Emotional Advertising to Attenuate Compulsive Consumption: Qualitative Insights from Gamblers

Svetlana De Vos, Roberta Crouch and Jasmina Ilicic

Abstract Compulsive consumption behaviours such as smoking, drinking, and gambling are serious public health concerns that impact consumers globally. Research examining emotional advertising appeals that specifically induce help-seeking in the problem gambling context remains limited. A qualitative study through the use of focus groups was conducted to inductively explore gamblers' perceptions of effective health messages, investigating how, why, and which emotional advertising appeals would best impact on their decision to seek help. Participants proposed that positive, negative, and mixed emotional appeals can be utilised to most effectively communicate with gamblers. In addition, response efficacy (the extent people believe a recommended response effectively deters or alleviates a health threat), self-accountability (an assessment of the degree to which oneself is responsible for the situation), and perceived benefits (beliefs about the positive outcomes associated with help-seeking behaviour) are also highlighted as important message elements. This study should serve as a starting point to develop effective health messages in compulsive consumption contexts, including gambling.

Keywords Emotional appeals · Gambling · Self-accountability · Response efficacy · Perceived benefits · Help-seeking

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Introduction

The negative impact of critical public health issues on individuals and societies challenges social marketing and public health professionals for novel communication strategies to address these concerns. Problem gambling has emerged as a serious public health issue (Adams et al. 2009). Some scholars argue that the liberalisation of the gaming industry from a welfare economic perspective (Fong et al. 2011; Livingstone and Adams 2011) together with the widespread use of the Internet for gambling, contributes to the global rise of problem gambling among young individuals and adults (King et al. 2010; Kairouz et al. 2012).

A common feature among these seemingly different public health concerns (e.g. gambling, smoking, alcohol abuse) is their compulsive nature. As such, afflicted consumers have an overriding, uncontrollable, chronic, and repetitive craving to consume the product/service (Hirschman 1992). Hodgins and El-Guebaly (2000) maintain that compulsive consumption problems (e.g. problem gambling) are best addressed through specialised services, such as psychological counseling and medical support. Therefore, it is essential for health messages to induce help-seeking attitudes and behaviours among afflicted consumers.

Relative to other compulsive consumption contexts, such as smoking or alcohol drinking, less is known about effective communication strategies to encourage help-seeking among gamblers (Calderwood and Wellington 2013). This qualitative study aims to uncover the emotional content and important associated message characteristics that problem gamblers perceive as effective emotional advertising appeals in health messages. Five focus groups were conducted in an inductive manner to reveal which emotional advertising appeal is efficient to boost help-seeking among problem gamblers. The appeal of focus groups for social marketing researchers lies in the potential for group interaction to provide researchers with data that demonstrates participants' responses and opinions about the phenomenon of interest (Stewart et al. 2007). Furthermore, focus groups may be effectively utilised to study sensitive topics in different contexts (Farquhar and Das 1999; Bagozzi et al. 2013), including problem gambling (Calderwood and Wellington 2013).

A recent study by Gainsbury et al. (2014) found few problem gamblers seek professional help, suggesting low awareness of professional help services. To address this gap, this research explored the potential benefits of various emotional appeals on help-seeking intentions among Australian at-risk gamblers and offers practical findings for social marketers and public health professionals working in the gambling context.

Literature Review and Research Questions

Emotions in Advertising

Emotion-based persuasion has been used in the social and health-related context with the aim to influence individual judgements, attitudes, and behaviours. Emotions not only energise and direct behaviour (Lazarus 1991), but are also known to enhance an individual's ability to engage in meaningful deliberation (Marcus et al. 2011).

