

research snapshot

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Understanding the use of consumer protection tools among online gamblers

What this research is about

As Internet gambling is becoming popular, there is a growing concern about the experience of harms among online gamblers. It is recognized that harms can be experienced even by gamblers who do not have a gambling disorder. Consumer protection tools are designed to help people remain in control of their gambling and prevent the development of gambling problems. However, few gamblers actually use those tools.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a theoretical framework that has been used to predict behaviours in many health domains. It was developed from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) model. The original TRA proposes that people are more likely to act in a certain way if they have the intention to do so. Intention is driven by favourable attitudes towards the behaviour and belief that other people approve of it. In the later TPB model, perceived behavioural control is added. Perceived behavioural control refers to the belief that the behaviour is under one's control. It has been found to increase people's intention and their subsequent behaviour.

This study was the first to apply the TPB to advance understanding of online gamblers' use of consumer protection tools. It also looked at whether past use of the tools could predict subsequent use.

What the researchers did

Participants were 564 adults who had bet online in the past 12 months. They were customers of six online gambling operators in Australia. They were randomly selected and invited by the gambling operators to take part in a survey study with a follow-up component.

What you need to know

This study applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to investigate the use of consumer protection tools among online gamblers. The researchers invited online gamblers to complete a baseline survey and a follow-up survey two weeks later. The results showed that gamblers who had used the tools in the past had greater intention to use them again. In terms of the TPB factors, gamblers who had favourable attitudes and believed that other people approve of their use had greater intention to use the tools. However, whether or not they believed the use of the tools was under their control had no impact on their intention. At follow-up, gamblers who had used the tools in the past and those with greater intention to use them were more likely to have used any of the tools during the last two weeks.

Participants completed a baseline survey at the beginning of the study. For gambling behaviours, they stated the number of online gambling accounts they had, monthly spending on gambling, and types of gambling activities they played. For consumer protection tools, they were asked about their past use of three tools. These included: 1) activity statements which let people review their gambling behaviour; 2) deposit limits that allow people to limit how much money they put into their account; and 3) self-exclusion that allows people to ban themselves from a gambling site for a period of time.

Participants also answered questions based on the TPB. The questions asked about their intention, attitudes, and belief about what other people are

doing with regard to the consumer protection tools. Participants were also asked if they thought that they had control over the use of those tools.

Two weeks later, participants were sent a follow-up survey about their use of the three consumer protection tools in the last two weeks. Of the 564 participants, 193 completed the follow-up survey.

What the researchers found

At the beginning of the study (baseline), 70% of participants reported that they had used one consumer protection tool before. Another 16% had used two and 3% had used three tools. However, one in ten participants had not used any tool before.

Participants who had used the tools in the past had greater intention to use them again. In terms of the TPB, participants who had favourable attitudes and believed that other people approve of their use had greater intention to use the tools. However, perceived behavioural control was not associated with intention to use the tools.

At follow-up, the percentages of participants who had used one, two, or all three of the tools dropped. Notably, almost two in five participants had not used any tool in the last two weeks. Participants who had used the tools in the past, and those with greater intention to use them, were more likely to have used any of the tools during the last two weeks.

These results suggest that the original TRA model is more suitable than the TPB for understanding online gamblers' use of consumer protection tools. This might be because consumer protection tools are quite straightforward to use. Thus, most gamblers think that the use of those tools is under their control. This could explain why perceived behavioural control was not found to have any impact on intention.

How you can use this research

This study could be used to guide efforts that encourage uptake of consumer protection tools. Interventions could emphasize that consumer protection tools are designed for all gamblers, not just those with a gambling problem. Interventions could

also encourage users to expand their use to more than one tool. Future research could examine the impact of consumer protection tools on gambling behaviour and the experience of gambling harms.

About the researchers

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