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# METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO IMPROVE HEALTH COMMUNICATION OF GAMBLING OPERATORS: STUDY OF JuegOSONCE.es INITIATIVE

**Análisis metodológico para la mejora de la comunicación en salud de los operadores de juegos: estudio de la iniciativa JuegosONCE.es**

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## Abstract

An effective Responsible Gambling strategy ideally seeks to bring about direct changes in player behaviors/beliefs. Even small improvements in the effectiveness of communicating such messages can have large downstream impacts. In this sense, prevention messages are one of the most widely used public health strategies to reduce the harm caused by pathological gambling. Through two studies, this work aims to analyze from different fields the factors that most influence the effectiveness of e-mails in health communication in order to optimize their effectiveness. For this purpose, the case study of the JuegosOnce.es initiative portal will be used with the e-mails that this operator sends to users who exceed a spending limit on a recurring basis (Study 1). The results obtained allow us to obtain the factors that have the greatest impact on the effectiveness of

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Responsible Gambling communications and then to propose an improvement in these emails, which is tested in a proof of concept (Study 2). The results allow establishing guidelines based on consumer insight to produce messages that promote a change in consumer behavior and allow obtaining the maximum benefit from responsible gaming policies. These guidelines can be key in the design of future campaigns with a more optimized content and form according to scientific evidence.

**Keywords:** health communication, responsible gambling, juegosonce, messages, marketing, concept proof.

## Resumen

Una estrategia efectiva de Juego Responsable idealmente busca provocar cambios directos en los comportamientos/creencias del jugador. Incluso las pequeñas mejoras en la eficacia de la comunicación de dichos mensajes pueden tener grandes impactos posteriores. En este sentido, los mensajes de prevención son una de las estrategias de salud pública más utilizadas para reducir los daños causados por el juego patológico. A través de dos estudios este trabajo tiene como objetivos analizar desde diferentes campos los factores que más influyen en la efectividad de los correos electrónicos en materia de comunicación en salud para optimizar su eficacia. Para ello se utilizará el caso de estudio de la iniciativa del portal JuegosOnce.es con los correos que dicho operador manda a los usuarios que sobrepasan un límite de gasto de forma recurrente (Estudio 1). Los resultados obtenidos permiten obtener los factores que tienen más impacto en la efectividad de las comunicaciones en materia de Juego Responsable para, a continuación, proponer una mejora en dichos correos que es testada en una prueba de concepto (Estudio 2). Los resultados permiten establecer unas directrices a raíz de conocer el insight del consumidor para producir mensajes que promuevan un cambio en la conducta del consumidor y permitan obtener el máximo beneficio de las políticas de juego responsable. Estas directrices pueden ser clave en el diseño de futuras campañas con un contenido y forma más optimizados según la evidencia científica.

**Palabras clave:** Comunicación en salud, juego responsable, juegosonce, mensajes, marketing, prueba de concepto.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, to combat gambling addiction (Pathological Gambling), Responsible Gambling programs have employed a set of tools including psychosocial assistance, awareness campaigns, player education programs, and self-management resources for gambling (e.g., setting deposit limits or self-exclusion). However, a series of barriers have been observed in the population that hinder the implementation of these programs. These barriers include stigma, shame in acknowledging the problem, lack of knowledge, and the desire to handle the situation oneself (Hernández-Cruz and Bujardón-Mendoza, 2020). In times where in-person and physical gambling activity continues to grow in the population (National Drug Plan, 2020), it is necessary for gambling operators to encourage their users to seek help before their problems worsen, minimizing harm and reducing the burden on emergency services. Nevertheless, in the case of gambling users, such as those engaging in games of chance provided by ONCE through their online portal JuegosONCE (<https://www.juegosonce.es/>), the implementation of an effective Responsible Gambling policy can be challenging due to these players lacking the necessary motivation to proactively seek help.

The use of databases by online gambling operators in recent years has allowed for obtaining specific information about the player base, which has sparked growing interest within the scientific community regarding Responsible Gambling in the use of personalized messages as a means to

enhance informed decision-making (Langham et al., 2017). An effective Responsible Gambling strategy ideally seeks to induce direct changes in player behaviors/beliefs. Even small improvements in the effectiveness of communicating such messages can have significant subsequent impacts. In this sense, prevention messages are one of the most commonly used public health strategies to reduce the harm caused by pathological gambling.

### **Theoretical Framework: Pathological Gambling and Responsible Gambling**

In recent years, there has been a surge in activities related to gambling, both in its physical and online forms, despite the latter experiencing greater expansion. Several factors contribute to this online growth and explain its success: sector liberalization, ease of access and partial or complete anonymity, or the shift away from categorizing these activities as prohibited. Additionally, society's attitude towards typical players of these types of games has shifted to a positive connotation (intelligence, insider knowledge, risk management), beyond the social aspect (Algarra-Prats, 2012).

Gambling Disorder or Pathological Gambling is an addictive disorder described as "persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behavior leading to clinically significant impairment or distress" (American Psychiatric Association, 1980, p.1301). The addiction to gambling, known as ludopathy, began to be studied in 1975, with its inclusion in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in one of its categories in 1980. In DSM-5, its classification changed from previous editions, moving from being part of the impulse control disorder to a new chapter titled "Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders" within the section "Substance-Unrelated Disorders." In terms of prevalence, it affects adolescents more than adults, and in both populations, it is more common in males. The profile of gambling is more prevalent in mid to late adolescence for in-person pathological gambling, but it occurs earlier for its online variants (National Drug Plan, 2020).

Gambling disorder is characterized by a range of symptoms, including distorted cognitions, chasing losses, preoccupation with gambling, and inability to quit. Currently, there is no one-size-fits-all treatment; it needs to be individualized and multimodal. This holistic approach includes both pharmacological therapy (antidepressants, mood stabilizers, anxiolytics, and antipsychotics) and non-pharmacological therapy (intervention programs, cognitive-behavioral therapy), given the comorbidity of this disorder with other conditions (American Psychiatric Association, 2014).

However, not all games are equally addictive. The various presentations of the same type of game, as well as the conditions under which it is played and its structure, also influence its addictive potential (Chóliz, 2010). Public and private sector companies in the industry are not oblivious to the harmful effects of gambling, which is why the concept of "Responsible Gambling" (RG) was created as a way to attempt to mitigate the addictive effects of gambling (Hing and McMillen, 2002).

