

Press release

The Behavioural Insights Team releases further research into improving deposit limit tools for online gambling

Innovation in safer gambling tools has not kept pace with other areas of product development — the Behavioural insights team has today published further work on the behavioural factors that influence uptake and engagement. These findings come at a time when the UK Government is undertaking a major review of Gambling Legislation

LONDON, 22ND JULY 2021 - The Behavioural Insights Team has today published a second randomised control trial examining deposit limit tools, this time exploring adding ‘commitment devices’. A commitment device is a voluntary arrangement, designed to dissuade people from breaking their intentions.

The commitment devices trialled made no statistically significant difference to the amounts then deposited by gambling customers, but the intervention appeared to reduce the number of customers that chose to set a deposit limit. This work follows a randomised control trial that found that by removing industry-set options for deposit limits, online gamblers reduce the amount they set for themselves by up to 46%.¹

This was the second of two major trials funded by GambleAware, an independent national charity commissioning treatment, research, and education in gambling, set out to determine whether the current design of deposit limits influences gambling behaviour. The objective of the trials was to produce evidence around specific ways that deposit limits should be applied so that they can better protect people from gambling harm.

Deposit limit tools cap the amount of money customers are able to deposit each day, week, or month, into their online gambling account and are offered by all licensed remote gambling companies in Britain. Insights from behavioural science suggest that the way deposit limit tools are typically presented could influence the limits people set for themselves.

The second of the two trials, published today, involved 861 online gambling customers, participants were asked to set deposit limits either using the ‘business as usual’² options, or following one of two new methods:

¹ <https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Remote-Interventions-gambling-anchoring-report-Final-Jan-15th-2021.pdf>

² Deposit limit selected from predetermined drop-down list. No reminder messages sent.

1. 'Self-persuasion' method, which asked participants to share advice for another person setting a deposit limit,
2. 'Personal commitment' method, which requested participants share their own reasons for setting a deposit limit.

Customers in these two groups then received SMS reminders of their advice and rationale. Two primary outcome measures were assessed:

1. The amounts deposited by customers in each group after setting a limit, and,
2. The proportion of customers opting to set a limit in each group.

For the first primary outcome, there was no strong evidence of difference that either treatment had an effect on amounts deposited. For the second primary outcome, analysis indicated that significantly fewer customers opted to set deposit limits in each of the two intervention arms. This indicates that the intervention had an apparent 'backfire' effect within the context of this trial, possibly because the trial added frictions (e.g. psychological barriers) to the process of setting a deposit limit. For example, customers in the treatment arms were presented with additional information to read, and choices to make. This is a useful finding for gambling research.

Findings across the two trials emphasises that innovation in safer gambling tools has not kept pace with other areas of product development. The research recommends that the regulator calls on the industry to show demonstrable development in their safer gambling tool designs. This could be done by challenging operators to show growth in the uptake or use of these tools year on year. There may also be opportunities to reposition deposit limits, so that they sound less restrictive (e.g. towards language like 'safety net'). Robust research is necessary to ensure that developments are meaningful in helping customers to gamble in a safer way.

Rosanna Barry, Principal Advisor, Consumer Markets and Business team, from the Behavioural Insights Team said: *"This report is the latest instalment in a huge amount of detailed safer gambling research by the team at BIT. Deposit limit tools have the potential to deliver benefits to those who gamble and to society as a whole, without constraining customer choice, but innovation and development has been lacking. Our work has shown just some of the ways that behavioural research could be used to refine these tools and their function."*

The report is available to download [here](#).

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About the research

- The research team ran a trial inviting 23,592 existing bet365 customers to set deposit limits, with 861 (3.6%) customers of those invited doing so.
- The research was a Randomised Control Trial conducted by the Behavioural Insights Team.
- Recruitment for the project took place between August and September 2020.
- Customers were randomised into one of three trial groups:

- Control/BAU, who were not prompted to attach a message to their deposit limit and received no reminders.
- Self-persuasion, who were prompted to include a message of advice to another player setting a deposit limit and received reminders of this.
- Personal commitment, who were prompted to choose from a list or write their own reason for setting a deposit limit and received reminders of this.

About the Behavioural Insights Team

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) is one of the world's leading behavioural science organisations, working around the world to improve people's lives.

Through its teams in the UK, US, Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand and Singapore BIT works in partnership with governments, local authorities, businesses and NGOs in over 30 countries, often using simple changes to tackle major policy problems and deliver improved public services and social outcomes.

BIT was established by the UK government in 2010 and in 2014 became an independent social purpose company, owned by the Cabinet Office, innovation charity Nesta, and BIT employees.

For more information on our work and our team visit www.bi.team and follow us on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Medium](#).

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