

GAMING INDUSTRY, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACADEMIA

BY MARK GRIFFITHS, RICHARD WOOD,
JONATHON PARKE & ADRIAN PARKE

This article briefly looks at some of the ways that academics – and more specifically the International Gaming Research Unit (IGRU) – have been helping the gaming industry and related stakeholders in terms of social responsibility. The IGRU is a team of experienced gaming researchers from across the UK, that work together to undertake high quality research and consultancy aimed at developing effective responsible gaming strategies. Rather than outline every single initiative that we have been involved in, this article briefly overviews one project in a number of different areas including prevention, evaluation, education, research, and sharing best practice. These examples are also chosen to indicate the types of social responsibility activities that gaming companies can engage themselves in.



P REVENTION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF GAM-RISC (CAMELOT)

Dr Richard Wood led this IGRU project in conjunction with *Camelot Group plc* (the National Lottery operator) in order to help them develop a more effective process for developing socially responsible games. The new gaming risk assessment tool called *GAM-RISC (Gambling Assessment Measure – Risks involving Structural Characteristics)* is an innovative and groundbreaking assessment tool that will help gaming companies design games that have minimal risk for vulnerable individuals. It can also prevent money being wasted on the development of a game that might otherwise be potentially problematic.

Structural characteristics, in particular, appear to be an increasingly important factor in the maintenance of gambling behaviour (Griffiths & Wood, 2001). By identifying and understanding how games are structured (i.e., game design and associated features) we are really trying to unravel what makes some games problematic for vulnerable players, what makes them playable or fun for social players and therefore, what makes it engaging and commercially successful. According to Parke and Griffiths (2007), the identification of these may have real and important implications for several interested parties to do the following:

- **Educate and inform clinicians:** To ensure that they have the appropriate knowledge to help problem gamblers through education and/or challenging cognitive biases and irrational beliefs. Structural awareness of games may also help identify information about a player's motivation by examining the type and form of gambling

preferred. In clinical sense, this may yield new information regarding player motivation that could inform any subsequent intervention.

- **Educate and inform players:** Information may empower players to gamble in a responsible way if we can help them to understand, identify and even adjust to such cues by either avoiding or exercising caution when playing high-risk games. For example, players engaging in games that have high event frequencies could aim to be more cautious, if they know that they could spend money faster or chase their losses easier.
- **Inform the gaming industry:** Finally, information about potentially risky features of games can help the industry with their responsible gaming strategies. By examining and reducing the risk of games during the development stages, it is possible to design games that will have the minimum negative impact. Such an approach would help in reducing the numbers of vulnerable players who go on to develop gambling problems.

The importance of a structural characteristic approach to gambling is the possibility to pinpoint more accurately where an individual's psychological constitution is influencing gambling behaviour (Griffiths, 1999). Such an approach also allows for psychologically context-specific explanations of gambling behaviour rather than global explanations such as 'addictive personality' (Parke & Griffiths, 2006). It also allows for the application of the extensive research that demonstrates the structural and situational "triggers" that can adversely influence the gambling behaviour of "vulnerable" players (e.g., Wood & Griffiths, 2007a).

GAM-RiSC was developed through a combination of examining the current state of research on structural and situational characteristics worldwide, and by employing a team of leading world experts, in terms of researching responsible gambling issues and treating problem gamblers. The advisory panel comprised of the IGRU team and other world experts from the US (Dr Henry Lesieur), Canada (Dr Robert Ladouceur, Dr Jeff Derevensky), Australia (Dr Alex Blaszczynski), and Germany (Dr Gerhard Meyer). Final testing of the measure compared the results to the known risks associated with established games. Once the tool is fully approved by *Camelot*, Nottingham Trent University will make *GAM-RiSC* available under licence to the whole gambling sector from 2008. It is also envisaged that those wishing to use the instrument can be given training by the IGRU as part of any company's social responsibility and/or game design staff development programmes.