Despite the prevalence and severity of pathological gambling, studies indicate that players view the availability of Responsible Gambling information tools favorably, particularly those that help them play within their means, including the opinions of other players and reports of their own spending (Griffiths, 2013).

Over the past years, the literature shows that player adoption of Responsible Gambling policies remains relatively low. As an example, Cohen et al. (2011) estimated that only 5% of the population at risk of pathological gambling is enrolled in a self-exclusion program. In other studies of online gambling operators, it was observed that only 1.2% of users set spending limits for themselves, and only 13% of users regularly interacted with a Responsible Gambling control tool (Forsström et al.,

2016; Nelson et al., 2008).

In conclusion, although the majority of players respond positively to the concept of Responsible Gambling, they require better guidance for its implementation.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to establish a methodological approach to analyze health communication emails from various perspectives in order to optimize their effectiveness. To achieve this, the case study of the portal JuegosOnce.es will be used, focusing on the emails sent by the operator to users who consistently exceed a spending limit (Study 1). The results obtained will identify the factors with the most impact on the effectiveness of Responsible Gambling communications. Subsequently, an improvement in these emails will be proposed and tested in a proof of concept (Study 2). These enhancements could be crucial in designing future campaigns with content and format that are more optimized based on scientific evidence. Thus, our hypothesis is based on the notion that knowledge from various fields of consumer insight can improve and produce messages that promote a change in consumer behavior and allow for maximum benefit from responsible gambling policies.

As for the research questions (RQs) of this study, we pose:

RQ1: Can health communications related to Responsible Gambling be modified through literature review and interviews with key stakeholders?

RQ2: Are the changes introduced in these communications effective for consumers?

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Study 1**

For this study, a methodological approach was employed that involved literature review, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and a proof of concept.

**Literature review:** A literature review was conducted to gather the latest research on Responsible Gambling and messages, extracting the different factors that influence the effectiveness of public health messages.

**Focus groups:** Two focus groups were conducted with students from the Complutense University of Madrid, Faculty of Information Sciences. The first group consisted of 42 students aged between 20 and 25, and the second group had 33 students aged between 19 and 25. Gender parity was maintained in both groups. Participants were shown the emails described in the section "Model of Analyzed Emails" and were asked to express and discuss their opinions about these messages, whether they would find them useful, and the changes they believed should be made to improve them.

**In-depth interviews:** In-depth interviews were carried out with individuals related to advertising and gambling (ONCE employees, advertisers, creatives, associations of rehabilitated gamblers – FEJAR – and communication professionals). They were shown the messages and asked for advice based on their professional experience to enhance them.

**Proof of concept:** Finally, based on all the results obtained, a set of recommendations and suggestions were developed that could be applied to the studied messages and any other communications related to Responsible Gambling. With this, an improved proposal for the analyzed emails was formulated, which

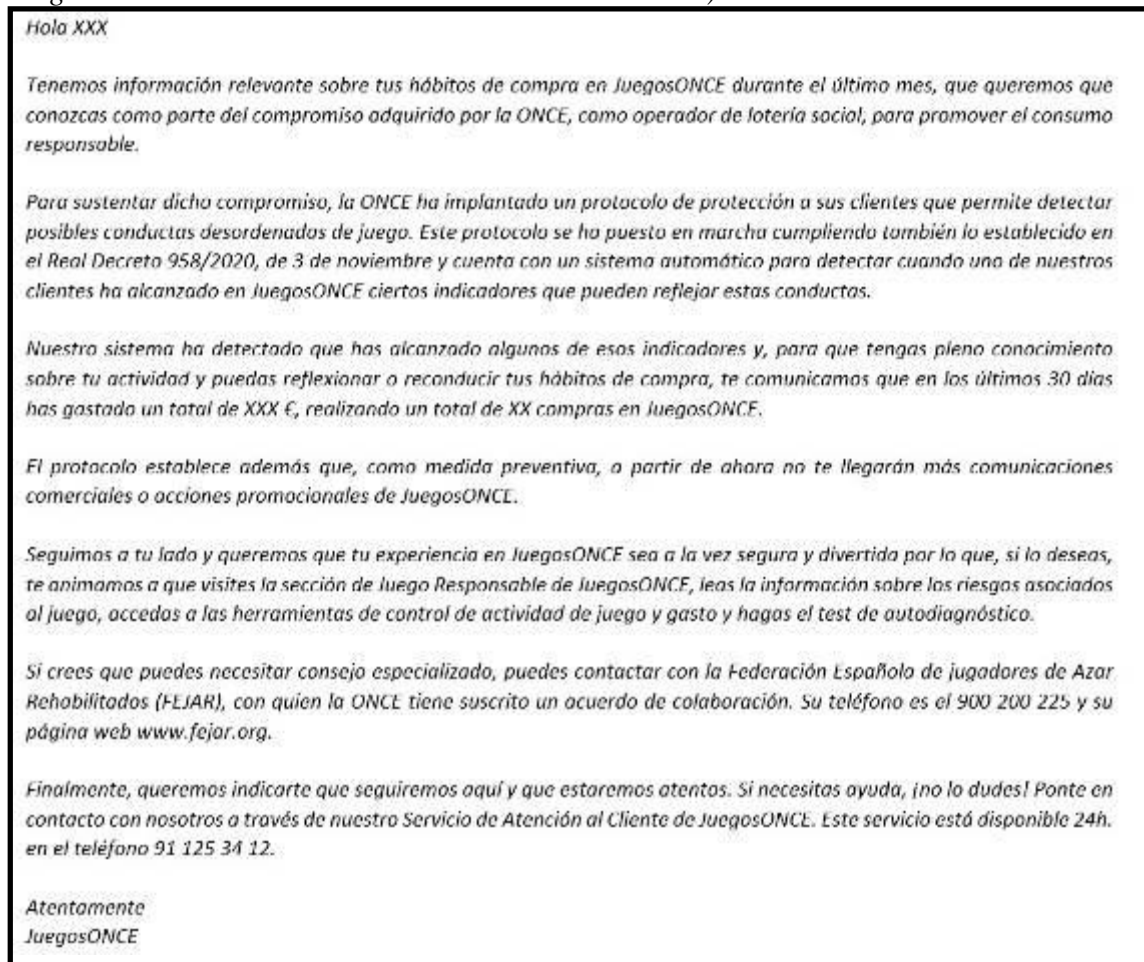
theoretically, according to our research, should be more effective than the original used by the operator JuegosONCE with its users. To test this proposal, an opinion and evaluation questionnaire previously used in other studies (Abuín-Vences et al., 2022) was administered to two independent populations of students from the Complutense University of Madrid. One group was shown the original emails, while the other group was shown the proposed emails, followed by both groups completing the evaluation questionnaire.

