

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF BUSINESS ACADEMIC LEADS GROUND BREAKING STUDY INTO AT-RISK GAMBLERS

A first-of-its-kind study has found that mixed emotional appeals in advertising make at-risk gamblers more likely to act on their desire to seek help. The ground-breaking study led by Dr Svetlana De Vos from the Australian Institute of Business, in collaboration with other researchers from the University of Adelaide, Monash University and Flinders University, has been undertaken in Australia and is leading the way in the Western world.

This is the first time that research has been conducted into the perceptions of at-risk gamblers who bet frequently (on a weekly basis) on video lottery terminals, slot machines, video poker machines, sports and animals. It has been found that, although medical help is available and necessary, problem gamblers are generally hesitant to seek help as they feel stigmatised within the community.

“While there is advertising that targets problem gamblers, it doesn’t mean it’s effective or driving these people to seek help,” explained Dr De Vos.

The study explored gamblers’ perceptions in seeking help by exposing the subjects to different types of emotional advertising.

“What we found was that women were more likely to respond to fear appeals that prompted them to seek help; however, negative emotion such as fear did not boost help-seeking intentions in men.

“Another interesting aspect is that, in comparison to appeals based on unipolar emotions, if participants were shown appeals eliciting mixed emotional responses (i.e. feeling both positive and negative emotions simultaneously, such as fear mixed with hope/challenge) they were significantly more likely to consider seeking professional help and to act on those intentions,” Dr De Vos continued.

The next step for Dr De Vos and her team is to uncover which other combination of mixed emotions will prompt the strongest response for these at-risk gamblers to seek help.

Dr De Vos’ research has been recognised nationally by the National Association for Gambling Studies and the South Australian branch of Relationships Australia focused on health promotion service. Internationally, it has been recognised by the Gambling Research Exchange in Ontario, Canada, who have featured her article in a series of research snapshots aimed at making informed decisions on gambling policies, standards and practices.

Dr De Vos has also presented her findings at a myriad of conferences across the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Spain and Australia. She hopes her studies will be used to help people who, before now, found it difficult to resonate with traditional advertising.

This study is significant for the success of social marketing attempts towards at-risk gamblers and their likelihood of seeking help, and Dr De Vos does not discount that this research may be applied in other compulsive and addictive consumption contexts including smoking.

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