Previous research has shown evidence to suggest that advertisements portraying negative emotions were better remembered and recalled more frequently in comparison to the ads showing warm, or other positive feelings, or no emotional content (Snipes et al. 1999). More recent studies claim that negative emotions, such as fear, act as a motivator to engage in intensive and thoughtful ad message processing (de Hoog et al. 2007). Fear facilitates attention to the message, which enables individuals to capture information helpful to evaluate the threat (Ordoñana et al. 2009). Other scholars have identified that positive emotions expand the attention scope and thought-action of an individual (Fredrickson and Branigan 2005), and enhance interaction with cognitive control, a key part of which is the ability to hold and update behaviourally relevant information with a facilitating effect on working memory maintenance and processing of information (Lindström and Bohlin 2011). Other empirical evidence also suggests that individuals experiencing positive emotions are flexible, creative, and efficient in their information processing and, therefore, positive affect generates more elaborative networks of association in memory (Lee and Sternthal 1999; Isen 2003). Negative, and to a lesser extend positive, emotions have been utilised in social marketing campaigns in various compulsive consumption contexts.

Emotional Appeals in Consumption Contexts

Negative emotions (e.g. fear, guilt, shame) are often used in preventive social marketing communications to induce the audience to pay greater attention to the problem issues at hand and prompt respondents to avoid harms (Brennan and Binney 2010). However, the persuasive effectiveness of negative emotional appeals remains inconclusive (Peters et al. 2012). For example, despite the fact that negative emotional appeals, such as fear, can be an effective communication strategy (Terblanhe-Smit and Terblanche 2010), previous research has also raised questions of fear appeal ethicality (Arthur and Quester 2003; Williams 2011; Racela and Thoumrungroje 2012), claiming that fear appeals boost chronic anxiety in vulnerable audience members such as children, the elderly, the infirm, and addicts (Hastings et al. 2004). Several authors suggest that individuals afflicted with smoking (Brown and Smith 2007; Diehr et al. 2011) or excessive drinking (Brown and Locker 2009; Lennon and Rentfro 2010) tend to inhibit processing of fear appeals. Furthermore, in

line with social neurocognitive evidence (Kessels et al. 2010), threatening graphical information placed on cigarette packaging causes disengagement from message processing among smokers. Similarly, Gallopel-Morvan et al. (2011) reported that fear-eliciting health warnings on cigarette packaging provoked avoidance reactions and needed to be combined with self-efficacy (the strength of one's belief in one's own ability to reach goals) and action cues (taking action to reach the goal) for cessation support. Likewise, Puhl et al. (2013) identified that messages that imply personal responsibility and blame for excess weight (e.g. 'the more you gain, the more you have to lose', or 'chubby kids may not outlive their parents') received more negative/less positive ratings and were considered as stigmatising among individuals.

On the contrary, Fishbein et al. (2002), in a study testing 30 anti-drug ads, found that youth perceptions of ad effectiveness was significantly positively associated with negative emotion, realism, and knowledge accumulation, and was negatively associated with positive emotion. Furthermore, Morales et al. (2012) reported that fear appeals co-elicited with disgust prompted better compliance with the recommendations enclosed in the message. The authors maintained that immediate avoidance action tendencies of disgust co-activated with a fear appeal effectively altered first-time methamphetamine use among teenagers. Block (2005) reported that higher levels of guilt led to greater persuasion in a drink-driving context, based on guilt-induced self-responsibility for the risk consequences. Jäger and Eisend (2013) examined the efficacy of fear appeals in comparison to humorous social marketing advertising for individuals who differed in their prior attitude towards safe driving, finding that the advertisements with humorous elements were more effective for individuals with less favourable prior attitudes towards save driving behaviour. However, fear appeals tend to enhance safe driving behavioural intentions for recipients who have more favourable prior attitudes towards save driving.

Similar empirical findings in the gambling context reported by Munoz et al. (2010) indicate that warnings had to be threatening to increase cognitive responses which, in turn, affected attitude change towards help-seeking behaviour. The authors maintain that, in a sample of 258 Canadian gamblers, fear caused by threatening warnings was efficient in the case of attitude change and professional help-seeking. Furthermore, Muñoz et al. (2013) found that the presence of a graphic enhanced both cognitive appraisal and fear, and had positive effects on the depth of information processing in 103 gambling participants. In particular, graphic content combined with family disruptions was effective for changing attitudes and complying with the gambling warning. However, the effectiveness of appeals based on negative emotions in the gambling context is inconclusive. For example, Calderwood and Wellington (2013) reported qualitative findings on the opinions of Canadian problem gamblers (n = 17) and their family members (n = 14) in developing billboards to promote a local problem gambling service. Participants identified issues such as guilt and shame as emotions that would turn them off of the advertisement, and a fear of the advertisement leading to a scam or hoax.