### **3.2. Model of Analyzed Emails**

This study has examined different models of email communications sent by ONCE to its customers through the JuegosONCE website. These emails have been crafted by ONCE, drawing inspiration from emails used by gambling operators in Northern Europe. Once a player has been classified as a high-risk player due to the presence of one or more indicators that reach the established weighting according to ONCE's criteria, organized actions are initiated at several escalating levels, associated with sending the emails of interest in this study.

Initially, when a new player registers, they receive a preliminary informative email informing them that their personal consumption data will be processed. If the user activates a risk indicator, the first email is sent, and if the risky behavior persists, second, third, and fourth emails would be deployed. The fourth email involves the temporary suspension of their account for three months. After the three months have passed, another email is sent to notify the reactivation of their account (account reactivation email or level 5 email). Below is an example of the email model used.

**Figure 1.** Model e-mails analysed. Level 1 mail model (Subject: Relevant notice of the JuegosONCE service Non-commercial communication).



### 3.3. Study 2. Evaluation Questionnaire

The evaluation questionnaire used is an adapted version of (Abuín-Vences et al., 2022), where participants are asked to rate their assessment on a scale from 0 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree) regarding the format (typography, graphics, etc.), content (whether they would read it thoroughly and find it attention-grabbing), and suitability (if they believe it can help them and they would utilize all Responsible Gambling tools presented). Additionally, participants are asked to provide an overall evaluation of each of the presented messages. Such scales have been previously employed in similar studies and demonstrated their validity (Cuesta et al., 2012). An example of a question would be "Please rate the following statements on a scale from 0 to 7, where 0 means you totally disagree and 7 means you totally agree, based on your opinion and personal criteria if you were in their situation: If I received these emails, I would read them thoroughly." The total number of questions was 15.

The questionnaire was administered to two groups of participants, comprising 45 and 43 individuals respectively. One group was presented with emails from the preliminary, level 3, and level 5 of the message models used by the operator JuegosONCE, while the other group received the same levels of emails from the proposed models. Each group was unaware of the existence of the other set of emails, ensuring the independence of the groups. Participants were informed of the research's objectives, following ethical protocols validated by the University department overseeing this

research. The independent variable was "message type" (original messages, improved messages), and the dependent variables were format, content, suitability, and overall evaluation. The results of the dependent variables were subjected to variance analysis and post hoc tests.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1. Study 1. Literature review**

The literature review on health-related messages suggests that messages may be more effective when they convey content directly and for specific reasons. This means that messages should present the different Responsible Gambling resources in a well-founded manner rather than merely informing of their existence (Haug et al., 2014).

From the literature review, the most studied factors by the scientific community for shaping Responsible Gambling messages to maximize their effectiveness have been described. The main aspects to consider are a) the type of content, b) message framing, c) message type, and d) segmentation.

Content of the message refers to the simplicity, sincerity, and clarity of the words that communicate an appropriate level of danger and actions to avoid harm caused by gambling abuse. The type of language used in messages can have varying impacts on individuals based on their culture, emotional state, addiction level, and self-esteem (Wogalter, 2006).

Informative or educational Responsible Gambling messages are based on conveying to players the notion that problematic gambling results from irrational thoughts and beliefs. The idea behind these messages is that if players understand how gambling works and the odds of winning (distribution of prizes, etc.), they will be capable of making informed decisions regarding their consumption (Sharpe, 2002). However, empirical research suggests that information communicated in this manner does not effectively alter irrational beliefs or erroneous estimations of winning probabilities (Steenbergh et al., 2004). The fact that purely informative approaches do not effectively modify behavior is likely due to cognitive biases, where players still hold onto unrealistic winning possibilities even after recalling such messages (Monaghan and Blaszczynski, 2010). It becomes necessary, therefore, to incorporate an emotional touch, with care not to trigger rejection, in order to make the message resonate with the user.

Individuals respond differently based on whether messages are framed as gains or losses. Positive messages (or gain-framed) focus on the benefits of making improvements in a particular behavior, while negative messages (or loss-framed) contain information about the harmful consequences and risks associated with risky behaviors (Argo and Main, 2004). It has been found that the use of positive message framing has a greater impact than negative framing. In other words, messages are more persuasive when they promote positive attitudes and when identified behaviors are mutually exclusive (an example being setting deposit limits vs not having limits). In this regard, neuroimaging techniques have confirmed that gain-framed messages are more effective at improving risk behaviors compared to loss-framed messages among individuals with substance use disorders (Fukunaga et al., 2013).

Different message types can yield various effects. Self-assessment messages encourage players to reflect on their own personal situation and take appropriate measures. Persuasion research shows that when individuals generate arguments and conclusions themselves, they find them more convincing than statements provided by external sources (Glock et al., 2013). Such messages can counteract potential adverse reactions and enhance message persuasiveness. Studies on slot machine messages such as "Have you spent more than you intended?" have demonstrated that this type of message increases

players' awareness of their playing time and fosters more realistic thoughts about winning possibilities, thereby increasing the likelihood of taking a break and reducing gambling session duration (Gainsbury et al., 2015). In this context, less abstract messages that include specific actions, such as setting a deposit limit, can boost message compliance. Online gaming messages that suggest specific information ("10 tips for playing online") generated five times more website traffic than commonly used informative messages ("How does problematic gambling work?") (Gainsbury et al., 2018).

ONCE employs banners with the Responsible Gambling logo both on its website and at physical points of sale. Many studies have found that this kind of message, if presented in isolation, tends to be ignored by players (Monaghan and Blaszczynski, 2010). The extent to which a message is read, absorbed, and acted upon depends on the personal relevance of the message, its sender, the recipient's ability to process the information, and their motivation to respond. To be effective, Responsible Gambling messages need to engage players' cognitive, emotional, and motivational faculties and alter behaviors of interest (Mayhorn and Podany, 2006). In other words, it's not very logical to assume that the same message transmitted to all players will have a similar impact on each of them, given the differences that exist among players.

The more information we have about users, the better we can implement more sophisticated Responsible Gambling strategies, such as using personalized messages based on individual characteristics and gambling patterns. Such targeted messages should be particularly valuable in populations where there's a high variability among members (Gainsbury, 2011).

