Online Gambling Advertising and the Third-Person Effect: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT
Gambling disorder is known to have a negatively detrimental impact on affected individual’s physical and psychological health, social relationships, and finances. Via remote technologies (e.g., Internet, mobile phones, and interactive television), gambling has come out of gambling venues and has brought the potential for online gambling to occur anywhere (e.g., the home, the workplace, and on the move). Alongside the rise of online gambling, online gambling advertising have spread throughout all type of media. In a sample of 201 Spanish university students, the present study explored the perceived influence of online gambling advertising. More specifically it examined the Third-Person Effect (TPE), and its consequences on individuals’ willingness to support censorship or public service advertising. The findings demonstrate that despite the difference on the perception of the effects of online gambling advertising, it scarcely accounts for the behavioural outcomes analysed. On the contrary, awareness of problem gambling and, above all, paternalistic attitudes appear to explain this support.

KEYWORDS
Advertising, Censorship, Online Gambling, Problem Gambling, Third-Person Effect

INTRODUCTION
Online gambling has rapidly expanded over the last two decades (Canale, Griffiths, Veino et al., 2016; Gainsbury, Wood, Russell, Hing, & Blaszczynski, 2012), and has become one of the fastest growing online businesses in the world (Gainsbury, 2015), with revenues surpassing those of movies, theme parks or music (Mizerski, 2013). At the same time, online gambling has become more socially accepted in contemporary societies and it has been integrated into many individual’s everyday lives (Cotte and Latour, 2009; Kuss and Griffiths, 2012). However, technological advances and the growth of remote gambling (via the internet, mobile phones, and interactive television) can be negatively detrimental to some individuals (Wardle, Moody, Griffiths et al., 2011). Individuals experiencing gambling disorder represent a very small proportion of gamblers (Mizerski, 2013). However, it is known that gambling disorder can have a seriously damaging impact on affected gamblers’ mental and physical health, their interpersonal relationships, and their finances (Griffiths, 2004). As the integration of gambling...
into everyday lives has shown individuals losing track of their spending (Auer and Griffiths, 2016; Siemens and Kopp, 2011), the concern about individual and social harm has grown (Canale, Veino & Griffiths, 2016; Yani-de-Soriano et al., 2012). In this sense, online gambling has been considered to be more harmful and less regulated than traditional gambling (Cotte and Latour, 2009; Kuss and Griffiths, 2012).

Empirical studies have shown that disordered gambling is related to an increase in the availability of gambling activities (Jacques et al., 2000), and that online gamblers are more likely to be problem gamblers than those who only gamble offline (e.g., Yani-de-Soriano et al., 2012; Griffiths and Barnes 2008; Ladd and Petry 2002) although almost all online gamblers also gamble offline (Wardle et al., 2011), and vulnerable individuals (e.g., problem gamblers) appear to be more susceptible to online gambling problems (Griffiths, Wardle, Orford et al., 2009). The new technological environment has forced governments worldwide to adapt their legislation. In particular, in Spain, where the present study was conducted, the legislation was changed in 2011. The 2011 Act (13/2011) that regulates gaming activities was the first legal framework for gambling since 1977 (Jiménez-Murcia et al., 2013). This legal change led to a large increase in the number of online gamblers and a rise of individuals with gambling problems (Castilla et al., 2013). The increase in disordered gambling observed in Spain after liberalising legislation has been also reported in other countries such as Sweden, Australia and the United Kingdom (Castilla et al., 2013).

THE INFLUENCE OF GAMBLING ADVERTISING

One of the most serious public health concerns is the extent to which online gambling advertising mediates the gambling behaviours of individuals and triggers their impulse to gamble. In this sense, the growth and expansion of online gambling companies has been accompanied by an increase in expenditure on all types of gambling advertising, in particular television commercials (Ofcom, 2013). It is generally accepted that gambling advertising induces playing activity, conveys messages that stress the positives aspects of gambling, and promotes the belief that personal talent is decisive to success in gambling (McMullan and Kervin, 2012). However, many organizations and scholars claim that the question about the impact of advertising on the consumption is still unclear (Binde, 2007). Anti-gambling lobbies maintain that advertising increases gambling and contributes to its social acceptance (Griffiths, 2005).

On the contrary, some authors state that advertising affects the market share between the online gambling companies but not the consumption (Hing et al., 2014). They argue that only a small proportion of individuals begin gambling for the first time after having been exposed to online gambling advertising (Hing et al., 2014). Despite of the fact that online gambling advertising has a smaller impact on gambling disorder than other influential factors (Binde, 2007), it can be viewed as an impulse trigger to gamble and has a negative effect on those who attempt to cease gambling (Binde, 2009). In one of the largest ever studies evaluating the impact of gambling advertising, Hanss, Mentzoni, Griffiths and Pallesen (2015) surveyed over 6,000 Norwegians and examined three specific dimensions of gambling advertising impacts: gambling-related attitudes, interest, and behaviour (“involvement”); knowledge about gambling options and providers (“knowledge”); and the degree to which individuals are aware of gambling advertising (“awareness”). The study compared the responses from problem gamblers against those of recreational (non-problem) gamblers and found that problem gamblers were more likely than recreational gamblers to agree that gambling advertising increased their gambling involvement and knowledge, and that they were more aware of gambling advertising.

Those who consider that online gambling advertising has an impact on individuals’ desire to gamble have advocated to apply preventive strategies to fight against gambling disorder, such as banning advertising and promoting public service campaigns, similar to those used to prevent cigarette smoking (Friend and Ladd, 2009). However, public service advertising that aims increasing individuals’ awareness of gambling disorder have been shown to have a limited impact (Najavits et al., 2003).
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