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**Title** – Comparing the Twitter Posting of British Gambling Operators and Gambling Affiliates: A Summative Content Analysis

**Authors:**

**Mr Scott Houghton (Corresponding Author)**

Address: NB155, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST, UK.

Email: scott2.houghton@northumbria.ac.uk

Telephone Number: 0191 243 7030

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0165-122X

Biographical Note: Scott Houghton is a GambleAware funded PhD student studying at Northumbria University. His PhD studies are focussed upon the relationship between social media and gambling. More specifically, he is interested in furthering understanding on how social media is used in relation to gambling, the impact this has upon gambling attitudes and behaviours and whether social media can be used to effectively promote safer gambling.

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**Dr Andrew McNeil**

Address: NB119, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST, UK.

Email: andrew.mcneill@northumbria.ac.uk

Telephone Number: 0191 227 3023

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4717-2219

Biographical Note: Andrew McNeill is a lecturer in Psychology at Northumbria University. Previously he has worked on projects exploring the use of social media in transmission of information during pandemics as well as the design of social network systems for older adults.

Funding: Andrew has worked on an EU funded project (ACANTO; The project received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme - Societal Challenge 1 (DG CONNECT/H) under grant agreement No 643644) for the past three years.

**Mr Mitchell Hogg**

Address: NB155, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST, UK.

Email: mitchell.j.hogg@northumbria.ac.uk

Telephone Number: 0191 243 7030

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8362-5123

Biographical Note: Mitchell is a multidisciplinary health researcher with a key interest in the development of complex psycho-somatic interventions. He is due to being a PhD project investigating the use of a novel breathing strategy to subdue mood-related symptoms and autonomic complaints within postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS) patients.

Funding: He is due to receive funding from Northumbria University for his aforementioned PhD studies.

**Dr Mark Moss**

Address: Department of Psychology, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST, UK.

Email: mark.moss@northumbria.ac.uk

Telephone Number: 0191 2274345

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5994-2540

Biographical Note: Mark is head of the Department of Psychology at Northumbria University. He is responsible for the strategic direction of the Division and oversees staffing and budgeting for all programmes of study. Mark was a founding member of the Human Cognitive Neuroscience Unit (now the Brain Performance and Nutrition Research Centre) at Northumbria University. His main research interests relate to the modulation of cognitive function and mood through natural interventions, with a current focus on phyto-aromatics.

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**Conflict of Interest:** In accordance with Taylor & Francis policy and my ethical obligation as a researcher, I am reporting that I receive funding from GambleAware to carry out my PhD studies, a company that may be affected by the research reported in the enclosed paper. I have disclosed those interests fully to Taylor & Francis, and I have in place an approved plan for managing any potential conflicts arising from that involvement.

**Ethical approval:** The study has received ethical approval from the ethics committee at Northumbria University. This article does not contain any studies with human or animal participants performed by any of the authors.

**Comparing the Twitter Posting of British Gambling Operators and Gambling Affiliates: A Summative Content Analysis**

**Abstract**

The current study aimed to assess the type of content posted on Twitter by British gambling operators and gambling affiliates**; third-party firms who are financially incentivised to attract custom to gambling operators.** **Five thousand and twenty nine** tweets from 5 gambling operators and 8,315 tweets from 5 gambling affiliates were collected over a 2 week period. A summative content analysis was carried out whereby each tweet was coded for its main content. Tweets were grouped together into content categories and the percentage of tweets in each content category was calculated for both operators and affiliates. The 9 categories of content **found** were; direct advertising, betting assistance, sports content, customer engagement, humour, update of current bet status, promotional content, safer gambling and ‘other’. Gambling operators had a higher proportion of posts in the sports content and humorous content categories, whilst affiliates had a higher proportion of posts within the direct advertising and betting assistance categories. These findings suggest that the affiliates were more direct in their posting style whereas operators followed a more indirect approach, reflective of a branding strategy. Future research should address how interacting with different types of gambling content on social media impacts upon gambling attitudes and behaviour.