Research Questions

Perceptions, beliefs, and opinions of the target population allow for the investigation of the determinants of risk behaviour and permit evaluation of the effectiveness of various communication strategies to alter these determinants (Brownson et al. 2006). Carter et al. (2011) argued that disregarding participants' perceptions, opinions, and beliefs may result in message misinterpretation and non-compliance. Identifying the right emotional themes is crucial to reach the desired target audiences in order to create attitudinal and behavioural change (Andreasen 2006), and the current exploratory research seeks to investigate gamblers perceptions of what constitutes effective emotional advertising. In particular, this qualitative study addresses the following questions: Which emotional advertising would best motivate help-seeking attitudes and intentions in an at-risk population (i.e. moderate risk or problem gamblers)? Which specific message elements should be highlighted in communications?

Method

Sampling Procedure

Five focus groups were conducted with self-reported problem gamblers (age range from 20 to 65 years old) within the metropolitan area of Adelaide, South Australia. A convenience sample, consisting of 43 participants, was drawn from the population, which is suitable for exploratory research (Malhotra and Birks 2007). An average sample size of 9 participants per focus group was drawn, totalling 43 participants (24 men, 16 women). All participants reported gambling on video lottery terminals, slot machines, or video poker machines on a weekly or daily basis. The Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) (Ferris and Wynne 2001) was used in order to determine problem gambling prevalence rates amongst the recruited participants. Participants scoring 3–27 points (i.e., moderate and problem gamblers) on the CPGI were admitted to the focus groups. Data collection was conducted until saturation was reached (Patton 2002). The digital recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researchers. A financial incentive (gift card) was offered to each participant. All participation was voluntary and each participant was assured anonymity. The names of the participants were omitted.

Prior to conducting the focus groups, a semi-structured discussion guide was developed. Issues raised in the discussion guide permitted insight into the attitudes, beliefs, and feelings towards social marketing advertising campaigns in various compulsive consumption contexts, including gambling. Several questions prompted gamblers to specifically outline the message content and message characteristics as being the most effective in communicating the risk associated with excessive gambling and encouraging help-seeking behaviour. A digital recording device was

used to audiotape all focus group discussions. The focus groups consisted of two parts. Part 1 followed a semi-structured discussion arising from participants recalling their exposure to social marketing campaigns in the past or present, which impacted them emotionally. Participants were prompted to give examples of such campaigns. Next, a series of print advertising stimuli in various social marketing contexts, including gambling, were shown to participants. Participants were asked to provide their immediate feelings and reactions toward each advertisement, and were prompted to explain their reaction towards specific elements within the message that turned individuals in or out of message processing. During the second part, participants were encouraged to imagine and describe their own advertisements in the gambling context, and discuss message features that they consider important to communicate.

Research Approach: Thematic Analysis

A comprehensive analysis of focus group discussions was conducted using thematic analysis (Boyatzis 1998). Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns, or themes, within qualitative data, and is considered a flexible, accessible, and widely-used method of qualitative data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Several steps of inductive coding were performed to identify emerging themes. First, open coding of raw text was used to find general themes evolving within the content (Thomas 2006). Next, categories were created defining the emerging themes. Finally, a selective coding system was used to narrow the themes. The researchers compared notes relevant to the themes to confirm inter-coder reliability.

Findings

Perception of Gambling Among Participants

During the focus groups participants spontaneously expressed their feelings in regards to their own gambling. Specifically, their gambling was referred to as "greed-rooted", or perceived by some participants as a "weakness" or a "costly pleasure". Several participants reported feelings of "total loss and desperation," "feeling sick, both physically and emotionally" or "lonely, deserted, and isolated" as the result of their gambling activities.