In this regard, a key difference among players is age. The reception of Responsible Gambling messages by young adults (ages 18-24) is often different from that of the general population. In their meta-analysis (Argo and Main, 2004), they argue that age correlates negatively with warning perception. Young adults tend to perceive themselves as invulnerable to negative consequences of risky behaviors, struggling to relate to future negative consequences. They tend to underestimate the seriousness of their gambling, not recognizing or accepting gambling problems, and are less likely to seek help. This doesn't mean they have poorer understanding of gambling odds than senior players, but they are more prone to erroneous beliefs about gambling and to believing that their addiction can be easily controlled. Due to the greater relevance of social norms for young people, manipulating the social context can enhance message effectiveness for this target cohort. In contrast, players aged 24 and above show a more obsessive passion for gambling when their behavior is problematic and are more likely to respond to communication strategies than other subgroups (Lewis and Reiley, 2014). Additionally, frequent players are at greater risk of gambling problems. All these data indicate several variables to consider when designing Responsible Gambling messages, as the impact of the message is likely to differ across player segments due to their unique needs and preferences (Jara-Rizzo et al., 2018).

## **4.2. Focus Groups**

## **4.3. First Focus**

### **Group Participants**

A group of 42 students from the Faculty of Information Sciences aged between 20 and 25 years old. Equal gender distribution. The majority are consumers of online gambling (betting, casino games, etc.). The focus group's objective is to gather information about Responsible Gambling and its communication from the perspective of different young university students to enhance the



communication strategy through emails sent to specific users according to legal regulations.

## **Key Developments**

### *Preliminary Message*

The group unanimously expresses a lack of interest in reading the emails. The format, tone, and content make them think it's written in a "cookie policy" style language designed to be ignored. The group suggests using language with the fewest legal terms possible and employing formatting tools (bold, spacing, and indentation) to improve readability. Some participants view the inclusion of images positively.

### *First Message*

The group shows a significant loss of interest, marked by excessive text and a sense that they're being told things they "already know." In this context, some participants prefer the inclusion of authoritative messages, although other more skeptical viewpoints raise concerns about potential boomerang effects. Suggestions are made to highlight FEJAR's contribution more or include information about the average spending of JuegosOnce's customer base compared to the player. The group spontaneously and strongly emphasizes the need to present consumption information right at the beginning of the message.

### *Second Email*

Several participants point out that the option to modify limits is hidden halfway through the message. A possible follow-up via phone is suggested as a way to complement email tracking, though acceptance of this proposal is not unanimous. Some participants propose using phrases like "if you meet these criteria, you might be an unknowing addict" to compel players to reflect and become aware of their behavior.

### *Third, Fourth, and Fifth Emails*

Since the emails were not available at the time of the focus group, participants were provided with the basic guidelines established in ONCE's protocol. The group's unanimous stance remained the same as in the previous emails.

## **4.4. Second Focus Group**

### **Participants**

A group of 33 students from the Faculty of Information Sciences aged between 19 and 25 years old, with some senior participants. Equal gender distribution. The focus group's objective is to gather information about Responsible Gambling and its communication from the perspective of different young university students for the purpose of reflection and potential improvement of the communication strategy through emails sent to specific users according to legal regulations.

## **Key Developments**

### *Preliminary Message*

Participants state that none of them play on the JuegosOnce.es portal. However, several occasionally

make purchases at physical ONCE sales points. Moreover, most of the group is unaware of the primary Responsible Gambling policies followed by ONCE (or any other Spanish gambling operator). Just like in the previous focus group, there is a unanimous attitude of "not reading" the emails. Participants agree that the emails are sent "because they have to do it," and several individuals emphasize the feeling that ONCE sends these emails "just to cover themselves."

#### *First Message*

Approximately 80% of the group indicates that they wouldn't read the message. The majority opinion suggests placing consumption information first and then the rest of the text. Various participants emphasize the need to add formatting elements (bold, spacing, etc.), and almost all participants agree on reducing the email's length.

#### *Second Message*

Once again, the vast majority acknowledges they wouldn't read the message. Most agree on reducing the email's length with a structure like "for more information, you can visit FEJAR's website" instead of listing all contact details. The group appreciates JuegosONCE's respectful tone in this and previous messages and advocates for maintaining it.

#### *Third Message*

One participant suggests using WhatsApp as a consumption reminder, although there's no widespread acceptance from the group. There's a debate between intensifying the email's tone (while maintaining respect) and continuing with purely informative approaches without directly labeling the recipient as a potential addict. Consensus isn't reached on this matter.

#### *Fourth Message*

Responses remain consistent with previous messages, showing a clear intent of not reading. One participant proposes the possibility of including paragraphs about prohibitions at the beginning to generate a call to action and encourage recipients to read the entire content, a suggestion supported by the majority.

As conclusions from the focus groups of young adult university participants, it's evident that the vast majority of participants from both groups would not read any of the presented emails in their current state.

Both groups express reasonable doubts about the effectiveness of the messages and support the necessity of making the messages shorter and more direct, enhancing the formatting, and prioritizing information about consumption and the offered Responsible Gambling options.

The idea of dual contact, through email and WhatsApp/phone, receives significant support, although the acceptance is not unanimous.

The tone of the emails, being respectful, does not inherently elicit rejection.

#### **4.5. In-Depth Interviews**

**Ana Fernández Pardo. Communication Consultant and Professor at Camilo José Cela University and Complutense University of Madrid**

The interviewee is unaware of the terms of the current legal regulations regarding responsible consumption promotion for these types of products, but she considers that the proposed schedule of informative emails and their tone are somewhat aggressive and perhaps contradictory. She finds it challenging for the entity promoting a product or service to also take on the role of controlling and limiting its acquisition. In fact, she believes that the content of the emails goes beyond mere information. In this regard, she thinks it would be more appropriate for such communications to direct the user to verify their expenses and learn about the current regulations for responsible consumption protection. She finds the inclusion of a "self-diagnostic" tool to be very appropriate, as it provides the user with the opportunity to consciously and independently assess their habits. Including expressions like "if you consider rethinking" or "we encourage you to self-exclude" seems intrusive and even disrespectful and inappropriate. She understands that if the entity considers or verifies that a user has violated the rules or exceeded certain limits, appropriate actions should be taken and the reasons for such decisions explained. However, she believes that using this tone is unnecessary and considers it threatening. The interviewee thinks that such explicit content might be justified and more comprehensible in the information published in the mentioned links, as "fine print" allows for liberties that are inappropriate in direct communication.