**Keywords** Gambling, Social Media, Marketing, Gambling Affiliates, Advertising

**Introduction**

The online gambling industry in Great Britain is now the largest gambling sector in the country, accounting for 35% (£4.9 billion) of gambling operator’s Gross Gambling Yield (GGY) from October 2016 to September 2017 (Gambling Commission, 2018b). The nature of the online environment has expanded the opportunities for an individual to participate in a range of gambling activities through numerous platforms, whilst also removing many of the social responsibility cues present in an offline gambling environment (Griffiths & Barnes, 2008). In addition, the online environment has also grown the opportunities for gambling operators to both advertise their product and engage with customers (Parke, Harris, Parke, Rigbye, & Blaszczynski, 2015). The rapid evolution of this technological landscape has coincided with increased online participation across all gambling activities (Gambling Commission, 2018a), highlighting the need for research to further understanding on how such technological advancements have impacted gambling behaviour.

One possible explanation for the increasing participation in online gambling could be the combination of the mobile nature of online gambling and the sheer scale of gambling marketing across many forms of media. Ofcom (2013) reported a near 500% increase in gambling advertisements on British television from 237,000 in 2007 to 1.39 million in 2013, following the commencement of the 2005 Gambling Act. The gambling industry spend on British television advertising between 2012 and 2015 was calculated at £456 million, with an annual increase in spending of 46% (Davies, 2016). A recent content analysis of sports betting advertisements highlighted that over 90% of adverts contained a character engaging in mobile betting through the use of a smartphone, demonstrating how gambling operators choose to highlight the mobile nature of sports betting within their advertisements (Lopez-Gonzalez, Guerrero-Solé, & Griffiths, 2017). In addition, gambling companies have expanded their advertising reach through sponsorship deals with highly visible sports teams. Bunn et al. (2018) reported that 50% of English Premier League football clubs carried a gambling industry shirt sponsorship in the 2016/2017 season, whilst all 20 teams had at least one official betting partner (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths, 2017). Whilst it is methodologically challenging to quantitatively measure the impact of such marketing strategies upon gambling behaviour (Binde, 2014), this does highlight the importance of investigating such marketing and advertising strategies due to the potential reach that they have.

***Gambling and social media***

One recently emerging marketing strategy employed by companies is the use of social media to both advertise their product and build brand awareness (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair, & Okumus, 2015; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). A recent review of social media in marketing by Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi and Algharabat (2017) emphasised how firms use social media to both attract new customers, through electronic word of mouth, and to enhance the brand experience of their existing customers, through customer relationship management. In addition, evidence suggests that individuals who interact with brands using social media demonstrate a number of positive marketing outcomes, such as a stronger brand relationship quality (Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016). Whilst such research has not been carried out specifically in a gambling context, it is evident that there is an abundance of gambling content on social media, with 1 in 20 of the UK’s fifteen million regular Twitter users following an account dedicated to posting gambling content (Miller, Krasodomski-Jones, & Smith, 2016). Additionally, over 1 in 4 regular online gamblers in Great Britain follow a gambling company on social media (Gambling Commission, 2018a). This rate is markedly higher in the younger age categories (Gambling Commission, 2018a), suggesting a potential generational effect whereby those who are younger are more likely to use social media to keep in touch with gambling news or products. Given that those in the younger age categories are more likely to report being influenced by gambling advertisements (Hanss, Mentzoni, Griffiths, & Pallesen, 2015) and have a higher incidence of problematic gambling behaviour (Gambling Commission, 2018a), there is a clear need for research which assesses how British gambling operators use their social media accounts and what type of messages are conveyed within their social media marketing.