> It is an emotional thing [gambling], you know. When I am angry I feel like gambling. When I am lonely I feel like gambling. It's the habituation of it. Terrible things. I can gamble because I am happy. I am happy, so I will throw the money into this machine (Female, 53 years old).

Participants acknowledged that excessive gambling activities prevented them from "seeing and living real life, which goes beyond gambling." Two participants mentioned that they tend to personalise their relationship with the video lottery terminal; attributing some "human qualities to the machine, which kind of talks to you when you feel isolated and lonely." One participant in particular reported "feeling safe in a funny and weird way" while interacting with the video terminal. Another participant stated that problem gamblers exhibit a "different psychology", characterised by focusing on and prioritising gambling, and "being absorbed" into gambling activity.

> You become very internal; you become very focused on what you are doing with the pokies. Your family does not exist, your life does not exist, and the only thing which exists to you is the "pokies" (Female, 54 years old).

In line with previous qualitative research, participants utilise excessive gambling as means to moderate emotional discomfort (Hills et al. 2001); an attempt to regulate or alleviate their emotions (mostly negative) resulting from various life events. Life events ranged from "death in the family," "empty nest syndrome and disconnection with the children," to "accidental gambling" when participants unexpectedly won some large amounts of money in a casino and felt elated to continue gambling. Nevertheless, increased emotional and financial costs of their gambling intensified their attempts for behavioural change. These findings parallel the notion that negative emotions are among the primary motives for behaviour change among problem gamblers (Hodgins and El-Guebaly 2000).

Recalled Social Marketing Campaigns

Participants equally recalled social advertising campaigns in relation to drinking and driving, tobacco/smoking prevention, and binge eating/obesity. Some participants perceived that majority of the recalled social marketing campaigns used positive emotional messages, advocating for help-seeking behaviours in the context where people have less control over the situation (e.g. a context such as eating disorders). The top three most powerful emotions associated with these ads were fun, hope, and feeling inspired. Participants recalled that mostly negative emotional content was presented in social advertising, portraying contexts such as smoking, binge drinking, and drink-driving. The top three most powerful emotions associated with these ads were fear, guilt, and disgust. Additionally, anger, loss, sadness, rage, and shame were mentioned.

The opinions among participants were polarised as to whether negative emotional content is an appropriate strategy for social marketing advertising. Some participants strongly supported the use of negative emotions in the smoking and drink-driving contexts, whereas others were against it. Supportive participants favoured negative emotional content, claiming that negative emotions heighten individual or societal awareness of behavioural risks and their consequences.

> I still cannot get rid of a scene out of my head where the ad showed a guy coughing up blood and his wife and kids in the kitchen and he coughs that blood. It impacted me personally. I used to be a smoker and I decided to quit (Female, 34 years old).

Data from this study supports the notion proposed by LaTour and Rotfeld (1997) that responses to negative emotional content, and fear appeals in particular, cannot be generalised across health contexts, as participants react differently to health and/or social marketing campaigns based on personal relevance. For example, one participant mentioned that she was persuaded by fear appeals she recalled in a texting and driving context, however, she engaged in such behaviours infrequently. Being a smoker, she articulated some degree of fatalism in her response toward recalled anti-smoking fear and described it as "unconvincing" and "not impactful".

> These fear ads or graphic warnings on cigarette packs do not make any impact on me because if I decided to smoke and die because of it- so be it. I have seen death - no impact on me (Female, 34 years old).

Other participants expressed preferences for positive emotional content in social marketing advertisements they recalled. Participants debated on the effectiveness of a recalled anti-smoking ad, where the physical and financial benefits of quitting smoking were outlined. One participant mentioned that such information evoked "excitement" and "inspiration", and was considered "persuasive", boosting her "power to achieve". For another participant such ads defined the "reasons for change". However, some participants, who were smokers, did not perceive the benefits of quitting smoking outlined in the ad as immediately motivational, but admitted that knowing the various benefits was reassuring.