GAM-RiSC can be used to identify the structural and situational characteristics of games that present the greatest risks for excessive play. *GAM-RiSC* provides each game tested with a total score that gives a 'traffic light' rating (i.e., green = low risk for vulnerable players; amber = medium risk for vulnerable players; red = high risk for vulnerable players). *GAM-RiSC* identifies which elements of a game, if any, are problematic so that they can be 'adjusted' to make the game safer or can be combined with other external measures of social responsibility in an effort to reduce overall harm. *GAM-RiSC* has been designed so that it can be used to assess any gambling type game by anyone with a basic knowledge of the features of the game. For example, the measure can be used by such people as game developers, responsible





gaming personnel, and/or game regulators. Gaming companies can either remove the most risky characteristics out of the games before they are launched or put in other social responsibility safeguards external to the game itself.

EVALUATION I: PLAYSCAN (SVENSKA SPEL)

For many years, the IGRU have been recommending to gaming companies (especially online gaming companies and those with loyalty cards), that they should start using their large data sets to help identify problem gamblers rather than exploit them (see Griffiths & Parke [2002], Griffiths [2003], Smeaton & Griffiths [2004], Griffiths, Parke, Wood & Parke [2006]).

Working with the Swedish Gaming Institute (Spelinstitutet), *Svenska Spel* recently launched an innovative new tool called *Playscan* that prevents problems with gaming in an active way. It uses behavioural science, psychology, mathematics, and artificial intelligence. *Playscan* detects players at risk of developing gaming problems and offers them tools to change their behaviour. *Playscan* not only detects if a player is having problems with gaming but can also predict (with more than 90% accuracy), whether the player is likely to develop gaming problems within the next three months. Provided with the data in the *Svenska Spel* customer database, the *Swedish Gaming Institute*, and the data mining company *ICU Intelligence* have been engaged to find a tool that actively helps the player. The tool has been produced based on all available research in this area and is built on the player's real gaming behaviour.

Unlike the conventional purpose of customer databases (i.e., to increase sales), the objective of *Playscan* is the opposite. *Playscan* detects and helps those who would benefit from playing less. *Playscan* has been compared to a safety belt (i.e., something you use without intending to actually make use of). It is founded on the player's own unique gaming data linked to *Svenska Spel's* customer loyalty card, *Spelkortet*. The tool measures increases and/or decreases of players' gaming behaviour and like GAM-RiSC uses a 'traffic light' identification system. If a player's gaming is stable and with no risky gaming behaviour it gives a green signal. A yellow signal indicates some risky gaming. Serious problems with gaming are shown by a red signal. The really innovative aspect of the tool is that it predicts *future* gaming behaviour. The use of the system is voluntary, but *Svenska Spel* strongly recommends its customers to use it.

Playscan uses the player's behaviour from the preceding year that is then matched against a model based on behavioural characteristics for problem players. If it predicts players' behaviour as risky they get an advance warning together with advice on how they can change their patterns in order to avoid future unhealthy and/or risky gaming. There are approximately 40 parameters used in predicting behaviour although it is the small patterns of behaviours indicating risky gaming that are more interesting.

Take the example of "chasing" where the player actively tries to win back his losses. What indicates chasing behaviour is that players raise their stakes significantly and/or widen their product base. Chasing-behaviour includes parameters like average stake and number of products played. As the tool is based on artificial intelligence (i.e. the computer itself learns to find complex patterns in large quantities of data), it can identify behaviours showing tendencies of problem gaming even though empirical research may not yet have

discovered them. As the use of *Playscan* is increased the prediction rate will increase and higher levels of significance will be obtained.

This system is likely to have a significant impact on the national and international gaming markets. If a players' behaviour indicates gaming problems they will be deleted from the direct advertising address lists. Via *Playscan* they will offered to use *Svenska Spel's* control tools (e.g., personal gaming budgets, self-diagnostic tests of gaming habits, and the chance to self-exclude from gaming). The IGRU have been commissioned to evaluate *Playscan* for *Svenska Spel* and will assess the extent to which the interventions used meet their aims and objectives. It will also assess the extent to which it is experienced as beneficial by those who have received the intervention and by those who haven't.

