ONLINE GAMBLING FORUMS
A POTENTIAL TARGET FOR HARM REDUCTION

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HARM REDUCTION AND GAMBLING (EARLY DAYS)

- "Reno model": Based on the premise that consumers are ultimately responsible for their own behavior (Blaszczynski et al. 2004).
    - 1) Consumers need be presented with accurate information to make informed choices
    - 2) When problems arise, people should have access to treatment
- Criticisms
    - Little discussion of responsibility for providers (there is some though)
    - Providing accurate information on an activity that is designed to make you misjudge outcomes presents problems
    - Treatment is costly and treatment seeking is low

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HARM PREVENTION AND REDUCTION STRATEGIES

- Self-exclusion: Often burdensome for help-seeker
- In game messages: "Take a break" messages, time or money based
- Personalized feedback: Compare your behavior to the average ("normative"), addressing erroneous beliefs
- Remove large bill accepters: User needs to make the decision to reload more often
- Lower maximum bets: Potential to increase habituation
- Removal ATM/credit: Increases need to for planning
- Precommitment/spending limits: Budgeting and time limits (mostly outside US)

HARM REDUCTION AND ONLINE GAMBLING

- While some strategies listed can work across platforms, many are made with in person gambling as the ideal.
- Online presents challenges (Marrioneau et al. 2023)
  - Difficulties in regulation of operators
  - High sophistication in targeting customers
  - High rate of play
  - Difficulties restricting access (age, intoxication, region)
  - Challenges in targeting intervention
  - Patrons tend to think that existing tools are not relevant to them

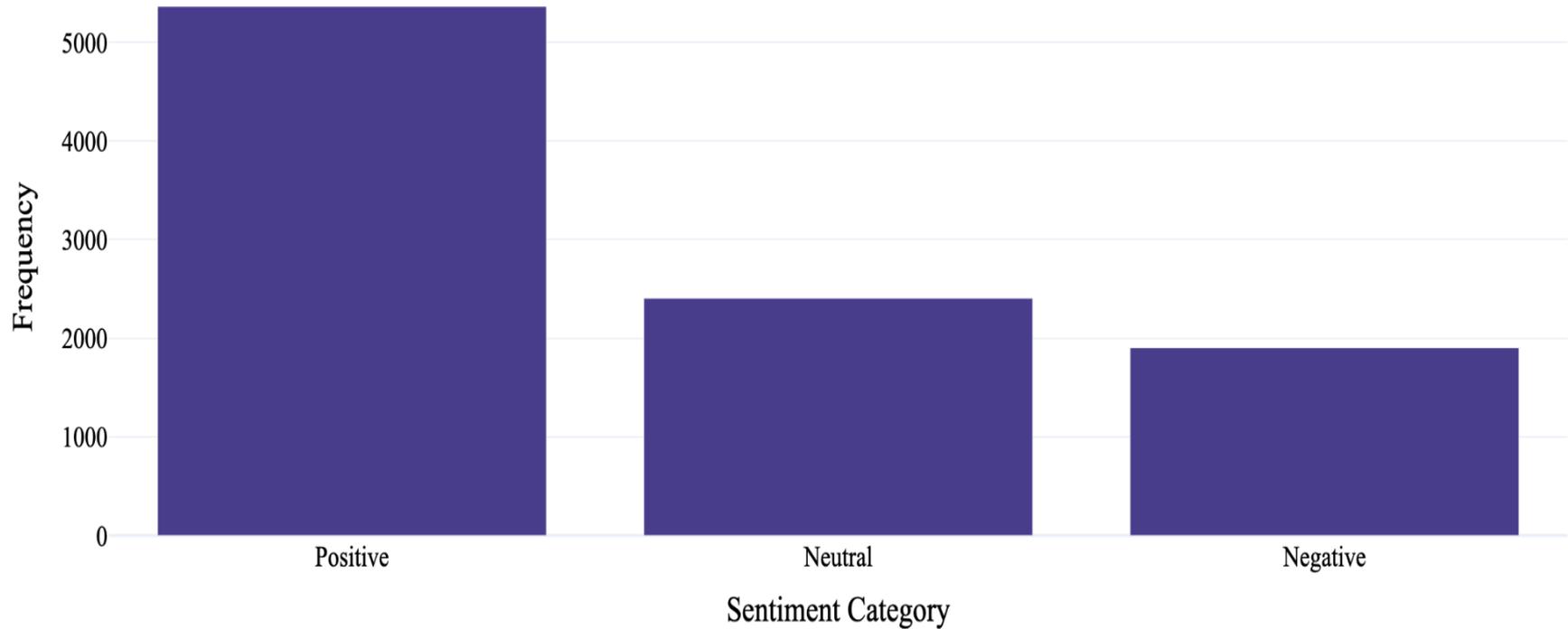# RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
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WHAT DO PEOPLE GAMBLING ONLINE WANT?