Negative Emotional Advertising in the Gambling Context

Each participant was prompted to imagine and describe his/her own health message in the gambling context. Several participants proposed to design advertising stimuli based on negative emotions. Several participants, of both genders, advocated employing negative emotional appeals, which heighten gambler responsibility for their own risky behaviour and emphasise how excessive gambling affects their lives (see Table 1).

Some participants mentioned that threats such as separation, divorce, loss of rights as a parent, threats of losing property, and significant financial debt may elicit negative emotions (i.e. fear, sadness) and prompt help-seeking action. Notably, participants strongly opposed shock tactics or the use of extreme fear appeals, as they believed that they offer "a wrong way out" or can "tip somebody over the edge". Rage and anger would be evoked in response to the shocking message prompting gamblers to dismiss help-seeking information and ultimately disengage from the message processing.

Table 1 Examples of negative emotional advertising scenarios

Age and gender of participants	Examples of proposed scenario
Female, in her 50s	You can win big but you lose more [when you gamble]. Gambling is like a trap-you cannot get out anymore. Venues are like fly traps in my advertisement. Do not get trapped!
Male, in his 20s	Money, family, house, and everything in one corner. On the opposite side the guy is having a night out in a casino and gambles. The next day he watches as the car leaves and you see his wife and kids left. Combine all the threats together by showing how much there is to lose. That night in a casino cost this guy his family life
Female, in her 60s	I would use negative emotions; isolation, loneliness, and sort of that. For me personally, gambling is a very isolating thing, it's not social, because I do the "pokie thing."
Male, in his 30s	In my ad I will be trying to get people saying that there is more at stake here than me; there is a relationship and family, whatever, so I can relate to this. Issue is bigger than just me. It's bigger than me and what I am doing. Think about the other people that you are affecting. That's how I see it. Show more of the consequences of what you are doing. If you are doing problem gambling it would lead to something negative. Think about people external to you that may be affected by your gambling. It makes you feel responsible for the situation."
Male, in his 60s	I think it [my advertisement] should be as hard as it can possibly be to get the bloke [man] to face the reality and the problems he caused. I have got to see some sort of a picture of a woman with children lining up at some charitable organisation, whether it is for food or clothing, and the person who actually caused this sort of problems feels as guilty as hell. It can be in other fields too, not only gambling. When you cause grief to your family, I do not think it can get lower than that, even though it was not necessarily meant to do when you are gambling, but at the end of the day it's is exactly what the end result is

Positive Emotional Advertising and Focus on the Gambler

Participants argued that behaviour change messages evoking negative emotions, such as guilt, fear, or shame, would not motivate gamblers to seek help. Instead, these negative emotions are perceived as stigmatizing individuals and psychologically barring them from help-seeking.

> Guilt evoked in the ad crashes you, actually. It is very strong. For a gambler, it is really, really strong. It hits you. It can also lead you down to the pokies especially for those who are tittering or have not gotten themselves under control. They just gone through that, they just lost everything and with that slap in their face, bang, they will be back to the machine. Guilt puts a really negative blame on the gambler. Gamblers have a disease, they need help, they do not need ridicule, they do not need to be put down, they do not need to be seen as an ogre in society or within a family or something like that. That negative ad stigmatises you (Female, 57 years old).

These participants proposed to use a strategically different approach in emotional advertising. They suggested that utilising positive emotions such as hope, fun, love, optimism, and focusing on the gambler themselves, is a better social marketing approach in the gambling context. One participant strongly emphasised to focus attention in advertisements on the affected person (e.g. the gambler), instead of concentrating on others (e.g. family). The same participant explained that communications should be highlighting the changes that gamblers will undergo after seeking help and rehabilitation leading to desirable consequences and the positive impact on significant others. Most importantly, the participant stated that the change has to start from the gambler himself/herself. The motivation to change risky behaviour would be encouraged by eliciting positive emotions in the message, with a strong emphasis on hope and opportunities that a gambling-free life would bring (see Table 2.).

