

***SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TOOLS IN ONLINE GAMBLING:  
A SURVEY OF ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR AMONG INTERNET GAMBLERS***

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# ***BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION***

- Dimensions of social responsibility in gambling
- Internet gambling: Key empirical findings
- Brief overview of *PlayScan*
- Survey of Internet gamblers' attitudes towards *PlayScan*
- Limitations and implications of empirical findings

# ***DIMENSIONS OF RESPONSIBLE GAMING***

*(Griffiths & Wood, 2008)*

Design



Behavioural  
transparency



Customer support



# ***INTERNET GAMBLING: KEY EMPIRICAL FINDINGS***

- Internet gamblers are more likely to be male, relatively young adults, single, well educated, and in professional/managerial employment (*Griffiths et al, 2009*).
- Problem gambling prevalence rate is significantly higher among Internet gamblers than non-Internet gamblers (*Wood, Griffiths & Parke, 2007; Griffiths & Barnes, 2008; griffiths et al, 2009*).
- Adolescents are gambling on the Internet (*Wood, Griffiths, et al, 2007; MORI, 2009*).
- Increasing numbers of women gambling remotely and gender swapping is common (*IGRU, 2007; Wood et al, 2007*).

- **Internet gamblers were more likely to be problem gamblers** has been reported previously in a number of smaller scale studies in both the UK and the US
- Internet gambling could be a **less protective environment** for vulnerable gamblers
- To a problem gambler, Internet provides possibility for **24/7 gambling** all year round from comfort of one's own home.
- Given the **low levels of social responsibility** that have been found in empirical studies of Internet gambling sites this is of particular concern.

# ***GLOBAL ONLINE GAMBLER SURVEY***

- The Global Online Gambler Survey conducted for *eCOGRA* (*eCommerce and Online Gaming Regulation and Assurance*) by the IGRU (2007) collected data from 10,865 participants, from 96 countries
- Participants had to have gambled at Internet casino sites, Internet poker sites, or both within the three months prior to the research.
- The survey focused on demographic variables, information on behaviour and attitudes, player protection and satisfaction, responsible gambling, and positive and negative aspects of Internet gambling.

- 51% to 75% of players (across five SR features) stated that they would consider some SR gaming elements at least 'quite useful'.
- Most popular option was receiving regular financial statements - 75% respondents considering this option to be at least 'quite useful'
- Least popular feature was self-set time limit with 51% reporting this as at least 'quite useful'.
- Those players who were younger, female, gambled out of boredom, and reported losing more money, were significantly more likely to consider SR gambling features to be useful.
- If players were supportive of one type of SR feature, they were generally in support of various consumer protection strategies.

- Same study also utilised a series of focus groups of gamblers in five countries (Canada, USA, Sweden, UK, Germany).
- Overall, attitudes among focus groups were that the onus for playing responsibly should rest with the player.
- Both survey and focus group data showed that players preferred informed choice options such as supplying regular financial statements to players.
- The majority of players were very much opposed to mandatory spend limits which they regarded as patronising and overly restrictive.

# ***BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PLAYSCAN***

- *PlayScan* aims to detect and help those who would benefit from playing less.
- *PlayScan* has been compared to a safety belt (i.e., something you use without intending to actually make use of).
- The tool measures increases and/or decreases of players' gaming behaviour and uses a 'traffic light' identification system.
- If a player's gaming is stable and with no risky gaming behaviour it gives a green signal to the player.
- A yellow signal indicates some risky gaming. Serious problems with gaming are shown by a red signal.
- The use of the system is voluntary, but *Svenska Spel* strongly recommends its customers to use it.

- *PlayScan* uses the player's behaviour from the preceding year that is then matched against a model based on behavioural characteristics for problem players.
- It operates through a combination of genetic programming (i.e., a neural network analogue) and Bayesian models.
- If it predicts players' behaviour as risky, they get an advance warning together with advice on how to change their patterns in order to avoid future unhealthy and/or risky gaming.
- If a players' behaviour indicates gaming problems they are deleted from the direct advertising address lists.
- Via *PlayScan* players offered use of SR control tools (e.g., personal gaming budgets, self-diagnostic tests of gaming habits, and the chance to self-exclude from gaming).

