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Pop-up messages on EGMs in New Zealand

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Background

- 1 July 2009: pop-up messages became mandatory in on all EGMs in NZ
- Pop-up messages:
 - Interrupt gamblers at irregular intervals not exceeding 30 minutes
 - Display current session duration, money spent, net wins or losses
- In a pop-up gamblers asked “Do you wish to continue play?”
 - YES: Wait 15s, then can continue gambling
 - NO: EGM immediately pays out
 - DO NOTHING: Pop-up message displayed for 30s before gambling can be resumed.





ELECTRONIC PLAYER INFORMATION FOR CURRENT SESSION

Cash In = \$0.00 Credits Played = \$87.00 Credits Won = \$79.20*
Session Win or (Loss) = (\$7.80)* Cash Out = \$0.00

*(These totals exclude jackpot amounts not included on the credit meter)

Session Started: 2:47 PM 20/2/09 Total Time Played: 0 hrs 9 mins
Current time: 2:56 PM 20/2/09 Credits Available = \$12.20

DO YOU WISH TO CONTINUE PLAY

Yes								No



Background

- New Zealand is the only country in which pop-up messages are mandatory on all EGMs irrespective of venue type
- A large-scale harm minimisation measure
- Significant industry opposition to their introduction
 - Reduce enjoyment of recreational gamblers
 - Lack of evidence for harm minimisation potential
 - At that time just two studies with modest effects
 - Unnecessary cost



Our work

- Too late for a pre-post study, unfortunately, and current research has moved on from this 'basic' message
 - engaging with gamblers cognitively, linking with pre-set limits, comparisons with 'norms' in laboratory/simulated settings
- Three phases:
 - Qualitative study with gamblers and venue staff
 - In-venue observational study
 - Survey of patrons



Qualitative study

- Forty gamblers in six focus groups (Landon et al., 2015)
- Current/former problem gamblers, social gamblers of varying frequency, and a Māori gambler group
- Nineteen venue staff in three focus groups – two pub groups and one casino group



Results

- “Nothing will stop you”
 - “most people sitting in front of a pokie machine have already allocated themselves the amount of money they are going to lose on it and those pop-ups are just a nuisance” (low-freq gambler)
 - “they tell you how long you’ve been there which is probably useful if you’re drunk... but I mean if you’re a gambler... you know what you’ve lost because your brain ... is always ticking” (current/former PG)
- “Better not to touch anything”
 - “you don’t even look at it, you just wait until it goes away *laughs* (current/former PG)
 - “they avoid it by not looking” (casino staff)
 - “People get angry and pissed off...” (non-casino staff)



Results

- Current and former problem gamblers had strong views
 - Accuracy of information, need for information, privacy, distraction from strategy
 - General annoyance only when jackpot nearing limit
- Venue staff too
 - Nanny state, public relations exercise, PG a small problem, informed choice, extra hassles, gambler changing machines, accuracy of information, confusion



Results

- **“anything is better than nothing”**
 - “Sometimes I see it and it’s like Oh! Have I been here for an hour ... they used to make me think ... that’s a long time or I don’t want to spend that amount” (current/former PG)
 - “It’s stopped people from sitting their in their trance going ...*taps table* for hours on end... we’ve had behaviour changes ... people are more likely to get frustrated whereas before we didn’t really notice them because they just sat there for hours” (casino staff)
 - “I suppose for me what would stop me from playing is photos of families... not my own family but people... it would remind me that I have a family... maybe even people crying ... something that reminds you to just pull out for a minute... might get me thinking...” (Māori gambler)



Observational Study

- Researchers entered venues in pairs posing as patrons
- Seated themselves at EGMs and gambled slowly (min bet, min line) and used smart-phone to document observations
- Forty-eight hours in total – twenty-four each in casino and pub venues



Relative frequencies of EGM events

- Small wins (losses disguised as wins) too frequent to track using this approach

EGM Feature	Casino instances	Non-casino instances
Jackpot won	0*	0*
Pop-up Message	22	18
Free Spins Won	70	66
Large Credit Win (400+ Credits)	66	76
Medium Credit Win (100-400 Credits)**	35	42
Small Credit Win (1-100 Credits)**	76	80

*Three “minor” jackpot wins (\$50-\$200) were observed – two in casinos and one in a non-casino venue

**These categories are substantially underestimated due to the pace of play and data collection method



Immediate response

- Look at information, or other gamblers

Behaviour	Non-casino instances <i>n</i> (%)	Casino instances <i>n</i> (%)
Appears to read the information	10 (56%)	5 (23%)
Watches other gamblers and their machines	6 (33%)	10 (45%)
Shows frustration	2 (11%)	2 (9%)
Removes loyalty card	0	2 (9%)
Checks cell phone	0	2 (9%)
Leaves EGM momentarily while pop-up occurs	0	1 (5%)



Subsequent behaviour

- No observations of interaction with venue staff

Behaviour	Non-casino instances <i>n</i> (%)	Casino instances <i>n</i> (%)
Continues playing at same rate (credits/lines bet)	9 (50%)	12 (54%)
Increases credits bet	3 (17%)	2 (8%)
Cashes out	2 (11%)	2 (8%)
Changes machines or games	2 (11%)	1 (4%)
Inserts money into machine	1 (6%)	2 (8%)
Increases speed of play (spin button pushing)	1 (6%)	2 (8%)
Decreases speed of play (spin button pushing)	0	2 (8%)
Accesses Player Information Display (PID) screen	0	1 (4%)



Patron survey

- Sample = 460 gamblers who gamble on EGMS
 - Recruited at gambling venues in two NZ cities
 - 47% female
- Questionnaire assessment conducted over the telephone.
- Key measures:
 - Money spent gambling per month
 - Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI)
 - Psychological & Physical Health (K-10 psychological distress, smoking)
 - Coping style
 - Attitudes towards and use of pop-up messages.