EVALUATION II – INTERNET GAMBLING SERVICES (VARIOUS COMPANIES)

The IGRU have also been working with many companies by auditing their online gaming sites and games and evaluating these services in terms of the levels of social responsibility that these products have. Led by Adrian Parke, the IGRU has been instrumental in evaluating a wide range of online games

for such companies as *Paddy Power*, *Atlantic Lottery Corporation*, and *An Post* (the Irish National Lottery). By applying a suite of responsible gaming measures, we are able to undertake an in-depth analysis of both the structural characteristics of games and the gaming environments.

Underpinning these evaluations is a focus on four key areas: (1) the level and quality of customer information that is made available; (2) the structural features of the games themselves (e.g., event frequency, near win opportunities, etc.); (3) the extent to which games allow for behavioural transparency (i.e., do players have opportunities to reflect and understand their play); and (4) the level of customer service available for players who may experience problems. On the basis of this, we are usually able to propose advice, suggestions and recommendations to be considered in relation to the proposed games and/or for future developments of the gaming company's responsible gaming measures.

The IGRU also evaluates other Internet gambling services including those that provide help for problem gamblers. The most recent example of this was an evaluation of the online advice and guidance service *GamAid* (see Wood & Griffiths, 2007b). Our many years of expertise has



also led the IGRU to producing materials that highlight the advantages and disadvantages of studying gambling both online (e.g., Wood & Griffiths, 2007c) and offline (e.g., Parke & Griffiths, 2002).

EDUCATION: 'YOU BET!' AND 'JUST ANOTHER GAME?' (RESPONSIBILITY IN GAMBLING TRUST)

Educating people about gambling is an important part of any social responsibility infrastructure. Since July 2006, Dr Mark Griffiths has been leading this IGRU project in conjunction with the charity *Tacade* (who specialise in producing educational materials for young people) and have been funded by the *Responsibility in Gambling Trust (RiGT)* to produce gambling education resources to use in schools and other youth education settings. This has involved both the production of new educational materials and over 60 dissemination events nationwide including youth gambling education seminars in cities throughout the UK, and many more 'twilight' sessions in schools nationwide.

The two resources produced so far are: *'You bet!'* (Gambling education materials for young people aged 11–16 years [Tacade/IGRU, 2007]), and *'Just another game?'* (Gambling education materials for young people aged 13–19 years [Tacade/IGRU, 2007]). Both these resources will assist in ensuring that young people are equipped to deal with such situations and empower them to make informed choices.

John Greenway (Chairman of *RiGT*) said: "These new resources are an important part of our long-term strategy for minimising the harm that can come from gambling. *Tacade* and the IGRU have produced excellent materials that can be incorporated into both the school and youth work curriculum."

The materials we have produced are available for free by contacting *Tacade* at their website (<http://www.tacade.com/>) and provide practical, accessible and quality resources for professionals working with young people and gambling. The issue of gambling has tended to be overlooked in both the school and youth work setting. These new resources significantly help to plug that gap.

This project has contributed to the gambling research agenda and highlighted gaps where research is urgently needed. It has also produced comprehensive teaching materials that can be used both inside and outside of the youth curriculum. Some of the materials can also be used in higher education settings and will be used in third year specialist modules across a number of different psychology-related degree programmes.

Adolescent gambling is widespread in the UK – see the latest national adolescent gambling prevalence survey (MORI/IGRU, 2006) – and these new materials are an important step in recognizing that gambling as a social and health issue are taken more seriously by educators and the health profession. We are delighted that our expertise in youth gambling has been put to excellent use. The IGRU and *Tacade* are now working on the next stage of the project that is to produce materials for 18- to 25-year old adults and students.