Gainsbury, King, Hing and Delfabbro (2015) carried out a series of interviews with Australian gambling operators and reported that operators did not primarily view social media as a way increasing revenue or increasing gambling participation. Instead, it was claimed that social media acted as a platform through which they could both attract new customers and retain existing customers. However, it might be argued that these latter reasons are closely linked to the former. A follow-up content analysis of 101 Australian gambling operator’s social media accounts revealed the multifaceted nature of gambling operator’s posting on social media (Gainsbury, Delfabbro, King, & Hing, 2016). Posts made covered a range of different topics, such as: information about the operator, special offers and bets, gambling tips, gambling wins and sports news. However, further analysis revealed a number of latent messages conveyed through the content of operator’s social media posting, including: raising awareness of gambling products, increasing brand engagement, aligning gambling with sport, emphasising winning, encouraging betting and limited warning messages. In addition, it has also been highlighted that Australian gambling operators use a wide array of marketing strategies across social media and that some of these strategies, such as humorous videos and match commentary, may not be clearly recognised as promotions by consumers (Thomas et al., 2015). These potentially worrying findings within the international market further emphasizes the need to investigate how social media is used by British gambling operators.

***Gambling affiliation on social media***

There has been little attention given to the role of gambling affiliates in the marketing of gambling on social media. Gambling affiliation works upon the premise that third-party firms are financially incentivised to attract new custom to a gambling operator, either through a one off payment for getting a new customer to sign up or a percentage of the revenue that customer provides the company with (Lopez-Gonzalez & Tulloch, 2015). **On social media, gambling affiliate accounts are presented as accounts where individuals can receive sports news, special gambling offers or tips on suggested bets. However, gambling affiliates also post direct links to place specific bets or to sign-up to specific bookmakers. If an individual chooses to follow that link and spends money with that gambling operator, the affiliate is financially rewarded. Therefore, whilst gambling operators are the companies with whom an individual partakes in a gambling activity, an affiliate is a company who actively looks to bring customers to a gambling operator.** Miller et al (2016) demonstrated that there were over twice the number of affiliate accounts compared to gambling operators on Twitter and the largest community of gamblers on Twitter generally followed affiliates and tipsters as opposed to bookmakers. Whilst the industry code for responsible gambling states that gambling operators are held responsible for any marketing made on their behalf by affiliates (Industry Group for Responsible Advertising, 2018), there are still concerns about how posts by affiliates on social media may be perceived by consumers due to the positioning of such accounts. Affiliate accounts on social media are often presented as betting communities or tipping accounts (Savage, 2018) and there are questions as to whether gamblers actually recognise that such accounts profit from trafficking customers to the bookmakers. Therefore, it is also pivotal for research to assess the content placed on social media by the gambling affiliates in order to gain a more complete understanding of the range of gambling content on social media.

***Aims of current study***

The current study aims to address the aforementioned gaps in the research literature by assessing what type of content is posted on social media by British gambling operators and gambling affiliates. Additionally, it will also be assessed whether the frequency of each type of content differs between operators and affiliates. This will build upon the work of Gainsbury et al. (2016) by quantifying the different types of content posted by gambling operators and affiliates, allowing for inferences to be made on differences in social media strategies between operators and affiliates. **This is particularly important to investigate given the uncertainty surrounding consumers’ ability to recognise affiliates on social media as marketing. Finally, the current study aims to provide an understanding of the marketing strategies encountered on social media by gamblers. Findings will be discussed in relation to psychological literature and used to advise upon current British policy, with the purpose of ensuring gambling is marketed in a way which allows for recreational enjoyment whilst protecting those who are vulnerable.**

**Method**

***Sampling procedure***

In order to assess which social media platforms were most commonly used by British gambling operators, an initial audit of gambling operators’ social media accounts was undertaken. This revealed that Twitter was the only social media platform used across all operators, therefore Twitter was chosen as the social media platform to investigate within the study. Aiming to assess the social media accounts with the highest potential reach, it was decided that the study would investigate the 5 most followed British gambling operators and 5 most followed gambling affiliates. Researchers manually checked the Twitter accounts of **the top 40 grossing British gambling operators** to highlight which operators had the highest number of followers. **Out of the 40 operators included in the audit, 33 had a twitter account, with the number of followers to those accounts ranging from 189 to 652,136. Within the 5 selected operators, the number of followers ranged from 204,639 to 652,136.**

