button replaced the spin button. In both conditions, the maximum stake limit was set to £2.

Participants also completed the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) before finishing the study. Their demographic information was collected by Prolific.

The researchers examined if a limit of 60 seconds per spin affected gambling behaviour. They calculated the "proportion bet", which represented participants' total amount bet in proportion to the maximum that they could have risked (i.e., gambling fund plus any winnings). The proportion bet took a value of zero when participants bet nothing. It took a value of one when participants bet and lost everything. A value closer to zero meant participants bet a smaller amount in proportion to what they could have risked.

The researchers also examined the effects on the number of spins played and the amount bet per spin.

What the researchers found

There were 500 participants in the normal speed condition and 502 participants in the slow speed condition. In the normal speed condition, the average time between spins was 21 seconds. In the slow speed condition, the average time was 88.6 seconds.

One-fifth of the participants (19.2%) took the £4 gambling fund without making a bet. Around 14.4% bet and lost everything. The remaining participants gambled a proportion of their money. The 60-second speed-of-play limit did not reduce the likelihood that participants would gamble at all or gamble and lose everything. However, it reduced the proportion bet by 4% for the remaining participants. The average proportion bet was 41.7% in the normal speed condition and 37.1% in the slow speed condition. Thus, the 60-second speed-of-play limit reduced gambling spending. Furthermore, the limit reduced the number of spins played. It slightly increased the bet size on average. However, the increase in bet size was not large enough to be of significance.

The researchers repeated the analyses taking into account participants' PGSI scores. In both conditions, participants with higher PGSI scores were more likely to gamble at all, to gamble and lose everything, and to place a larger proportion bet.

Together, these results suggested that the 60-second speed-of-play limit reduced participants' gambling spending regardless of their risk of problem gambling. This effect occurred because participants facing the 60-second limit made fewer spins. Further, this effect outweighed any potential increase in bet size.

How you can use this research

This study could inform harm reduction interventions, policy, and research. Future research could examine the effects of different speed-of-play limits on different games. Future research could also examine for potential backfire effects. For example, people may switch to other high-risk games or play multiple games at once when there are speed-of-play limits.

About the researchers

Philip W.S. Newall is affiliated with the Experimental Gambling Research Laboratory, School of Health, Medical and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Sydney, Australia. **Leonardo Weiss-Cohen** is with the Leeds University Business School at the University of Leeds in Leeds, UK, and the Department of Psychology at Kingston University in Surrey, UK. **Henrik Singmann** is with Experimental Psychology at the University College London in London, UK. **W. Paul Boyce** is with the School of Psychology at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. **Lukasz Walasek** is with the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick in Coventry, UK. **Matthew J. Rockloff** is with the Experimental Gambling Research Laboratory, School of Health, Medical, and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Bundaberg, Australia. For more information about this study, please contact Philip W. S. Newall at p.newall@cqu.edu.au.

Citation

Newall, P. W. S., Weiss-Cohen, L., Singmann, H., Boyce, W. P., Walasek, L., & Rockloff, M. J. (2022). A speed-of-play limit reduces gambling expenditure in an online roulette game: Results of an online experiment. *Addictive Behaviors*, 127, 107229. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2021.107229>

Study funding

No funding source was declared for this study.

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