**Gema Bonales Daimiel. Marketing and Communication Professional. Professor at Complutense University of Madrid**

The interviewee finds it appropriate that the messages - both the tone and the language - progress gradually, without sudden shifts at any level. She only notices in the first message (initial email) that in the 2nd paragraph where it says "To support this commitment, ONCE has implemented a customer protection protocol...certain indicators have been reached in JuegosONCE that may reflect these behaviors," the protocol and the measures taken to activate it are not explained. She believes that this paragraph needs improvement and recommends avoiding a paternalistic tone in the emails. Additionally, the interviewee suggests seeking different insights for the beginning of each email to approach the topic from various angles.

**Luis Munné. Freelance Creative and Copywriter. Professor at Antonio de Nebrija University**

Although the interviewee understands the legal requirements that need to be met, he finds the preliminary email to be very long and cumbersome to read. He recommends trying to be more concise and adopting a more empathetic language, speaking more directly to the target audience in order to establish a better connection. He believes it would be appropriate to simplify the information with shorter, more colloquial phrases, and to highlight the two or three most important points within each email. He considers the reactivation of the account email a good example and would attempt to align the rest of the emails with this pattern, understanding that each email serves different objectives and requires varying amounts of information. He would keep all the supportive and informative messages, as he believes they are necessary to engage the recipient. Lastly, he would try to avoid repeating the same texts, as in emails 2, 3, and 4. He thinks that repetition can lead the recipient to perceive it as "more of the same" and discourage them from reading.

**José Ignacio Niño. Professor at Complutense University of Madrid**

The interviewee believes that the texts are formulated in an excessively "legalistic" language and do not make them easy to read. He acknowledges that the texts need to convey legal matters, but they should be crafted in a language that empathizes more with the reader. The interviewee states that the texts convey what they need to say, but they do so in a rather cold and distant manner. He believes that a warmer and more relatable language is needed, especially considering that the texts will be sent to individuals who may be experiencing problems related to their gambling behavior. The interviewee emphasizes that the texts are not offensive; they are polite, but in his opinion, they need a more "emotional" touch and less "rational" tone. He points out the repetition of ideas and content across different levels, suggesting that while there may be a long time between each level, it would be interesting to make them less repetitive to give each message a unique personality that stands on its own.

**José Antonio Vivanco. Strategic Communication Advisor and Creative**

Based on these 5 corporate mandates, the interviewee believes that a new written communication should be reconsidered to convey messages to the online audience in a more convincingly creative and effective manner, using a more attractive, friendly, and above all, consumer-friendly language. He proposes creating a more organized narrative structure in the written messages, especially in emotional understanding, capturing empathy and audience identification with the content. The proposed communication tone should foster closeness and be expressed in the mode of "Written Recommendations" rather than warnings or advisories that only serve to distance the sender from the final recipient. To ensure immediate reading, comprehension, and assimilation of the sent messages, the interviewee proposes structuring each of the 5 emails in an attractive, receptive, and empathetic way for the customer. This approach would encourage reflection and identification with the messages by the user, making them their own and obtaining their feedback in an effective, convinced, and immediate manner. This can be achieved by constructing a creative communication concept based on reflection and responsibility in online gaming. Lastly, the interviewee suggests slogans such as "Your responsibility is part of the game," "Risk is not part of the game," and "For your safety, play responsibly" as final corporate messages.

**Juan Lamas. Technical Director at FEJAR**

The interviewee sought assistance from various associations to review the emails and obtained opinions from several clinicians on the topic. All of them agreed that the language is appropriate, with objective data and a sufficient delicacy to avoid aggressive reactions from the recipients. The interviewee finds the messages suitable for JuegosONCE users and emphasizes the term "users." He only identifies one inappropriate issue regarding the account reactivation email. According to him, if the accounts are suspended based on the player's gaming behavior after 3 months, it's not understandable to congratulate them later and state that ONCE noticed their change in playing behavior. In the interviewer's opinion, this seems to be a marketing strategy to win back the customer based on advertising rather than objective data.

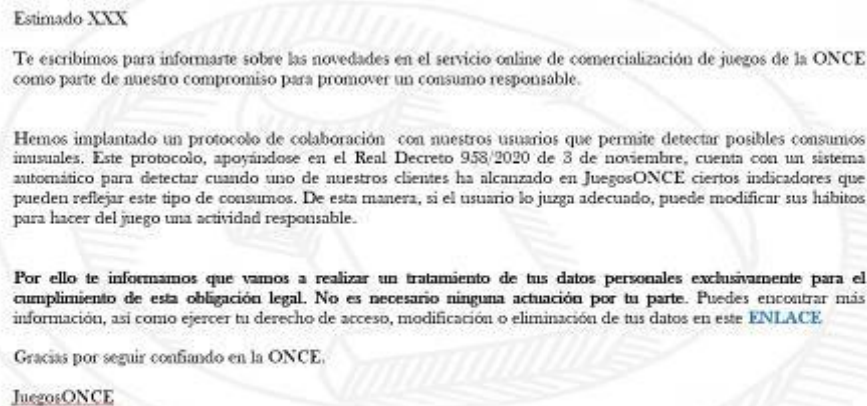
**4.6. Proposal**

Taking into consideration the outlined recommendations, an improved proposal for the studied emails has been developed. This proposal retains the same structure and content as established by ONCE's

Responsible Gaming policy. However, based on the findings from focus groups, literature research, and interviews, it aims to enhance the user's awareness of all available Responsible Gaming options and encourage their implementation. The messages feature text in blue that corresponds to links (hyperlinks) leading to various sections providing descriptions.

**Figures 2-7.** *Proposed improvements to the messages.*

**Figure 2.** *Initial mail (Subject: Notice of Responsible Gambling personal data processing in your JuegosONCE account).*



Estimado XXX

Te escribimos para informarte sobre las novedades en el servicio online de comercialización de juegos de la ONCE como parte de nuestro compromiso para promover un consumo responsable.