**Unfortunately, a similar auditing strategy was not possible for gambling affiliates as there is no such publically available information on the highest grossing affiliates. Therefore,** **a** manual search of the ‘people’ section of Twitter was used to establish the 5 most followed gambling affiliates on Twitter using the following terms: ‘tips’, ‘accumulator’, ‘acca’, ‘bets’ and ‘betting’. **Each search term was entered individually and the accounts returned from the search were inspected to** **assess whether they were active gambling affiliate accounts**. **In order to be identified as an active affiliate account, the account had to post direct links to either sign up to a gambling operator or to place a specific bet with a gambling operator. They also had to have posted at least once within the previous week.** In addition, the ‘you may also like’ section was followed from each identified affiliate Twitter account as a further strategy to locate affiliate accounts. **Within the 5 chosen affiliate accounts with the most Twitter followers, the number of followers ranged from** **194,858 to 583,153.**

NCapture (QSR International, 2018) was used to download Tweets from each of the 10 accounts over a 14 day period – Thursday 14th June 2018 to Wednesday 27th June 2018. This 2 week period was chosen due to numerous sporting events taking place during this time, notably the first 2 weeks of the 2018 FIFA World Cup and the Royal Ascot race meeting. The study obtained ethical approval from the Northumbria University ethics committee. The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Mendeley Data at <http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/rhdjw852x4.1>.

***Analysis procedure***

A summative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used to quantify the number of Tweets made for a range of different reasons. **The first 100 Tweets from each Twitter account were coded based upon the purpose of the tweet.** From this, an initial coding scheme was developed and applied to the remaining data set. **Codes were the grouped into 9 main content categories** A second researcher then **applied the final coding scheme** just over 10% of the data (1,400 tweets) and Cohen’s k was run to in order to provide a check of inter-rater agreement. This demonstrated substantial agreement between researchers, k = .668 (95% CI, .641 to .695), p < .001. **The proportions of operators’ and affiliates’ posts** were then calculated for each of the 9 categories. A Chi-Squared Test of Independence was then carried out to assess whether the proportion of posts belonging to different categories significantly differed between operators and affiliates. Inspection of standardised residuals allowed the researcher to assess differences in the frequency of posts in each different content category between operators and affiliates.

**Results**

**Sample Characteristics**

**The 5 gambling operators included within the sample were: PaddyPower, Bet365, SkyBet, Coral and William Hill. All 5 operators provide an online gambling service, whilst PaddyPower, Coral and William Hill also offer land-based gambling services. Each of the gambling operators included within the sample offer a range of gambling services, including: sports betting, poker, casino games, live casino, bingo and virtual gambling. However, the Twitter accounts for each of the operators were focused almost exclusively on sports betting, with operators holding separate Twitter accounts, with far fewer followers, for their other gambling services. The operators will therefore be discussed and evaluated as sports-betting operators from this point onwards.**

**The 5 gambling affiliate accounts within the sample were: Footy Accumulators, Live Football, Football Super Tips, My Racing Tips and The Winners Enclosure. Upon further inspection, it was found that Footy Accumulators and The Winners Enclosure were owned and operated by a company called Checkd Media. Football Super Tips and My Racing Tips are accounts owned and operated by Apsley Group International. However, it is not clear as to who owns and runs the LiveFootball Twitter account as there is no such information available on their Twitter account or their website. The accounts were presented as either being betting communities, tipping accounts or accounts dedicated to posting football news and gossip.**

To demonstrate the reach of the social media content of each account, the number of followers, the number of posts (per day) and the number of retweets per post were assessed. As demonstrated in table 1, there were around 5% more followers for the operator Twitter accounts (1,949,316) compared to the affiliate accounts (1,866,358). However, the gambling affiliates posted around 40% more Tweets per day (593.93) than the gambling operators (361.56). Due to a lack of normal distribution within the number of retweets per post, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted and revealed that the gambling operators achieved significantly more retweets per post (Mdn = 2) than the gambling affiliates (Mdn = 0), U = 13048895, z = -40.53, p<0.0001, r = -0.35. So, whilst gambling affiliates tended to post more often than the gambling operators, their posts were not as widely shared as the posts from the operators.