Importantly, the participants suggested that it is crucial to design a message that boosts the gambler's self-worth, self-esteem, and offers an opportunity to search for a new identity as a result of positive change. The meaningful benefits resulting from help-seeking behaviour included "coming back to life", "family reunion", "re-connection with children and closed ones", "start of work", "changed lifestyle with the exploration of positive dimensions in life", "acquired self-worth and self-esteem", "meeting new people with positive ideas." One participant highlighted the importance of a "second chance in life to be lived with honesty and integrity".

Mixed Emotional Advertising

By constructing their own creative advertisements, other participants suggested indirectly that a combination of both negative and positive emotions might condition participants to pay attention to the stimuli. These participants argued that help-seeking would be motivated by a personal growth prospective which, in turn, evokes positive emotions. One scenario reflects a mixed emotional format, in which negative emotions are evoked by the threat appraisal and, combined with positive emotions, encourages growth and the possibility of achievement as a counterweight to gambling. The participant in that scenario used fear provoking information communicated through the loss of control and developing a gambling addiction (*tittering and slipping down the steep and slippery slope*) and the hardship of recovery (*hard to get back*) at the beginning of her message. However, she also included positive emotional content incorporated into the message statement, which may evoke hope, eagerness, and determination to resist the problem (*Build yourself from here! Life has hope! You are worthwhile!*) and focused on personal benefits arising from action. She enforced the message with meaningful dreams and achievements as a counterweight to the gambling, and implied that gamblers can achieve in themselves (*Your dreams and achievements now mean more than a press of a button!*). Another participant provided her personal life example of how a

Table 2 Examples of positive emotional advertisings scenarios

Age and gender of participants	Examples of proposed scenario
Female, in her 50s	You are trying to uplift, not to put down, not to make feel guilty, not make to think about the damage you have done, not the lies you have told, not to think about the deceit you have undergone to make the money to gamble. Instead of other people you have to have a gambler there [in the social advertisement]. The gambler is the centre: to give the gambler hope, to give the gambler the positive affect that they can find their life, their self-esteem. Because using others uses a guilt factor to make a connotation on a gambler. They have enough negative connotations to actually deal with. They have a lot of negativity in their life. Focus has to come that they are worthwhile and they are positive. In my ad I would probably say: "Life is more that the clink of a coin." When we are sitting behind these machines, our life is that clink of a coin. Alright, we are looking for a way out of that life at times because we do not see anything beyond that click of a coin. So in my ad it would be written: "Your life, your self-worth that is more important than that clink of that coin. Explore what your life could be! My self-worth has gone up and I am more than that "poker" machine!"
Female, in her 30s	Meeting someone that has things similar to you is amazing. That is going to help me. Togetherness. It feels inspiring and exciting. Somewhere, there are people like me and we have the same little habits. Advertise that getting help will be fun and you meet other people similar to you
Male, in his 50s	This is all [negative emotional content] "ohhh you have gone too far!" Can you come back from there? Maybe! When you are in the zone [excessive gambling], you can think about coming back to life. "Come back from the dark side into the light!"—that should be in the message

mixed emotional experience motivated her to reassess her gambling behaviour and to initiate behavioural change.

> One of the turning points for me in deciding to give up gambling, was that my counsellor put all the bad things that I was doing (gambling, drinking) on my route to destruction on the board and on the other side of the board we worked out what my life would look like without doing that, if I changed. You know, if I kept going the way I was - suicidal and the rest of it - that would probably be the end of it [life]. But on the other side of the white board we started to talk about things like connecting back to my children, being a worthwhile person, thinking about working again, all those sort of things. The thing that happened to me in my journey was that I lost my identity, that I lost the person I was. Now, I have come through it all, I have a new identity, and it's very, very clear to me that I lost it to my addictions. These things written on that board, made me think. Slowly seeing that sort of hope, things that I wanted to do in a positive way, because I was lost, totally lost, made the difference (Female, 64 years old).