RESEARCH: THE GLOBAL ONLINE GAMBLER SURVEY (eCOGRA)

Last year, Dr Jonathan Parke led an IGRU project commissioned by eCOGRA (e-Commerce and Online

Gaming Regulation and Assurance) to carry out the *Global Online Gambler Survey* and earlier this year it was published (see Parke, Rigby, Parke, et al, 2007). To date, this survey is the most complete attempt to understand player concerns, and will help the industry formulate policy-making and lobbying in the future. Data for the quantitative investigation was collected using Internet Mediated Research (IMR) via an Internet data collection tool.

Overall, 85 questions including closed and open-ended questions were used to collect data on demographic variables, information on behaviour and attitudes (basic play, casino and poker play), player protection and satisfaction, responsible gambling, and positive and negative aspects of Internet gambling. The content and wording of questions were developed from discussions involving both the research team (based on emergent findings in past explanatory work) and the client.

This survey had two particular strengths: (i) the size of the sample (n = 10,865) which was to our understanding the largest sample ever employed in Internet gambling research by a substantial margin, and (ii) the variety of sources used from which to recruit participants. Rather than recruiting from sub-groups of players (e.g., problem gamblers, newsgroup users, etc.) or from a restricted number of locations, this survey considered responses from 96 different countries, giving a good representation of ages, men and women and employment sectors.

Of the almost 11,000 respondents who completed the survey, 58 percent were male and 42 percent female, with the majority of respondents being between the ages of 18- to 65-years. The majority of online play took place at home (90 percent of respondents), with the most popular time of day for play being in the evening (72 percent), followed by late night (53.4 percent). Women (9.1 percent compared to 7.6 percent of men) were significantly more likely to play at work. Just under half of the players were influenced by the software provider when selecting sites to play on (43 percent). However, casino players (46 percent) were more likely to be influenced when compared to poker players (34 percent). Almost 40 percent of respondents stated they visited message boards or forums.

The top five message boards or forums for those that did visit were: *Two Plus Two*; *Casinomeister*; *Casino Crush*; *GoneGambling.com* and *EZboard*. The two main reasons for visiting message boards and forums were to find out about bonuses and promotional offers (65 percent), and/or to get information about the best and worst sites at which to play (53 percent). Those who visited message boards or forums did so quite frequently, mostly one to three times per day (39 percent). This research represents an important milestone in understanding Internet gambling behaviour, and we now have a useful framework to guide future research, corporate strategy, and policy and regulation.

Some key findings from this study include:

- Gathering and sharing information among players (either online or offline) is becoming an important part of Internet gambling experience.
- Fun and entertainment seem to rank above the profit motive as reasons for play.
- That the gender gap is closing more generally, and that the typical Internet casino player is older and female.
- More women are also now playing Internet poker.
- Consistent with past research, men are playing for

excitement and women are playing more for relaxation and escape.

- Also consistent with previous research, chasing losses and biased betting (i.e., over-reliance on luck or heuristics) leads to a poorer financial performance.
- The most common problem experienced by players is being disconnected. Non-payment is the least common concern among players.
- Over a third of survey respondents claim to have had a dispute with an Internet casino or Internet poker website – the validity of disputes requires further investigation.
- Players on the whole do not know whether the industry is properly regulated.
- In spite of the uncertainty and concern among players, the level of customer service offered in the Internet gambling industry is rated on the whole as better than that of other industries.

BEST SHARED PRACTICE: INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING ORGANISATION

Later this year sees the official launch of the International Responsible Gaming Organisation (IRGO) which was co-founded by IGRU members Dr Richard Wood, Dr Mark Griffiths, and Dr Jonathan Parke, and includes an advisory board of other world leading researchers and clinicians. The IRGO will provide up-to-date information in order to allow a gaming operator to develop and maintain the most effective responsible gaming strategies. Most importantly, IRGO will help bridge the gap between research and application, by providing a unique, independent, online resource detailing the latest worldwide responsible gaming research findings, and initiatives.