**Table 1** Number of followers, number of posts during the two week data collection period and the mean number of retweets per post for each **sports betting** operator and gambling affiliate Twitter account.

[Table 1 near here]

***Content of posting***

A total of 9 categories of content posting were identified across the data set (Table 2). A Chi squared test of independence revealed that there was a significant association between account type and the categories of posted content, χ2 (4) = 3433.21, p < 0.001. Inspection of standardized residuals showed that there was a significant difference in the frequencies of each content category between gambling operators and gambling affiliates, p < 0.001 in each case.

**Table 2** Number of Tweets made within each content category by **sports betting** operators and gambling affiliates. Percentages refer to the percentage of operators’ or affiliates’ Tweets within each content category. Z-scores represent standardized residuals.

[Table 2 near here]

In order to demonstrate a clearer view of these findings, a description of each content category has been provided below.

***Direct advertising***

**The percentage of Tweets across the data set classified as direct advertising was 29.76%.** Posts made for the purpose of direct advertising were common for both the operators and affiliates, albeit significantly more common for the affiliates. For the operators, direct advertising posts were largely made up of posting their own gambling odds for a specific sporting event, with a direct link to the market on their own website. For example, Coral tweeted: “*Fancy Diego Costa to get frustrated by Iran? Costa to get carded - 9/2 [LINK]!*” (20/06/2018). Additionally, operators also regularly posted special offers whereby followers are incentivised to wager on certain events. Examples of such incentives include: Early pay out or money back on bets where certain criteria are met, best odds guarantees and accumulator bonuses. There were also some examples of free bets offers, whereby free bets were offered for wagering a certain amount of money or logging into a gambling application on a mobile phone. Alternatively, direct advertising from the affiliates was mainly in the form of sign-up offers. Followers were given incentives to sign-up to specific bookmakers based around either vastly enhanced odds for new customers on a specific bet, which was usually paid in free bet tokens, or for free bets rewarded when a first bet of a specific value is placed – such as the following post by Footy Accumulators: “*Yet to give William Hill a try? Bet £10 and get £30 in FREE bets when you join HERE [LINK]*” (20/06/2018).

***Betting assistance***

**The percentage of Tweets across the data set classified as betting assistance was 20.16%.** Unsurprisingly, given the positioning of the affiliate twitter accounts as ‘tipping pages’, the affiliate accounts regularly posted content which aimed to assist in betting by giving tips to specific bets. Tips given ranged from low odds singles to high odds accumulators and permutation bets. They were mostly given before the event had started, however there were also examples of in-play tips being given. Tips were also commonly given alongside a link to place the bet directly with a specific bookmaker. An example Tweet from The Winning Enclosure reads: “*TODAYS SKY BETS 40/1 RAB boost to betslips [DIRECT LINK TO BET] 34/1 Place acca to betslips [DIRECT LINK TO BET]*” (19/06/2018). Whilst tips were not as commonly given by operators, they were more likely to be given from an associated celebrity or sports personality. For example, SkyBet tweeted: “*@NewburyRacing is the venue for @skysportsAlexH's Daily Double. 2.55 - Sea Of Class. 4.00 - Mountain Peak. Currently available at 8/1*” (14/06/2018). In addition, operators also gave match previews and links to statistics databases in order to assist bettors with choosing their bets.

***Sports content***

**The proportion of Tweets across the data set classified as sports content was 22.98%.** **It was the most common type of content posted by sports-betting operators and consisted of**: sports news, match commentary, sports reviews, quotes from sportsmen and sport statistics. To illustrate this, Bet365 tweeted: “*BREAKING: The WBA orders Anthony Joshua to sign a deal for a mandatory title defence against Alexander Povetkin within 24 hours*” (26/06/2018). Similar topics were discussed by gambling affiliates, however not as commonly.

