

research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



Betting operators send sports and race bettors many incentives to bet through text messages and emails

What this research is about

Gambling advertising influences players' sports and race betting behaviour. Players who see a lot of gambling advertisements are more likely to place bets on sports and races regularly and to make larger bets. Advertisements for sports and race betting are found everywhere in Australia, such as on the television, radio, and social media. Players also get advertisements in direct messages such as via emails and text messages.

Direct messages allow betting operators to adapt the content of their advertisements based on players' previous betting behaviour. Betting operators use direct messages to offer players incentives and remind them to bet. Promotions may lead players to bet more than they meant to and make more risky betting decisions.

Few studies investigate the types of advertisements players receive by direct message from betting operators. More evidence is needed to understand how players' betting behaviour is affected by receiving direct messages from betting operators. In this study, the researchers explored the content of direct messages that players received from betting operators. They also investigated whether the content of direct messages might be targeted to the players' gambling frequency and gambling risk status.

What the researchers did

The researchers used an ecological momentary assessment (EMA) study design. An EMA collects repeated measurements of participants' behaviours and experiences as they are happening, or close to that time. The researchers invited participants from a larger study who had agreed to be re-contacted.

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers explored the content of direct messages (i.e., text messages and emails) that players received from betting operators. Participants were sports and race bettors in Australia who placed at least one bet every two weeks. Participants completed one survey every day for seven days. They also sent the researchers any direct messages they received from betting operators. The results showed that betting operators regularly sent incentives and reminders to bet, to both sports and race bettors, by email and text message. Policy makers could use this research to regulate advertisements in direct messages so that they are subject to the same laws as other forms of gambling advertising.

Participants were 102 sports bettors and 110 race bettors in Australia, who placed at least one bet every two weeks. They were 18 years of age and older.

Participants completed a baseline survey before the study began. The survey collected participants' sociodemographic information and assessed their gambling behaviour. It also assessed participants for problem gambling using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). Of the sports bettors, 13.7% had problem gambling and 35.3% had moderate-risk gambling. Of the race bettors, 20.9% had problem gambling and 34.5% had moderate-risk gambling.

Participants then completed one survey every day for seven days. These daily surveys asked participants about the direct messages they received from betting operators and if the messages affected their betting behaviour. The researchers collected survey data from

participants in two stages. In stage 1, the researchers collected data from sports bettors the week before the 2017 Australian Football League and National Rugby League Grand Finals. In stage 2, they collected data from race bettors during the week of the 2017 Melbourne Cup (a popular racing event in Australia). Participants sent the researchers any direct messages they received from betting operators after they completed their survey each day. There were 931 messages, with 722 being sent by race bettors.

What the researchers found

Betting operators regularly sent incentives and reminders to bet, to both sports and race bettors, by email and text message. Bonus bets were the most common type of incentives. Bonus bets are free bets that players could use in their future bets.

Betting operators usually offered sports bettors reward points and reduced risk incentives. Players could use reward points to gamble or for shopping and entertainment. Reduced risk incentives are when players get a prize even if they lose a bet. Sports bettors also often received bonus winning incentives (e.g., where they could double their winnings), refund/stake back offers (e.g., where they could get some of their money back if they lost), and match your stake/deposit offers (e.g., the amount they stake being matched by the betting operator).

Betting operators usually offered race bettors refund/stake back offers, match your stake/deposit offers, and better odds incentives. Better odds incentives increase players' chances of winning.

The researchers did not find a relationship between the content of direct messages, and participants' gambling risk status or gambling frequency. This result suggests that the same content is promoted to all players regardless of how frequently they gamble and if they have a gambling problem or not.

How you can use this research

Policy makers could use this research to regulate advertisements in direct messages so that they are subject to the same laws as other forms of gambling advertising. Policy makers could also introduce a

system where players opt-in, rather than opt-out of, receiving messages from betting operators. This policy would ensure that only players who want to see betting advertisements will see them. Prevention service providers could educate gamblers on how to make safe betting choices.

About the researchers

Vijay Rawat, Nerilee Hing, and Alex M. T. Russell are affiliated with the Experimental Gambling Research Laboratory in the School of Health, Medical and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Australia. Vijay Rawat is at the Melbourne, Victoria location, Nerilee Hing is at the Bundaberg, Queensland location, and Alex M.T. Russell is at the Sydney, New South Wales location. For more information about this study, please contact Vijay Rawat at v.rawat@cqu.edu.au.

Citation

Rawat, V., Hing, N., & Russell, A. M. T. (2019). What's the message? A content analysis of email and texts received from wagering operators during sports and racing events. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-019-09896-3>.

Study funding

This research was funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (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 responsible 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.

Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.