The IRGO will provide a continuously updated summary of all relevant responsible gaming information, compiled with the help of an international panel of world leading experts in the field. IRGO membership will demonstrate a commitment towards a global community based approach to responsible gaming and corporate responsibility, and will greatly assist an operator to meet both their own national regulatory requirements, as well as the requirements of related organisations that promote responsible gaming policies (e.g., World Lottery Organisation, European Casino Organisation etc.). The specific aims of the IRGO will be:

- To summarise the evidence on all the key areas of responsible gaming so that gaming operators can quickly, and efficiently, get the information that they need through the website (<http://www.international-responsible-gaming.org/>).
- To disseminate the latest responsible gaming research findings and strategies, archived to provide a comprehensive online resource.
- To publish a weekly news bulletin on responsible gaming issues.
- To offer the opportunity for exchange of best practise in responsible gaming strategy from around the world, and across different gaming sectors, both online and land-based.
- To operate a secure, registered, members only online community forum to report and discuss responsible gaming issues.
- To publicise upcoming responsible gaming events.
- To provide relevant and comprehensive links for world-wide responsible gaming services. For example,

organisations who undertake full evaluations of existing responsible gaming initiatives.

- To accredit members who meet IRGO standards in responsible gaming, and for their commitment to the goals of international responsible gaming through the exchange of best practise.
- To hold international workshops on responsible gaming initiatives.
- To organise an annual international responsible gaming conference with speakers to include - industry responsible gaming staff, leading researchers, policy makers, and clinicians.

Hopefully this article has shown that the gaming industry can work closely with academics in a number of areas of social responsibility and that the type of work that can be done in this area is both diverse and innovative. **CGI**

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MARK GRIFFITHS

Dr. Mark Griffiths is a Chartered Psychologist and Europe's only Professor of Gambling Studies (Nottingham Trent University). He has published over 185 refereed research papers in journals, a number of books, over 35 book chapters and has over 550 other publications to his name. Mark has served as a member on a number of national and international committees and also does some freelance journalism with over 120 articles published in *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Sun*, *Sunday Post*, *Daily Mirror*, etc. and as had regular columns in *Arcade* and *Inside Edge*. He has also appeared on over 1500 radio and television programmes since 1988.

RICHARD WOOD

Dr Richard Wood is a Chartered Psychologist and has been studying gaming behaviour for over 12 years, mostly at the International Gaming Research Unit (IGRU) at Nottingham Trent University where he is still an associate member. He also worked as a Post Doctoral Research Fellow at The International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviours at McGill University in Montreal. Dr Wood has published numerous gambling related articles, presented his findings at conferences and seminars around the world, and undertaken many responsible gaming consultations for both the gaming industry and regulatory sectors. His research focuses on both the individual causes of problem gambling, as well as the structural characteristics of games that can influence the gambling behaviour of vulnerable players (info@GamRes.org, www.GamRes.org)

JONATHAN PARKE

Jonathan Parke has been a senior researcher with the International Gaming Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University where he has worked on a variety of research projects focusing on Internet gambling, poker behaviour, social responsibility and electronic gaming machines. His PhD research focused on developing an in-depth understanding of the structural characteristics of slot machines and how they influence slot machine gambling. Jonathan teaches classes on the psychology of gambling at both Nottingham Trent University, and at Salford University, Manchester. Jonathan acts in a consultant capacity on the psychology of gambling for various sectors of the gambling industry and to regulators.

ADRIAN PARKE

Adrian Parke is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Lincoln. He has been an active member of the International Gaming Research Unit for the past 5 years. Adrian has performed gambling research in several capacities such as academic journal articles and responsible gambling evaluation consultancies. Adrian's primary research interest is the role of IT in changing gambling behaviour (aparke@lincoln.ac.uk).



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