***Customer engagement***

**The proportion of Tweets across the data set classified as customer engagement was 11.20%.** Both operators and affiliates regularly posted content which encouraged engagement from their followers. For example, they would post questions which would encourage replies or an answer through a poll. Additionally, they would encourage followers to like or retweet certain content and the affiliates would often incentivize this by stating they would message those who retweeted the content with their daily tips. Examples of customer engagement include SkyBet tweeting: “*What's been the best goal of the World Cup so far*”? (27/06/2018) and My Racing Tips posting “*POLL: #RoyalAscot is about to start!!! Who do you think will be crowned top trainer*”? (19/06/2018).

***Humour***

**The proportion of Tweets across the data set classified as humour was 9.33%.** There was a clear focus by the gambling operators to incorporate humour into their social media content. Posts were made which employed a humorous tone when discussing sport or other relevant current events. An example of this from Paddy Power reads: “*GOALLL!!! Lovely penalty from... some lad from #TUN, and just like Harry Maguire's head, it's all-square*” (18/06/2018). Gambling affiliates also showed a similar strategy, albeit less commonly.

***Update of bet status***

**The proportion of Tweets across the data set classified as updates on bet status was 3.83%.** Affiliates also used social media to update their followers on the progress of selective bets which they had tipped. Whilst this was mostly focussed upon bets which had either won or were getting closer to winning, there were occasions where losing tips were commented upon. For example, My Racing Tips tweeted: “*MAKE THAT 3/3 ON THE EVENING LUCKY 15!!! ARTISTIC MELODY WINS AT 4/1!!! COME ON!!!*” (22/06/2018). Operators also occasionally updated on bet statuses by demonstrating examples of high odds accumulators which would have won on certain football games or by stating how many of their customers successfully backed a high odds bet, such as William Hill posting: “*We have a huge #YourOdds winner. One lucky punter had £30 on this, returning £6930*” (24/06/2018).

***Promotional content***

**The proportion of Tweets across the data set classified as promotional content was 1.81%.** Another social media strategy of the gambling operators was to post promotional content with specific hashtags in order to increase operator visibility on the platform.For example, operators would gather popular sportspeople and celebrities to discuss sporting events live in a specific locationalongside the use a hashtag such as ‘*#TheKickOff*’ or ‘*#PaddysBoatParty*’. In addition, there was also examples of promotional content where free bets could be won. Alternatively, promotional content for the affiliates came in the form of self-promotion to alternative social media platforms or cross promotion to another affiliate’s social media account which was primarily focussed on a different sport, such as My Racing Tips posting: “*IN PLAY ALERT @FootySuperTips have posted their #WorldCup IN PLAY PREDICTION for #ENGvTUN Download their app to get it HERE*” (18/06/2018).

***Safer gambling***

**The proportion of Tweets across the data set classified as safer gambling was 0.78%.** There were a few examples of tweets posted solely to emphasise the importance of ‘safer gambling’by the operators. All operators posted at least one tweet on safer gambling over the two-week period, however some operators made a more conscious effort to post on safer gambling than others. Only 1 affiliate made posts primarily related to safer gambling. Nearly all safer gambling messages made were informational in nature, with a few limited examples of self-appraisal messages. An example of a safer gambling messages posted by SkyBet was: “*Never put betting before family & friends. Remember, #WhenTheFunStopsStop*” (20/06/2018).

***Other***

**The proportion of Tweets across the data set classified as other was 0.37%.** There were a few examples of other types of content which did not fit with the 8 main categories discovered. Examples of content which was placed in this category are posts discussing good causes, commentary on news stories, music lyrics and celebrity news.

**Discussion**

***Summary of findings***

The current study aimed to assess the type of content posted on social media by gambling operators and affiliates. In total, 9 categories of content were discovered: ‘direct advertising’, ‘betting assistance’, ‘sports content’, ‘customer engagement’, ‘humour’, ‘update of current bet status’, ‘promotional content’, ‘safer gambling’ and ‘other’. Additionally, the study also aimed to assess any difference in the frequency of posting within each content category. In doing so, it was highlighted that gambling affiliates were more aggressive in their use of social media for direct advertising, with just under two thirds of their posts falling into the ‘direct advertising’ or ‘betting assistance’ categories. Alternatively, gambling operators tended to take a clearer branding approach, with a higher percentage of their content falling into the ‘sport content’ and ‘humour’ categories. **Other key findings of interest included that there was very little attention given to safer gambling and that there were no age restrictions placed upon access to affiliate accounts.**

