

research snapshot

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An analysis of the factors that affect online gambling

What this research is about

Gambling is readily available in many societies. This is especially true now that people can gamble online. Since online gambling is easy to access, it may encourage people to gamble more often. Therefore, it is important to understand what factors affect whether someone chooses to gamble online. This study looked at psychological and social factors that can affect gambling behaviour. Psychological factors include someone's intention to gamble and attitudes towards gambling. It also includes whether they feel they are in control of their gambling behaviour. Some social factors that could affect gambling behaviour are social norms. Social norms or pressures can come from family and friends, or from society and social media in general.

Social norms can differ across regions or societies. How accepting a society is of gambling may affect whether someone chooses to gamble. Therefore, this study surveyed participants from two regions: the UK and the US. The researchers tested the effects of psychological and social factors on gambling behaviour in people from both regions.

What the researchers did

The researchers sent out questionnaires over social network platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn. They sent links to the online questionnaire to 1000 adults (18 years or older) from the UK and the US. 241 people participated in the questionnaire. Of the 241 participants, 56% were female and 44% were male.

The questionnaire asked participants whether they agreed with statements about gambling. These statements were related to psychological and social factors that can affect gambling. Participants rated

What you need to know

Online gambling is readily available to many people, but not everyone uses it. What factors affect whether someone chooses to gamble online? This study tested whether certain psychological and social factors affected people's intent to gamble online in two countries (the UK and the US).

The researchers found that people's online gambling intentions were positively related to their gambling attitudes. Their intentions were also related to their views that online gambling was widely accepted in society and on social media. However, online gambling intentions were not affected by the social norms from their family and friends, or their perceived behavioural control. This was unlike the offline gambling context where perceived behavioural control affected gambling intentions. Social norms from close others also affected the offline gambling intentions of people living in the US, although not those living in the UK. People's online gambling intentions were positively related to online gambling behaviour. This study showed that there were differences in online and offline gambling.

their agreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The questionnaire measured their opinions of gambling in the following categories:

- i) Intention: the participant's intentions for gambling in the next year online and offline (e.g., "I intend to try more online gambling games in the next year").

- ii) Attitudes: their personal attitudes towards gambling online and offline (e.g., “I do not feel guilty when I gamble online”).
- iii) Social norms or pressures from those close to the participant: how the participant viewed the opinions of their family or friends (e.g., “My family is critical about gamblers”).
- iv) Social norms or pressures from society and social media: broader influence on the participant’s views of gambling (e.g., “I have heard a lot of bad things about gambling”).
- v) Perceived behavioural control: how much the participant felt in control of their gambling (e.g., “I would rate my gambling skill as advanced”).

The participants also answered questions about their gambling behaviour. For example, how often they gambled and how much they spent gambling in the past year.

The researchers tested whether participants’ gambling intentions were related to the other factors. They also tested whether the participants’ gambling behaviour was related to their gambling intentions.

What the researchers found

For online gambling, the researchers found the same results for participants from both the UK and US. Participants’ online gambling intentions were positively related to their gambling attitudes. Their intentions were also related to social norms from society and social media. In other words, participants who had more positive attitudes and thought that online gambling was widely accepted in society, had greater intentions to gamble online. However, intentions were not related to social norms from their friends or family, or their perceived behavioural control. Finally, online gambling intentions were positively related to online gambling behaviour.

For offline gambling, attitudes and perceived behavioural control were related to greater gambling intentions. There were also some differences between the UK and US participants. For the US participants, thinking that others close to them disapproved of gambling decreased their intentions to gamble offline. This was not the case for the UK participants.

How you can use this research

This research shows that many factors can affect someone’s intent to gamble online. Since online gambling is so readily available, it is important to understand the psychological and social factors that influence people’s gambling. Clinicians could use this information to help people who experience harm from online gambling.

About the researchers

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (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 safer 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.