- What are people gambling online getting out of their participation and what are the harms they want to avoid?
- Reddit forum (subreddit) r/onlinegambling
  - 1141 posts and 11668 comments between Augst 5, 2015 and October 30, 2023
- Natural Language Processing (VADER) to help sort data and identify patterns
- Sentiment analysis to sort positive, neutral and negative posts

Distribution of Sentiment Categories of Comments

WORD EXAMPLES

Positive		Neutral		Negative	
account*	good	account*	know	account	people
bet*	know	bet*	kyc	cash*	play*
bonus	lol	bitcoin	money	casino*	scam
cash*	make*	bovada	pay*	crypto	shit*
casino*	money	cash*	send*	deposit*	site*
com	paid*	casino*	site*	fuck	stake
crypto	play*	com	slot*	gamble*	time
deposit	player*	crypto	stake	game*	try*
gamble*	slot*	deleted	try*	illegal	use*
game*	stake	deposit*	use*	know	vpn
web*	time	gamble*	vpn	kyc	win*
win*	tried*	game*	withdraw*	lose*	withdraw*
withdraw*		got		money	

DESIRES AND HARMS

- The goal: Most users were interested in long-term, sustained play
  - Wins were celebrated but profit orientation was considered unrealistic or untruthful
  - Discussions frequently centered on giving new users advice
- Harm: "Scam" providers
  - A lot of discussion on sites to avoid and stories of unpaid winnings
- Harm: Predatory practices
  - Engaging with promotions and bonuses were discouraged
- Harm: Enforcement
  - Shared strategies on avoiding detection when gambling across digital borders

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS FOR COMMUNITY

- Overrepresentation of winnings
  - Frequent discussions of winning can make users overestimate chances of winning
- Repeating erroneous beliefs about gambling
  - Discussions of "hot hand" fallacy, gamblers' fallacy ("you're due to win!")
- Encouraging perseverance
  - "keep at it", "don't give up!"
- Stigmatizing language surrounding mental health
  - Identifying self or others as "degenerate", "psycho" used to describe someone not in control of their gambling

ECHOES OF SUBSTANCE USE COMMUNITIES

- Howard Becker: Becoming a Marihuana User
  - Social interaction is a necessary part of using cannabis
  - Technique, interpretation of sensation, how to avoid detection are all learned informally and reflect the needs of the community members
- Opioid use community members
  - Informal "shooting galleries", locating good/safe supply, avoid police
  - Forms to limit risk but maintain participation

TAKEAWAYS

- Aspects of gambling pose unique challenges in harm reduction and prevention
  - Online delivery even more so
  - Still common themes with SUDs
- Gambling harm a topic is underrepresented in Social Work
  - A big problem give the dramatic expansion in gambling availability
- Globally, harm reduction and prevention is moving towards constraints on the gambling providers
  - Still largely focused on consumer responsibility in the US

WHAT DOES A GOOD FRAMEWORK LOOK LIKE?

- Finland government monopoly
    - Explicit federal strategy for addressing gambling harm
    - Maximum loss limits €500 a day and €2,000 a month
- Netherlands
    - Duty of care for operators
    - Centralized exclusion registry
    - Required anonymized data sharing
- Canada (Ontario)
    - Playsmart centers: Onsite staff giving advice on lower risk playing and referral for help seekers

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THANK YOU!

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