***Contribution to existing literature***

The type of content highlighted within the current study largely fits in line with research into Australian gambling operators’ use of social media (Gainsbury et al., 2016). In particular, all 9 of content categories discovered within the current study were also identified as being present within the aforementioned Australian study. **Whilst there may be some overlap between operators included within the two samples, it is important to note the Gainsbury et al. (2016) study included Australian-facing social media accounts, whereas the current study used the operators’ main Twitter account.** The current study therefore expands the findings of Gainsbury et al. (2016) by emphasising that British gambling operators employ similar social media strategies to Australian operators and by demonstrating that gambling affiliates also post similar types of content. Additionally, the current findings also provide further weight to the growing evidence base of the integrative relationship between gambling and sport, often coined the ‘gamblification of sport’ or the ‘sportification of gambling’ (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths, 2017; McMullan & Miller, 2008; Thomas, Lewis, Duong, & Mcleod, 2012). Just under a quarter of total posts by operators and affiliates were made purely to discuss or provide updates upon sport. This highlights the fact that relationship between gambling and sport is reciprocal, whereby gambling is not only prevalent within sporting environments (Lopez-Gonzalez, Estévez, & Griffiths, 2017) but sport is also widely discussed within gambling environments. Such processes have raised concern about the potential exposure to gambling products for at risk populations (Derevensky & Gilbeau, 2015; Li, Langham, Browne, Rockloff, & Thorne, 2018) and the current study exemplifies how this risk is also present upon social networking sites.

To the author’s knowledge, the current study also entailed the first attempt to quantify the type of content posted by gambling operators on social media. It was found that over half of the content posted by gambling operators was dedicated to sports or humour, whilst just under one fifth of posts contained direct advertising. This more considered, indirect approach to social media usage somewhat mirrors the view put forward by Australian gambling operators that social media is seen as a platform by which to engage with customers and promote brand engagement (Gainsbury et al., 2015). Research has demonstrated that in order to maximise engagement with social media content, the content should be related to the brand’s personality (Lee, Hosanagar, & Nair, 2018). Therefore, by implementing a social media strategy which is highly inclusive of sport and humour, gambling operators can not only further the integration of sports and gambling but also create a clear brand personality which encourages engagement with their content. This may explain why gambling operators average significantly more retweets upon their posts compared to gambling affiliates despite posting proportionally less content which directly encourages customer engagement – as gambling operators post significantly more content related to their brand personality.

Contrastingly, gambling affiliates were far more direct in their use of social media. Just under two thirds of the posts made by gambling affiliates on Twitter were either direct advertisements or posts made to assist betting choices. This finding was not a particularly surprising one, given that affiliate accounts are often presented as betting communities or tipping pages (Savage, 2018). However, the sheer number of tips and special offers presented on these accounts in comparison to the gambling operators highlights a far more aggressive marketing strategy employed by the gambling affiliates. A potential concern as relates to this is the fact that only 1 of the 5 affiliate accounts posted any tweets related to safer gambling and none of the accounts had age screening set up for their followers. This means that the affiliate accounts could have individuals under the legal age to gamble following them on Twitter where they are actively posting highly attractive gambling offers and tips. This is particularly worrying given adolescents are recognised as a vulnerable population who at an increased risk of developing gambling problems (Derevensky & Gilbeau, 2015). Additionally, gambling affiliates were more likely than gambling operators to post updates on the status of current bets and these updates mostly focussed on bets which had won or were close to winning. This may create unrealistic expectations among vulnerable followers on the likelihood of making money from gambling, due to an availability heuristic whereby instances of winning are more easily recalled than examples of losing bets (Fortune & Goodie, 2012). **Regulators of affiliate marketing should therefore be aware of the addressed concerns and consider whether affiliates should be required to track the success of all suggested bets in order to allow consumers to get a more accurate idea on how successful affiliates are in tipping winning bets.**