# ***STUDY AIMS***

- Given lack of research into attitudes towards SR by gamblers and how they are using SR tools, study examined players' attitudes/behaviour towards using SR tools within *PlayScan*.
- Study included an assessment of online gambler feedback in relation to the overall relevance of *PlayScan* but also involved data collected from Internet gamblers who have not used *PlayScan* to examine their perceptions of *PlayScan*.
- It also examined the extent to which *PlayScan* is experienced as beneficial by those who have received the intervention and seen as beneficial by those who have not.

# ***PARTICIPANTS***

- A total of 2,348 participants took part in the study (1,725 males and 560 females; 56 missing responses).
- Mean age of 43.9 years (age range 18 to 84 years; standard deviation = 12.8 years).
- Three quarters of participants who responded to the survey were male and a quarter of respondents were female
- Participants were clientele of the *Svenska Spel* online gambling website and self-defined as online gamblers.

# ***ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE***

- How long they had been playing online at *Svenska Spel*
- How often they gambled online
- How they viewed *Svenska Spel* in comparison to other gaming operators
- Whether or not they had used *PlayScan*
- Reasons for why they had used *PlayScan*
- Reasons for why they had not used *PlayScan*
- When they first used *PlayScan*; how easy *PlayScan* was to use
- How helpful *PlayScan* was to them
- How helpful they perceived *PlayScan* was to other players
- How useful individual features of *PlayScan* were
- Whether they had used any of the self-exclusion features
- Why they used self-exclusion features
- Whether their individual ratings had changed since using *PlayScan*
- Benefits of using *PlayScan*
- Best and worst features about *PlayScan*
- Basic demographic information (gender, age, etc.).

# ***PROCEDURE***

- Survey sent out online to 10,412 online *Svenska Spel* players representing approximately 10% of the player base.
  - Of the questionnaires sent to 10,412 players, 698 email addresses came back as being incorrect - total sample of 9,714 possible players who received the questionnaire.
  - Of these, 2,348 players completed the questionnaire (net response rate of 24.2%).
  - As an incentive to participate, all respondents who completed the survey were given a scratch ticket by *Svenska Spel*.
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## ***GAMBLING FREQUENCY***

- 3.5% gambled every day
  - 32% gambled a few times a week
  - 46% gambled a few times a month
  - 18.5% gambled less often
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- 62% did not gamble online with anyone else but *Svenska Spel*.

# ***LENGTH OF TIME ONLINE GAMBLING***

- At the time of the survey, gambling online with *Svenska Spel*:
  - 82% more than a year
  - 8% began seven to twelve months ago
  - 7% three to six months
  - 2.5% one to two months
  - 1% for less than a month

# ***PLAYSCAN USAGE***

- Quarter of respondents (26%) had activated *PlayScan*
- Of non-PlayScan users, the main reason given for not using it was that three-quarters of players did not think they needed it (75%).
- Other lesser reasons included they did not know what *PlayScan* did (17.5%), *PlayScan* was just for problem gamblers (11%), could not be bothered (7.5%), they did not want *Svenska Spel* gathering data on them (4.5%), and took too much time to sign up (1%).
- In open ended responses, majority (n=76) reported they felt that they did not need *PlayScan* because they kept in control of their own limits, they did not gamble often enough, or did not gamble with large enough sums of money to warrant setting it up (n=65).

## ***PLAYSCAN USAGE, GENDER, GAMBLING FREQUENCY AND LENGTH OF TIME GAMBLING ONLINE***

- Higher frequency players were significantly more likely to use *PlayScan* ( $X^2 = 47.71$ , d.f. = 4;  $p < 0.0001$ )
- Length of time spent gambling online with *Svenska Spel* had no bearing on whether they had activated a *PlayScan* account) ( $X^2 = 2.68$ , d.f. = 4;  $p < 0.61$ ).
- Males were more likely than females to activate a *PlayScan* account (26% males and 20% females) ( $X^2 = 7.66$ , d.f. = 1;  $p = 0.006$ ).

