



Enabling safer online gambling

Summary

Most people who gamble online do so responsibly, but a significant minority develop gambling addictions. Online gambling has unique characteristics compared to land-based gambling such as rapid continuous play and simultaneous betting across multiple accounts. It's also more often done when the individual is alone. However, using player data generated in online gambling creates novel opportunities for harm prevention based on transparency, customer engagement and empowered decision making.



'Dairy-Free II' by Stuart Lee

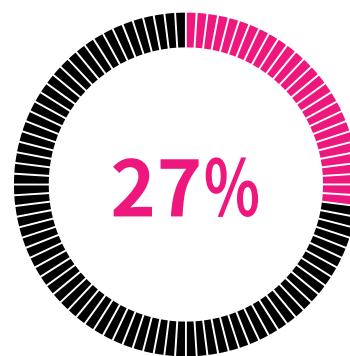
The artwork featured in this document was created by Stuart Lee, an artist with lived experience of gambling harms. The cow symbolises problem gamblers being 'milked' worldwide, using online data that empowers the industry to advertise and continuously promote gambling.

Gambling in the UK

Gambling Commission figures for 2022 show that 27% of UK adults gambled online in the last four weeks, with 1-2% of UK adults demonstrating moderate to high risk levels of gambling harms.

It was also reported that only 30% of the public believe that gambling in the UK is conducted fairly and safely. Several safer gambling techniques are used on online gambling sites, including deposit limits, time-outs, and self-exclusion.

Nevertheless, people continue to experience significant harms from online gambling, which also impacts those around them.



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About the research

To understand these challenges, we reviewed scientific research on online gambling. We looked at how persuasive technologies can be used to both facilitate and inhibit risky gambling behaviours. We reviewed the desktop and mobile websites of gambling operators using eye tracking technologies and other techniques.

Fundamental to this work has been our engagement of people with lived experience of gambling harms.

Key findings

- All websites we assessed displayed the legally required age warnings, and icons and links to safer gambling organisations.
- Because of the way that sites are designed for mobile versus desktop browsers, safer gambling information can be harder to find on mobile browsers.
- Safer gambling information is most often presented using text and icons, rather than images or video, in text that is usually smaller than the other text on the page.
- Many websites use text or icons to link to either dedicated safer gambling pages or external sources of information, though a few include icons without links.
- Safer gambling webpages are generally designed as separate from main sites, and signposting to these pages is often poor and inconsistent.
- Co-design and co-creation with people who have lived experience of gambling harms can lead to improved and more impactful safer gambling messages and strategies.
- People who gamble online regularly are open to their gambling data being used to send them personalised and targeted safer gambling messages.
- The individuals who work within the safer gambling teams at gambling operators are in support of the techniques used for marketing also being used for reducing gambling harms.

Policy recommendations

The Government should:

- Require gambling operators to provide clear and transparent explanations to players on how algorithms are used to target them for marketing promotions.
- Require safer gambling links and icons on gambling websites to be clear and prominent, not relegated to the bottom of webpages.

Gambling operators should:

- Use player data to promote safer gambling and minimise harm, using the same techniques that they currently use for marketing and promotions.
- Make use of multimedia such as video and audio to make safer gambling messaging as appealing as marketing promotions; in addition, the branding of safer gambling content should be consistent with the rest of the website.
- Provide information about games that is targeted at common misunderstandings, such as misconceptions around probabilities.

Professor John McAlaney is a Chartered Psychologist at Bournemouth University, where he leads the Gambling Research Group. His work focuses on decision making and social influence in online environments, including problematic gambling, digital addiction and participation in cybercrime. In doing so he determines how risky behaviours in these online spaces can be mitigated through transparency, user engagement and empowerment.

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