***Evaluation of current study***

One issue encountered within the current study was that some of the Tweets, particularly by the gambling affiliates, were multiple purpose tweet where it was difficult to decide upon the definitive main purpose of the tweet. In order to counter this problem, the researcher developed an initial coding scheme based off of the 100 tweets from each of the 10 accounts and applied this coding scheme to the rest of the data. A second researcher was also asked to code over 10% of the data and checks of agreement showed substantial agreement between researchers, suggesting that the developed coding scheme was effective in classifying the data. A limitation of the current study was that the NCapture software (QSR International, 2018) uses the Twitter streaming API to retrieve the data, therefore it does not get all of the tweets which would be available to see on a browser. Additionally, it also does not collect certain measures of engagements, such as ‘likes’ or number of comments. However, there did not appear to be a systematic bias in the types of tweets not collected. **Additionally, the research initially set out to focus upon the use of Twitter by gambling operators. However, due to the sampling method employed, the study focused solely upon sports-betting operators. Whilst this is indicative of the social media environment for gambling, whereby sports-betting operators have a larger following, it does leave a gap in the literature as to how British gambling operators of other activities market their company on social media**

One major strength of the current study is the fact that it was able to successfully collect information on the frequency of posting certain types of content. For example, it was identified that only 1.62% of gambling operators posts were dedicated to promoting safer gambling and this figure was even smaller for the gambling affiliates at 0.26%. By collecting data on the frequency of posting different types of content, the social media strategies of both gambling operators and gambling affiliates have become clearer.

***Future directions***

**The current research draws attention to the online environment in which gambling behaviour occurs, highlighting the social media strategies employed by sports-betting operators and affiliates. Future research would benefit from assessing the understanding gamblers have of such an environment.** The findings of the current study have highlighted numerous areas for further study. One such idea is to analyse the current data set in a more in-depth, qualitative, manner to explore the messages conveyed around gambling by operators and the affiliates. Whilst the current study has successfully explored the types of content posted by operators and affiliates on social media, there is also a need to understand the type of language used to discuss gambling and the underlying messages this conveys. In particular, there is a need to analyse the language used to present special offers, tips and updates upon current bets due to the potential for this type of content to present gambling in a very attractive manner.

Another area which requires further study is looking at how interacting with gambling content on social media impacts upon gambling attitudes, intentions and behaviour. This may be particularly relevant to look at within at-risk populations, given that at-risk gamblers and problem gamblers report increased levels of gambling and gambling problems as a result of social media promotions (Gainsbury et al., 2016). Through interviewing at-risk gamblers, a clearer understanding will be formed on how social media is used by gamblers and what role it plays within a gambler’s life relevant to other gambling influences. Further research is also needed into the understanding of gambling affiliation amongst gamblers. It is unclear as to whether gamblers understand that such ‘tipping’ accounts on social media are affiliated with the bookmakers and make money from directing their custom to a gambling operator. This may therefore have major impacts on how trustworthy affiliates are viewed to be by gamblers which may be directly impacting upon gambling behaviour.

***Conclusions***

The aim of the current study was to assess the type of content posted by British gambling operators and gambling affiliates on social media. Findings supported international research (Gainsbury et al., 2016) regarding the type of content posted however was able to build upon this research by quantifying the proportions of posting within each content category for both operators and affiliates. It was found that gambling operators’ use of social media marketing took a more calculated indirect approach, focussing content on humour and sport to build brand awareness. Alternatively, gambling affiliates were far more direct in their use of social media with the majority of their social media content focussed on direct advertising or giving tips for suggested bets. References to safer gambling were sparse for operators and even more so for affiliates. Future research should aim to assess the impact of social media advertising upon at-risk populations and further focus should be given to the underlying messages portrayed through gambling content on social media.

**Compliance with Ethical Standards:**

The study obtained ethical approval from the Northumbria University ethics committee. This article does not contain any studies with human or animal participants performed by any of the authors.

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