## ***PLAYSCAN USAGE, NON-USAGE AND AGE***

- *PlayScan* users' mean age (42.4 years) was significantly lower than non-*PlayScan* users (44.5 years) ( $t = 3.26$ , d.f. = 2277;  $p < 0.001$ ).
- Younger respondents were significantly less likely to know what *PlayScan* was ( $t = 3.37$ , d.f. = 1720;  $p < 0.001$ )
- Younger respondents significantly more likely to say they could not be bothered to activate *PlayScan* ( $t = 8.22$ , d.f. = 1720;  $p < 0.00001$ )
- Younger respondents significantly more likely to say they did not want data collected about them ( $t = 2.35$ , d.f. = 1720;  $p < 0.02$ )
- Older respondents were significantly more likely to say that they did not need *PlayScan* ( $t = 2.09$ , d.f. = 1720;  $p < 0.04$ )

# ***EASE AND USEFULNESS OF PLAYSCAN***

- *PlayScan* users were asked how easy the system was to use.
- The majority of *PlayScan* users (58%) said it was very easy and 30% said it was somewhat easy.
- *PlayScan* users were also asked how useful the system was to them.
- Majority (52%) said it was 'quite useful' or 'very useful' compared to 19% who said it was either 'quite useless' or 'completely useless'.
- The remaining respondents (29%) had neutral feelings about the usefulness of *PlayScan*.

# ***REASONS FOR USING PLAYSCAN***

- Most popular reasons for using PlayScan were:
  - Players being curious about what *PlayScan* was (47%)
  - Players wanting to set time and money limits (34%)
  - Players wanting to play safe (23%)
- Lesser reasons for using *PlayScan* included:
  - Players who were concerned they were playing too much (12%)
  - Players wanting to better understand their play behaviour (11%)
  - Players wanting some help with their gambling (1%)
- 8% said they did not know the reasons why they started using *PlayScan*.

# ***USEFUL FEATURES OF PLAYSCAN***

- Most useful features that were rated 'quite' or 'very useful':
  - Setting of spending limits (70%)
  - Being able to view their gambling profile (49%)
  - Performing self-tests of gambling behaviour (46%)
  - Being able to self-exclude for a certain period of time (42%)
  - Getting information about support for gambling issues (40%)
  - Getting information about predicted gambling profile (36%)
- Respondents were also asked which features of *PlayScan* (if any) they had used. 56% had used spending limits, 40% had taken a self-test, 17% had used a self-exclusion feature, and 0.4% had contacted a helpline.

# ***SELF-EXCLUSION FEATURES IN PLAYSCAN***

- Most useful self-exclusion feature rated as 'quite' or 'very useful' by users:
  - 7-day self-exclusion (46%)
  - 1-month self-exclusion (24%)
  - 24-hour self-exclusion (24%)
  - permanent self-exclusion (16%)
  
- *PlayScan* users asked why they used the self-exclusion features (SEFs):
  - Only 17% had used any of the SEFs
  - 12% used SEFs to save some money by avoiding playing
  - 10% used SEFs as they thought they were gambling online too much
  - 0.5% used SEFs because they never wanted to gamble online again

# ***CHANGES IN PLAYSCAN RATING***

- 89% said their rating had stayed the same (presumably 'green' throughout).
- The remaining players reported they had gone from:
  - Green to yellow (5.6%)
  - Yellow to red (0.5%)
  - Green to red (0.2%)
  - Red to yellow (0.7%)
  - Yellow to green (5%)
  - Red to green (1.2%)
- Suggests overall, 11% of *PlayScan* users had been made aware of a change in their rating over time.