Such qualitative findings from the current study suggest that mixing negative and positive emotions are considered to be a credible communication approach by some at-risk gamblers. This parallels the notion from positive psychology research, which suggests that positive and negative emotions co-activated simultaneously allows individuals to make sense of stressors, and gain mastery over future stressors, stimulating information processing, and helping them to transcend traumatic experiences (Larsen et al. 2003). Theory, such as the Heuristic Systematic Model, supports the notion that a feeling of ambivalence, created by the experience of conflicting emotions (i.e., mixed emotions or simultaneously evoked positive and negative emotions) may prompt more effortful information processing (Chaiken et al. 1989). Such theory stipulates that ambivalence can decrease attitude confidence to a level below the sufficiency threshold (Chaiken et al. 1989). This, in turn, generates motivation for systematic processing due to the consumer's need to preserve a desired level of attitude confidence (Chaiken et al. 1989). Recent empirical evidence confirms that participants who feel ambivalent tend to process information systematically when exposed to advertising in an obesity and junk food consumption context (Yan 2014). Similarly, ambivalence positively influenced the perceptions of message effectiveness in an anti-smoking context, through affective processing of the message (Xiaoquan and Xiaomei 2008).

Important Message Elements

Several participants highlighted the role of help-seeking action steps which they would include in their message. The message cues and action steps incorporated in their own advertising campaigns included information on readily-available specialised help executed professionally, anonymously, and non-judgementally. Participants acknowledged that in the gambling context, professional help is an essential component of recovery and provides an opportunity for treatment in a hospitable and supportive environment. Without well-pronounced action steps, the advertisement would leave participants either with anxiety, non-resolution, or both.

> Not many people could self-diagnose when they are truly in that critical moment. Try to make person on the other side feel- "Hey, no judgment! This is where you get help when you are ready. This is what you do. Did you know that is a treatable condition? These are your options." Show them-go there, it's anonymous. Hey, do not wait till it's too late-go there, and seek some help (Male, 28 years old).
>
> You cannot change this [problem gambling] without help, you cannot do it alone. You have to get yourself into an environment that is stabilising and supportive and it's not always family, because they are very hurt. You have to inform in the ads where they [target population] can go and seek help because they cannot do that [recover or stop gambling] on they own (Male, 45 years old).

Two participants mentioned that at risk gamblers may be reluctant to seek help and may feel intimidated by the social stigma attached to their problem-gambling status. In order to prompt consumers to enquire into information about specialised

services, the health message should normalise help-seeking. One way of normalising help-seeking is to outline in the message that the initiative to seek-professional help comes from the gamblers themselves. Personalised decisions to "get myself out of gambling" emphasises the individual's accountability for help-seeking actions.

> "I am getting myself out of gambling. It's OK to ask HOW!"-would be a more encouraging message. Try to personalise the message, because it's ME talking. I am not being talked down. I am not being told what to do. It is my own decision! (Male, 62 years old).

Several participants advised against using visual stimuli portraying dice, video lottery terminals, or slot machines, maintaining that such gambling attributes dominate their attention and entice them into risky behaviour. Other participants suggested that problem gamblers would avoid paying attention to the social marketing materials displayed in the venue. One participant explained that the prevention material would be ignored in order to avoid the negative feelings (e.g. guilt) aroused by a message prompting them to stop gambling "as one has decided already to come and engage into gambling". Instead, these participants suggested that health messages would have a better chance to be attended to and processed outside the venue. They claimed that "the right and reflective state of mind" is compromised while engaged with the gambling activity in the venue; hence, the message is most likely to be disregarded.

> When you are in the venue, you are in the zone; you are not worried about anything else around you. You are not interested because you are gambling. When I am quiet, calm, and reflective I can be receptive to that ad and I can sit quietly and receive the information. I am not going to receive any information while I am gambling in a venue while I am trying to chase my dollar, feeling anxious (Female, 54 years old).

