

The WAGER, Vol. 21(10) - How do gamblers use a web-based responsible gambling tool?

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Although gambling is a very common activity, it also is associated with some serious risks. For some people, such risks can lead to [negative consequences](#) in various aspects of their personal and social lives. Responsible gambling tools might help protect gamblers from harm. This week, The WAGER reviews a [study](#) by David Forsstrom and his colleagues that examines how online gamblers use a new responsible gambling tool.

What is the research question?

How do gamblers use a web-based responsible gambling (RG) tool?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers analyzed the usage data from 9528 gamblers who used a voluntary responsible gambling tool called Playscan on the Swedish gambling website Svenska Spel. The goal of Playscan is to help gamblers avoid excessive gambling and its consequences. Playscan assesses the user's risk of gambling problematically by looking at their gambling frequency, spending, duration, budget discipline, and gambling self-assessment scores. It communicates those risk levels to gamblers and offers advice for recognizing problems and seeking help.

What did they find?

While the initial usage of Playscan was high, the researchers found that participants' engagement with the tool's overall functions decreased over time. For instance, 80% of subscribers began the self-assessment, but only 65% went on to complete it on the first try. Similarly, 90.9% of participants were initially sent help messages, but only 35% actually read them. Researches then used a [latent class analysis](#) to separate the sample into five specific classes defined by their Playscan use (see Figure).

Non-users	Those who did not use the tool.
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Self-testers	Those who visited to the gambling website infrequently, but made use of the self-assessment.
Multi-function users	Those who visited the gambling website often and used the self-assessment/advice functions.
Advice users	Those who visited the gambling website infrequently, but tended to click on advice messages.
Site visitors	Those who visited the gambling website often, but made little use of any Playscan features.

Figure. User groups based on the Latent Class Analysis researchers found that players in the “multi-function users” category had higher risk scores than those in the site visitors, advice users, and non-users categories.

Why do these findings matter?

RG tools like Playscan are put in place to help gamblers gamble in a responsible manner. These findings are important because they suggest that different people use responsible gambling tools differently. Research into these tools can help identify behavior patterns and the risk factors that arise during online gambling sessions. An RG tool should be useful and provide helpful information to anyone gambling, not just problem gamblers.

Every study has limitations. What about this one?

One major limitation in this study is the [self-selection bias](#). Participants who choose to use Playscan are the minority, and might be different from people who choose not use it. Therefore, it is unclear how well Playscan will work for the majority of gamblers. Another limitation can be found in the algorithms used to calculate problem gambling. Playscan pulls information from self-report and user data and then uses an algorithm to calculate a problem gambling report. The predictive algorithm only is as good as the information input, and faulty self-report data could affect its results.

For more information:

If you or a loved one has a problem with gambling please visit our first steps to change [here](#). To learn more about problem gambling and the different programs/help tools in place, please visit the National Council on Problem Gambling website [here](#).

— Alec Conte

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