# ***PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF PLAYSCAN***

- Participants 'completely agreed'/'somewhat agreed' that *PlayScan* had helped users:
  - Feel better informed about their playing behaviour (63%)
  - Feel more confident that they could play moderately (66%)
  - Gain better control over their playing behaviour (41%)

## ***BEST FEATURES OF PLAYSCAN***

–254 participants responded to a ‘free response’ question:

- *Limit setting*: Option for players to set limits and help with budgeting (n=101);
- *Self-monitoring*: Option for players to keep track of their spending and general gambling behaviour through self-monitoring (n=91)
- *Protection of the vulnerable*: Can help protect those vulnerable players who may be experiencing problems (n=27);
- *Education and awareness*: Can generate improved awareness of play and educate gamblers about their own gambling habits from an independent and objective perspective (n=18).
- *Other issues* (n=17): (e.g., ease of use, value for money)

## ***WORST FEATURES OF PLAYSCAN***

- 136 participants responded to a ‘free response’ question.
- Most popular response (50%) that there was nothing negative about *PlayScan*.
- However, five specific areas were identified by a small minority of players including:
  - *Frustration with limit settings* (18%; n=24): Players voiced that it can be frustrating to have their play restricted whenever they reach their limits.
  - *Voluntary nature of the settings* (7%; n=10): Players also suggested that if this tool is voluntary, players who may benefit most (e.g., problem gamblers) may not activate the tool or may use it in an ineffective way (e.g., setting high limits).

- *Limit settings should not include winnings* (n=7): Among a few respondents, clear views that that limits should only focus on net expenditure rather than absolute expenditure.
- *Conflicts of interest* (n=4): Small minority expressed some cynicism regarding the intended purpose of *PlayScan* including a questioning of the role of marketing.
- *Need for better information* (n=5): A small minority called for more information regarding how the tool works, and the expected benefits.
- *Other issues* (n=17): Finally, a variety of other issues (e.g., privacy concerns, wanting more than three levels of play rating) were also raised although these received less support (less than three people per concern).

# ***DISCUSSION***

- Gender split (three times more males participating) not surprising.
- Gambling frequencies reported by players were generally higher than those found in national prevalence surveys, although very similar to other studies of online gambling.
- Such surveys report high frequency gamblers more likely to access mediums such as the Internet due to convenience, 24/7 accessibility, and good value for the gambler.

- Results of the survey taken as a whole reveal a 'hardcore' loyalty to *Svenska Spel* - 62% did not gamble online with anyone else but *Svenska Spel*.
- Suggests there is significant trust of *Svenska Spel* among its clientele and conforms previous qualitative research on Swedish online poker players who had high trust (*Wood & Griffiths, 2008*).
- Of the minority who had gambled on both the *Svenska Spel* website and on other websites elsewhere, players were almost six times more likely to say that *Svenska Spel* treated them better than other gaming companies

- Quarter of players (26%) had used *PlayScan*.
- Given *PlayScan* is voluntary rather than mandatory, hard to assess whether this is a healthy uptake by players or not (as there are no studies by which to make a similar comparison).
- Non-*PlayScan* users clearly viewed they didn't need it - confirmed by majority of open-ended qualitative responses.
- Some clearly had the view that initiatives such as this were really aimed at problem gamblers.
- All of the reasons given for using *PlayScan* (apart from curiosity value) are for the reasons that *Svenska Spel* introduced it in the first place (e.g., to ease concerns over playing too much, limit setting, understanding gambling behaviour, help with gambling if needed, etc.).

- Many features were seen as useful including spending limit setting, viewing their gambling profile, self-exclusion facilities, self-diagnostic gambling tests, information and support for gambling issues, and gambling profile predictions.
- These findings are very similar to those reported by the IGRU's (2007) study of almost 11,000 Internet gamblers
- Other research on player card use has reported similar findings of what responsible gaming features players like best such as access to financial statements highlighting wins and losses (*McDonnell-Phillips, 2005; Bernhard et al, 2006; Focal Research, 2007*).

- The seven-day exclusion period was the most useful with almost a half of *PlayScan* users (46%) endorsing this as their most favoured.
- May be especially useful for those who do not want to gamble for a particular period such as the week before a monthly 'pay day'.
- One-month and one-day self-exclusion periods were most popular for around half the *PlayScan* users (approx 25% each).
- These types of self-exclusion are more likely to be associated with non-problem gamblers who may want to restrict their gambling behaviour to a very specific instance
- For example, preceding a night of heavy drinking (e.g., 24-hour self-exclusion) or a particular time of the year like the run up to Christmas (e.g., one-month self-exclusion).