Engagement with pop-up messages

- Over half had seen a pop-up in the last 3 months (n=260, 57%)
- Many saw them often or always (n=99, 22%)
 - Most (70%) saw 1-2 pop-ups in a typical session
 - Some saw 3+ pop-ups per session (n=30, 30%)

All of these participants were problem gamblers (PGSI 8+)

None reported ever being approached by venue staff

In contrast to qualitative work:

- **Pop-ups help control the amount of money they spend (n=65, 25%)**
- Only 15% perceived pop-up messages to be factually incorrect
- **Generally neutral (63%) or positive (9%) impact on enjoyment**



Results – effects on money spent

- Being likely to stop gambling in that session is key (significant $p < 0.05$ – Palmer du Preez et al., 2016)
 - Other responses not significant, but interesting
- How to encourage the ‘harder’ response?

Table 3 Results from the multivariate GLM model outlined in Table 2 showing the relationships between behavioural responses to pop-up messages and money spent gambling

Behavioural response	Unlikely		Neutral		Likely		<i>p</i> value
	Estimate (\$) ^a	95 % CI	Estimate (\$) ^a	95 % CI	Estimate (\$) ^a	95 % CI	
Stop gambling in that visit	6.13 (\$459.44)	5.45, 6.82	6.09 (\$441.42)	5.26, 6.92	5.11 (\$165.67)	4.35, 5.86	0.04
Consider the overall level of your gambling	5.81 (\$333.62)	5.18, 6.44	6.00 (\$403.43)	5.10, 6.91	5.20 (\$181.27)	4.43, 5.97	0.09
Reduce your gambling	5.90 (\$365.04)	5.24, 6.57	6.24 (\$512.86)	5.37, 7.11	5.35 (\$210.61)	4.61, 6.08	0.11
Consider seeking help about your gambling	5.81 (\$333.62)	5.19, 6.43	5.54 (\$254.68)	4.49, 6.59	4.55 (\$94.63)	3.28, 5.82	0.12
Read the information	5.54 (\$254.68)	4.88, 6.20	6.18 (\$483.00)	5.39, 6.97	5.68 (\$292.95)	5.07, 6.30	0.14
Increase your gambling	5.63 (\$278.66)	5.01, 6.24	6.27 (\$528.48)	5.29, 7.25	6.11 (\$450.34)	3.14, 8.78	0.31
Change machines	5.81 (\$333.62)	5.19, 6.44	5.82 (\$336.97)	5.03, 6.61	5.50 (\$244.69)	4.81, 6.19	0.43

Adjusted for baseline PGSI, COPE planning subscale, age group, Asian ethnicity and EGM venue (see Table 2)

^a The dollar values are the inverse logarithms of the least squares means estimates, and provided for indicative purposes only



Discussion

- NZ pop-up messages:
 - Provide no direct message to the gambler, encouragement to extend break beyond 15s, or suggestion of competing activities
 - Occur randomly (unrelated to session spend or losses)
 - Passive: Rely on the gambler interpreting and using session information
 - Default (do nothing) outcome is to continue gambling
- Gambler is not required to make a choice/decision or attend to the information
- When gamblers engaged with pop-ups, 'thinking about gambling', 'reducing gambling' wasn't enough to significantly impact expenditure - **decision to stop seems important**



Message and timing

- No message and non-contingent (just random times).
Controlled research has suggested benefits:
 - Dynamic messages that encourage self appraisal (Monaghan & Blaszczynski, 2010)
 - Message content emphasising family disruption paired with graphic warning (Muñoz, Chebat, & Borges, 2013), or stress/distress (Muñoz et al., 2010)
 - Explicitly encouraging money limit setting with a pop-up reminder (Wohl et al., 2013)
 - Contingencies - gamblers may be more receptive to warnings when they are losing vs winning (Phillips & Ogeil, 2010)



Many gamblers see multiple pop-up messages

- **No evidence of venue staff engaging**
- Alter content - by third pop-up message – explicitly encourage gamblers to stop gambling in that session
- Graded pop-up messages,
 - First: informational current form
 - Successive: more explicit, directive threat messages about expenditure and harm
 - Require a response from gambler and or host-responsibility interaction in order to continue gambling
- Present messaging after a series of losses (Phillips & Ogeil, 2010)
 - As an aside make losses clear



Require action

- At a minimum
 - Require input from gambler – default is cash out rather than continue?
 - Add self-appraisal (Monaghan & Blaszczynski, 2010) – e.g., “you have now spent \$x, how does this compare with what you intended to spend today?”
- Most people reported seeing 1-2 pop-up messages per session, all those seeing 3 were problem gamblers
 - Require host-responsibility intervention?
 - Pop-up occurrence easy to see (observational work)
 - Loyalty card/electronic monitoring could support this process?
 - Late in session pop-up messages could inform gamblers of a possible approach?



Final thoughts

- Our Government was bold introducing pop-up messages on the basis of limited evidence.
 - Policy decisions cannot necessarily await evidence
- They do help some gamblers, and there is minimal evidence of a negative impact on gambling experiences
 - Strongest negative views expressed by problem gamblers and non-casino venue staff (not perceived as their core business)
- Variations of message content and use of personally/emotionally relevant stimuli.
 - suggested by focus groups and in recent review (Harris et al., 2016)



Further information

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