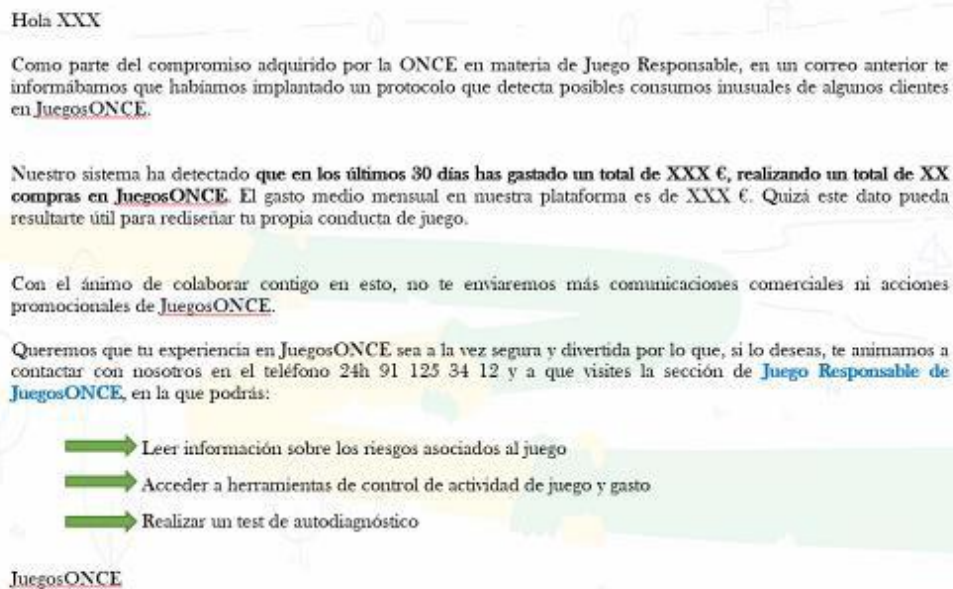
Hemos implantado un protocolo de colaboración con nuestros usuarios que permite detectar posibles consumos inusuales. Este protocolo, apoyándose en el Real Decreto 958/2020 de 3 de noviembre, cuenta con un sistema automático para detectar cuando uno de nuestros clientes ha alcanzado en JuegosONCE ciertos indicadores que pueden reflejar este tipo de consumos. De esta manera, si el usuario lo juzga adecuado, puede modificar sus hábitos para hacer del juego una actividad responsable.

Por ello te informamos que vamos a realizar un tratamiento de tus datos personales exclusivamente para el cumplimiento de esta obligación legal. No es necesario ninguna actuación por tu parte. Puedes encontrar más información, así como ejercer tu derecho de acceso, modificación o eliminación de tus datos en este [ENLACE](#)

Gracias por seguir confiando en la ONCE.

JuegosONCE

**Figure 3.** *Level 1 Email (Subject: Responsible Gambling Notice. Non-Commercial Communication).*



Hola XXX

Como parte del compromiso adquirido por la ONCE en materia de Juego Responsable, en un correo anterior te informábamos que habíamos implantado un protocolo que detecta posibles consumos inusuales de algunos clientes en JuegosONCE.

Nuestro sistema ha detectado que en los últimos 30 días has gastado un total de XXX €, realizando un total de XX compras en JuegosONCE. El gasto medio mensual en nuestra plataforma es de XXX €. Quizá este dato pueda resultarte útil para rediseñar tu propia conducta de juego.

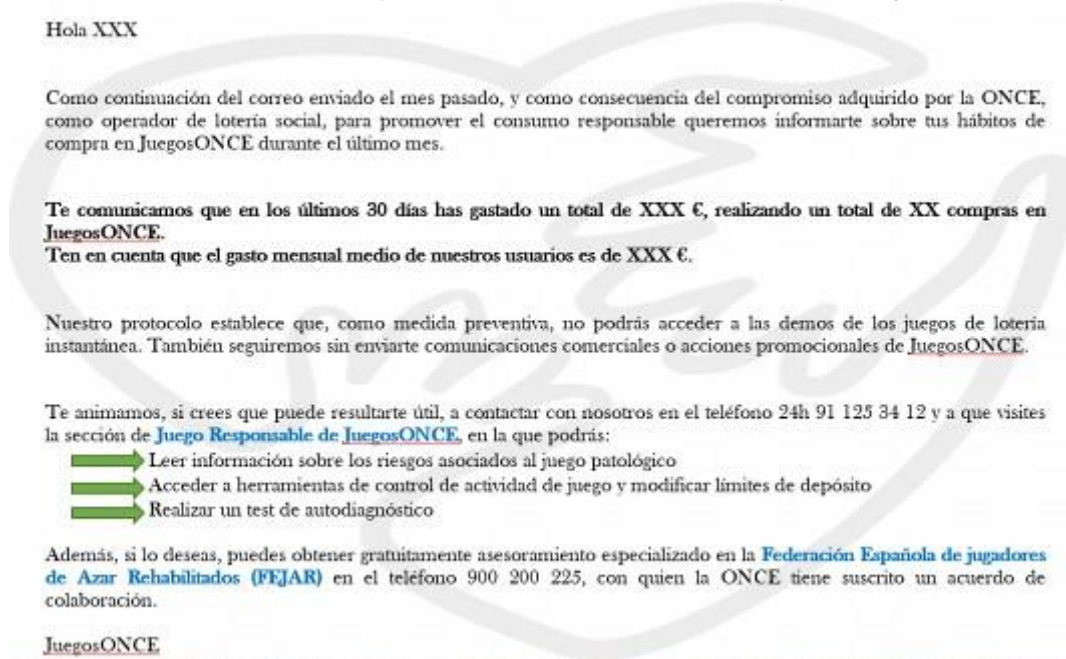
Con el ánimo de colaborar contigo en esto, no te enviaremos más comunicaciones comerciales ni acciones promocionales de JuegosONCE.