- These results suggest that for *PlayScan* users, self-exclusion is not a tool for problem gamblers but more generally a tool for responsible gambling.
- However, it was noted that only 17% of *PlayScan* users had actually used a self-exclusion feature so that they could save some money or because they thought they were gambling too much.
- Only a very tiny minority (0.5%) said they used it because they never wanted to gamble again.
- Although it cannot be proved from the data reported here, there is a high likelihood that these latter respondents were problem gamblers.

- In relation to 'traffic light' ratings of gambling behaviour, it would appear from self-reports that majority of respondents (9/10 *PlayScan* users) were in control of their gambling.
- They reported no change in their (presumably) 'green light' ratings.
- The remainder of the users showed relatively small fluctuations from both positive to negative ratings, and a tiny minority going from negative to positive ratings.
- Some *PlayScan* users' ratings clearly went up and down.
- Reflects findings in the literature that some players dip in and out of problem gambling over long periods of time and that problem gambling is not necessarily chronic or totally fixed (*Wardle et al, 2007*)

- *PlayScan* users showed relatively high endorsements of the benefits of *PlayScan* including:
  - Feeling better informed about behaviour
  - Feeling more confident that they can play moderately
  - Helping them to gain better control over their playing behaviour
- While this latter finding was not an overwhelming endorsement, it most likely reflects the fact that most feel in control of their behaviour anyway and do not necessarily need *PlayScan* to keep in control.

- Interestingly, findings revealed that *PlayScan* users were significantly more likely to be high frequency gamblers.
- This could be perceived as a positive finding as it is the higher frequency gamblers who are more likely to have need of *PlayScan*
- Findings also showed that *PlayScan* users were significantly more likely to be male than female.
- Given high frequency gamblers are more likely to use *PlayScan* and high frequency gamblers are more likely to be male, it's no surprise that *PlayScan* users are more likely to be male.
- However, some research suggests that female gamblers are more likely to access online guidance and help than males as evidenced by an evaluation of the *GamAid* website (*Wood & Griffiths, 2007*).
- The *IGRU (2007)* also reported that females in their sample more likely to endorse responsible gambling tools.

- Results indicated that there was no relationship between the length of time participants had been an online gambler on the *Svenska Spel* website and *PlayScan* activation.
- Such a finding suggests that the decision to activate *PlayScan* can occur at any time in a person's playing career and that promotion of *PlayScan* by *Svenska Spel* should not just be targeted at new clientele but should also be reinforced among those who have been playing a long time.
- Although such tools will not be helpful to everyone, and some severe problem gamblers will always find a way to gamble, these tools may be useful for at least some gamblers across the problem gambling spectrum

# ***LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS***

- The response rate of the online survey was relatively low at 24% although fairly typical for this type of research.
- Little way of finding out whether those who responded to the survey were representative of the whole target population.
- Of the people who did respond, only 24% had used *PlayScan*.
- Again, there is no way of knowing whether these *PlayScan* users were representative of all *PlayScan* users.
- The data in the online survey were self-report data and comes with all the known problems of self-report data.
- There is always the possibility that some players do not respond, exaggerate and/or tell lies.

- One initiative might be to hold regular focus groups to allow players a more open forum in which to raise issues.
- Another suggestion for future research may be to match the frequency playing data with players' reasons for not using *Playscan*.
- Would be interesting to collect data on individuals who perceive they do not need to use *Playscan* as there are data to suggest PGs do not necessarily perceive themselves as having a problem.

- Gaming companies need to acknowledge they will need to provide even **better social responsibility infrastructures** online than offline - some companies are starting to do this.
- Furthermore, there is also the issue of how Internet problem gamblers **can be helped**
- Recent research suggests that online problem gamblers appear to **prefer to seek help online**
- **Online help, guidance and treatment** may be a potential way forward to help those who may feel too stigmatised to seek traditional face-to-face help

# ***Online help: The key advantages***

(Griffiths, 2001; Griffiths, 2005; Griffiths & Cooper, 2003; Wood & Griffiths, 2007)

- Convenience
- Cost effectiveness
- Helps overcome social stigma
- Overcomes barriers that may prevent people from seeking face-to-face help
- Allows service providers to reach an exponential amount of people