Discussion, Implications and Future Research

This study provides a starting point for the development of emotional advertising appeals to encourage individuals to seek help in compulsive consumption contexts, such as gambling. The majority of gamblers in the study agreed that emotional advertising has the capacity to motivate behaviours and influence help-seeking attitudes, intentions, and behaviours. However, opinions regarding whether negative versus positive emotional advertising are the most effective were polarised. Proponents of the negative emotional content highlighted the persuasiveness of guilt and fear emotional advertising in compulsive contexts. Scenarios revealed that some gamblers perceived guilt as an emotion that intensifies responsibility for the harmful gambling outcomes on significant others; particularly in the family context. Guilt would motivate at-risk gamblers to reassess their behaviour and prompt them to seek help. Some participants also propose fear emotion as an effective appeal. Fear prevailed as a loss of control over gambling, loss of identity, loss of trust, loneliness, and isolation. Monetary concerns were also incorporated into fear scenarios. Notably, extreme forms of fear appeals/shocking tactics are harmful and

should not be used in the gambling context. Anxiety and depression, which often co-occur with pathological gambling, may prompt at-risk consumers to be overly distressed by shocking messages.

Gamblers support positive emotional appeals utilising hope, fun, feelings of inspiration, and excitement; with uplifting emotions prompting help-seeking action. In parallel with Calderwood and Wellington (2013), some Australian gamblers perceive guilt and fear-based health messages as stigmatising and harmful. In addition, positive expectations should be incorporated within messages targeting gamblers to seek help. Notably, perceived help-seeking benefits in the form of various intrinsically motivating positive expectations are regarded as antecedents of positive emotions such as hope, enthusiasm, or eagerness.

Furthermore, gamblers perceived other novel communication strategies, based on mixed emotional appeals, to be effective in curbing compulsive behaviour. For example, gamblers perceived effective communications as those that highlight emotions such as fear (e.g. *slipping down the steep and slippery slope* as a metaphorical expression of losing control over excessive gambling) mixed with hopefulness, determination, and resistance to the problem/issue (*Build yourself! Life has hope! You are worthwhile!*). These original findings in the gambling context parallel the notion of mixed emotional appeal effectiveness in sun screen usage contexts (Passyn and Sujan 2006). Moreover, recent findings on mediated advertising stimuli effectiveness in anti-marijuana context (Wang et al. 2012; Lang et al. 2013) point out that co-activated messages (e.g. mixed negative and positive emotional content) gain further attention from afflicted individuals based on their ability to condition individuals for information intake, better encoding, and storage of information. The findings from the current study suggest that the combination of negative emotions (e.g. fear) mixed with positive emotions (e.g. hope, eagerness, determination) are perceived as efficient to boost help-seeking in a gambling context.

Another finding from this study is that response-efficacy and self-accountability for help-seeking action are considered important elements that should be incorporated in messages to gambling-affected individuals. Personalised self-accountability (e.g. "I am getting myself out of gambling! Its OK to ask How") and clear guidance on how and were to seek help, highlights the importance of these elements in the message. Additionally, the current research indicates that advertising stimuli should exclude any explicit gambling cues, such as images of dice or slot machines screens, as these may trigger afflicted audiences to gamble. This notion parallels the findings from smoking contexts, which demonstrate that pictures of individuals smoking, or even conditioned smoking stimuli, are appetitive, pleasurable, and increase the desire of smoking a cigarette in smokers (Winkler et al. 2011).

The controversy regarding whether positive or negative emotional content is more effective in compulsive contexts calls for future research to consider the tailoring of emotional advertising to different consumers profiles (Rimer and Kreuter 2006). Future qualitative research should also explore if a mixed emotional advertising format is perceived as an effective communication strategy to prompt quitting among smokers, or healthy eating in overweight consumers. Furthermore, quantitative methods to produce more generalisable findings on emotional

advertising effectiveness in compulsive contexts, with a particular focus on mixed emotions, should be utilised.

The current research provides original insights into the effectiveness of various emotional appeals from a gamblers perspective. However, the qualitative nature of this research induces a number of limitations. Given that this was a qualitative research study, the findings from this research are not generalisable. Additionally, given the convenience nature of the sample, research findings may not be representative. Although a part of every focus group was dedicated to triangulate participants answers, the audience may have been inadvertently cued by the researchers to provide socially acceptable or desirable responses.

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