Queremos que tu experiencia en JuegosONCE sea a la vez segura y divertida por lo que, si lo deseas, te animamos a contactar con nosotros en el teléfono 24h 91 125 34 12 y a que visites la sección de [Juego Responsable de JuegosONCE](#), en la que podrás:

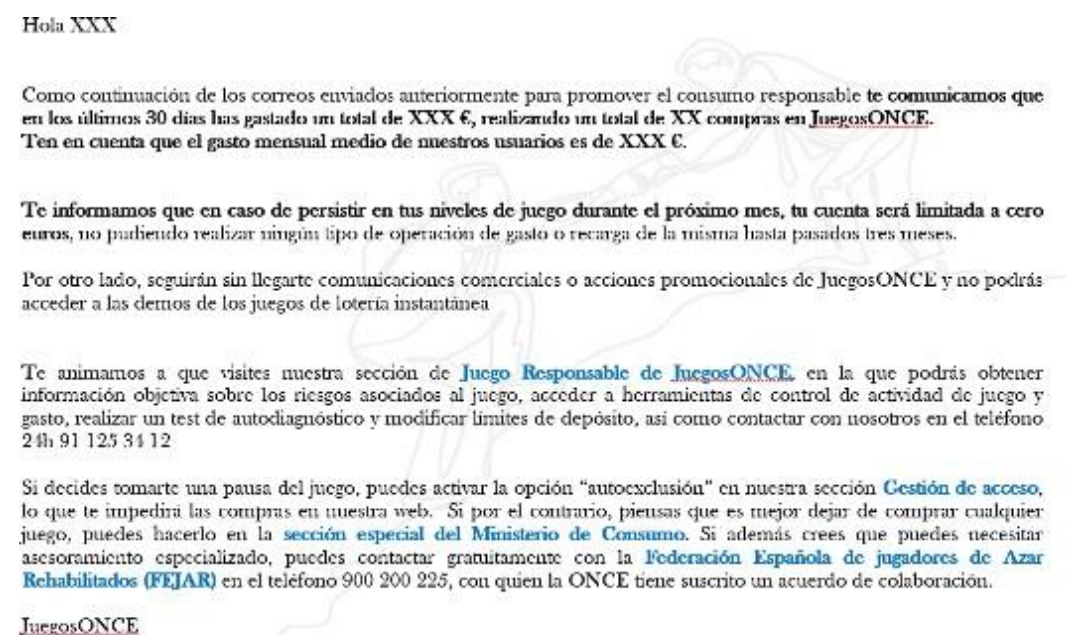
- ➔ Leer información sobre los riesgos asociados al juego
- ➔ Acceder a herramientas de control de actividad de juego y gasto
- ➔ Realizar un test de autodiagnóstico

JuegosONCE

**Figura 4. Level 2 Email (Subject: account restrictions Notice from JuegosONCE)**



**Figure 5. Level 3 Email (Subject: Notice of New Restrictions on Your JuegosONCE Account)**





**Figure 6.** *Level 4 Email (Subject: Notice of Temporary Suspension of Your JuegosONCE Account)*

Hola XXX

En los últimos 30 días has gastado un total de XXX €, realizando un total de XX compras en [JuegosONCE](#). El gasto mensual medio de nuestros usuarios en los últimos meses ha sido de XXX €.

Nuestro protocolo de Juego Responsable establece, como medida de protección ante conductas de juego problemático, que tus límites de gasto y recarga sean configurados a cero euros, no pudiendo realizar ningún tipo de operación de gasto o recarga hasta pasados tres meses.

Transcurridos tres meses desde la limitación temporal de la cuenta, procederemos a comunicarte la reactivación automática de la misma.

Podrás recuperar el dinero que tengas en tu cuenta, y te ingresaremos los premios que hayas podido obtener.

Para que en el futuro tu experiencia en [JuegosONCE](#) sea ilusionante pero segura, puedes consultar algunas herramientas para disfrutar de una experiencia de juego responsable en los siguientes enlaces:

- ➔ La sección de [Juego Responsable de JuegosONCE](#), en la que podrás leer información sobre los riesgos asociados al juego, acceder a las herramientas de control de gasto, realizar un test de autodiagnóstico y modificar límites de depósito
- ➔ La posibilidad de "autoexcluirse" en nuestra sección [Gestión de acceso](#), lo que te impedirá las compras en nuestra web. Si por el contrario, piensas que es mejor dejar de comprar cualquier juego, puedes hacerlo en la [sección especial del Ministerio de Consumo](#)
- ➔ El contacto con la [Federación Española de jugadores de Azar Rehabilitados \(FEJAR\)](#) en el teléfono 900 200 225, con quien la ONCE tiene suscrito un acuerdo de colaboración y que puede ofrecerte asesoramiento especializado gratuito. Nuestro [Servicio de Atención al Cliente de JuegosONCE](#)

[JuegosONCE](#)

**Figure 7.** *Level 5 Email (Subject: Notice of Reactivation of Your JuegosONCE Account)*

Hola XXX

Te escribimos para comunicarte que tras los tres meses de suspenso temporal, desde hoy, tu cuenta de juego deja de estar suspendida.

Esta reactivación incluye el volver a recibir de forma habitual las comunicaciones comerciales que se produzcan (si tienes activado el consentimiento para recibir este tipo de comunicaciones), así como el acceso a las demos de los distintos productos de lotería instantánea.

Recuerda que esta pausa ha formado parte del compromiso con el Juego Responsable de JuegosONCE, que promueve hábitos y comportamientos saludables y compatibles con actividades lúdicas.

Si decides seguir jugando, ya sabes que dispones de nuestras [herramientas de Juego Responsable](#) con las que podrás disfrutar de tus operaciones de juego desde la perspectiva de un consumo responsable, para que puedas disfrutar del juego de una forma segura y controlada.

Seguimos a tu lado y recuerda que si necesitas ayuda puedes contactarnos en el [Servicio de Atención al Cliente de JuegosONCE](#) o en el teléfono 24h 91 125 84 12

[JuegosONCE](#)

## 4.7. Study 2

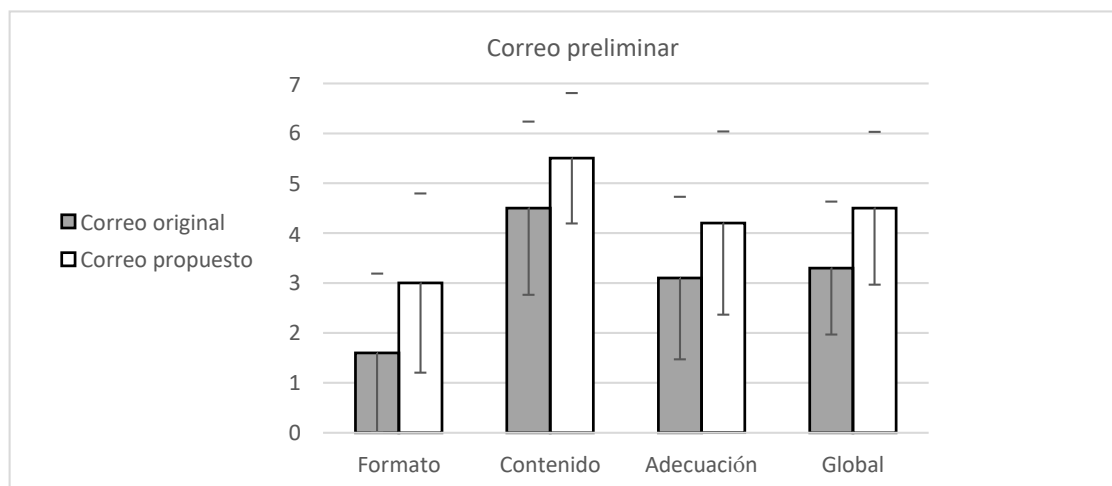
Both groups had a similar age and gender distribution with no significant difference (mean age  $20.2 \pm 2.3$  years). The results of the evaluation questionnaire are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Results of the evaluation questionnaire for the original and proposed email models. Scores are given on a scale from 0 (worse) to 7 (better).

