

knowledge snapshot



A systematic review of online communities and gambling behaviour

What this article is about

Online communities focused on gambling are increasingly popular. Online communities are defined as social groups on the internet where technology allows people to interact with each other. These communities attract people who share their ideas and interact with like-minded others. Online groups are made up of more than two people who share similar interests and characteristics. In online groups, communication happens over the internet and online platforms (e.g., social networking sites).

Online communities and groups can both encourage people to engage in harmful activities and help people overcome existing problems. For example, online gambling and gaming communities can normalize harmful gambling and gaming behaviours. But they can also help support people who are coping with gambling and gaming problems.

The authors of this review wanted to examine: (1) the role of online communities and groups in gambling behaviours; and (2) the link between online communities/groups and problem gambling.

What was done?

The authors did a systematic literature review following the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA). The authors searched five databases: EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, Scopus, Social Science Premium Collection, and Web of Science. The authors searched for scholarly articles that were published in English in peer-reviewed journals. The articles had to be published between 2017 and 2022. The authors searched the databases using search terms like online/virtual gambling, online/virtual

Why is this article important?

Online communities and groups that focus on gambling are increasingly popular. These communities/groups attract users who share their ideas and interact with like-minded others. The purpose of this systematic review was to examine: (1) the role of online communities and groups in gambling behaviours; and (2) the link between online communities/groups and problem gambling. The authors found 17 articles that met the inclusion criteria. Overall, online communities are used for a variety of reasons (e.g., discussing gambling experiences and problems, sharing tips, celebrating wins with others). Online discussion forums are also sources of support for people who gamble and their significant others. Active users of online gambling communities are more likely to be at-risk or have problem gambling. But a greater sense of belonging to offline groups can buffer the effect of online gambling community participation.

communities/groups, online discussion, chat room, and social networks. This search found 38 articles. The authors removed duplicates or articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Included articles had to analyze: (1) gambling or gambling problems; (2) involvement in online groups or communities; and (3) the role of online groups/communities in gambling or gambling problems. Articles examining trading and investment were also included. Seventeen articles met the inclusion criteria and were included in the review.

What you need to know

Of the 17 articles, 8 used quantitative methods and 8 used qualitative methods. One study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Almost half of the studies were conducted in Finland (41%), while 18% were conducted in Australia. There were also studies from the UK (12%), USA (12%), Canada (6%), Switzerland (6%), and Sweden (6%). Many studies used surveys (41%), and one-third (35%) analyzed online forum posts or social interactions. Most studies were published between 2020 and 2022 (59%).

Most studies examined gambling behaviour in general (71%). Two studies looked at sports betting. Three studies looked at online poker, internet gambling, or bitcoin investing and trading. Types of online communities included discussion forums, chat groups, online social casinos, and bitcoin online communities. Online communities often grow through social means (e.g., inviting friends or social media contacts to join).

Overall, the review shows that online communities are used for a variety of reasons. For example, discussing gambling experiences and problems, sharing tips and stories, and celebrating wins with others. Online discussion forums are also used to talk about emotions related to gambling. Gambling is mostly discussed in a positive light in the various online contexts examined in this review.

Online discussion forums are sources of support for people who gamble and their significant others. Discussing their situations with others who have similar experiences can be helpful. Online forums are often one of the first sources of help sought by people who gamble and their concerned partners.

Participating in online groups requires a certain level of commitment. If someone is no longer gambling as much or engaging in as many gambling behaviours, they often lose contact with the group. Breaking ties with betting-based online groups might be unpleasant and cause anxiety. This can mean that an individual may continue to gamble to avoid issues related to leaving the group.

Many studies (41%) examined the connection between online community participation and problem gambling. Active users of online gambling

communities are more likely to be at-risk or have problem gambling. But a greater sense of belonging to offline groups can buffer the effect. The authors of this review also noted that there is a need to explore gender differences in the motivations of use and involvement in gambling-themed online communities.

Who is it intended for?

Policy makers and practitioners can use this article to support the creation of online communities that encourage users to reduce gambling behaviours.

About the researchers

Iina Savolainen, Ilkka Vuorinen, Eerik Mantere, and **Atte Oksanen** are affiliated with the Faculty of Social Sciences at Tampere University in Finland. **Anu Sirola** is affiliated with the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. For more information about this study, please contact Iina Savolainen at iina.savolainen@tuni.fi.

Citation

Savolainen, I., Sirola, A., Vuorinen, I., Mantere, E., & Oksanen, A. (2022). Online communities and gambling behaviors – a systematic review. *Current Addiction Reports*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-022-00430-x>

Study funding

This work was supported by the Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies.

About Greo

Greo has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. Greo is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization with almost two decades of international experience in generating, synthesizing, and mobilizing research into action across the health and wellbeing sectors. Greo helps organizations improve their strategies, policies, and practices by harnessing the power of evidence and stakeholder insight.

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