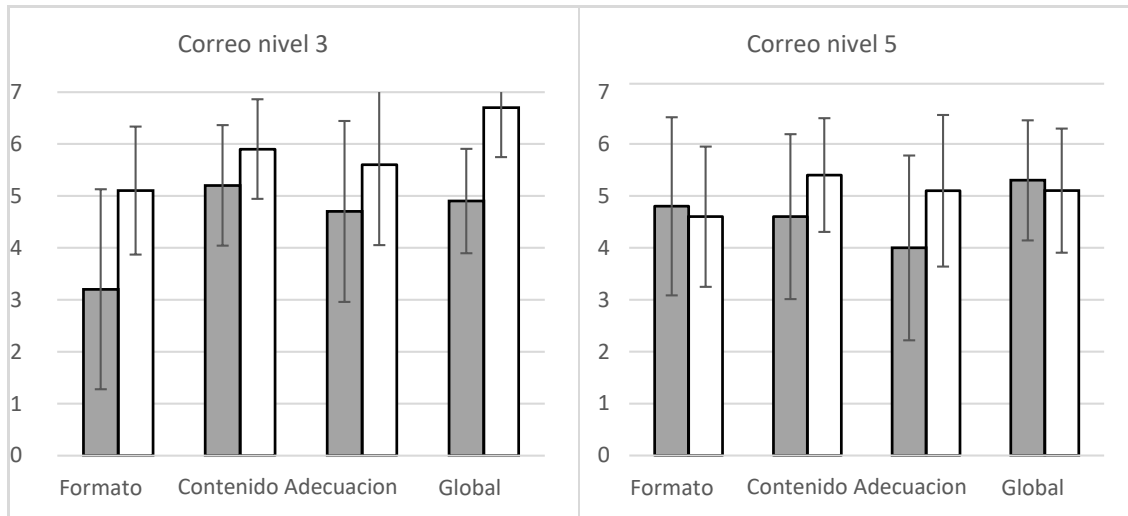
		Types of emails		Value <i>p</i>
		Originals	Proposals	
<b>Preliminary Email</b>	Format	1,6	3	0,0004
	Content	4,5	5,5	0,0044
	Appropriateness	3,1	4,2	0,0025
	Overall	3,3	4,5	0,0001
<b>Level 3 email</b>	Format	3,2	5,1	<0,0001
	Content	5,2	5,9	0,0025
	Appropriateness	4,7	5,6	0,0138
	Overall	4,9	6,7	0,0003
<b>Level 5 email</b>	Format	4,8	4,6	0,7089
	Content	4,6	5,4	0,0092
	Appropriateness	4	5,1	0,0027
	Overall	5,3	5,1	0,4528

It can be observed that in all cases except for the format and overall evaluation of the Level 5 email, the proposed messages are significantly superior to the original messages (Figure 8). This difference is more notable in the Level 3 email, where the score difference between the original and proposed messages is larger.

**Figure 8.** Graphical representation of the evaluation questionnaire for the original and proposed email models. Scores are given on a scale from 0 (worse) to 7 (better), along with the standard deviation.







Regarding gender, Table 2 shows that the scores for men and women were equivalent in most cases except for the "content" section of the original Level 3 email, where the score was higher for men. In the rest of the cases, the same pattern observed in Table 1 and Figure 8 of the overall results was followed.

**Table 2.** Results of the evaluation questionnaire for the original and proposed email models separated by gender. Scores are given on a scale from 0 (worse) to 7 (better).

		Types of emails					
		Originals			Proposed		
		Male	Female	Value <i>p</i>	Male	Female	Value <i>p</i>
<b>Preliminary Email</b>	Format	1,6	1,7	0,7683	2,9	3,0	0,8937
	Content	4,6	4,4	0,7598	5,2	5,6	0,5633
	Appropriateness	2,9	3,3	0,3683	4,2	4,3	0,8961
	Overall	3,2	3,3	0,7215	4,2	4,7	0,3560
<b>Level 3 email</b>	Format	3,3	3,2	0,9566	5,3	4,9	0,3509
	Content	5,6	4,8	0,0272	5,5	6,0	0,1062
	Appropriateness	4,8	4,6	0,0688	5,3	5,6	0,4805
	Overall	5,0	4,8	0,4858	5,4	5,8	0,3121
<b>Level 5 email</b>	Format	4,5	5,0	0,3467	4,4	4,8	0,4289
	Content	5,0	4,3	0,2192	5,1	5,5	0,2360
	Appropriateness	4,4	3,7	0,1989	4,5	5,3	0,1044
	Overall	5,2	5,3	0,5820	4,8	5,2	0,2901

## 5. DISCUSSION

Once all the fieldwork has been collected, we can observe trends and elements that are common across all the analyzed fronts (professionals, focus group participants, and bibliographic analysis). These elements enable the establishment of guidelines that can be applicable to both the established emails and other different Responsible Gaming materials, addressing Research Question 1:

- There is unanimous rejection of messages that have a "cookie policy" tone, and it is logical to assume that this might also lead to subsequent communications not being read. It is advisable to draft messages that avoid a sterile and purely legalistic tone.
- Both professionals and focus group participants find the length of the messages excessive, recommending them to be as concise as possible.
- It is suggested to enrich the messages' format. This recommendation includes the use of bold text, lists, increased paragraph spacing, and the use of images that evoke the operator's social responsibility.
- To prevent disinterest caused by the repetition of the same syntactic formulas observed in focus groups, it is recommended not to present all Responsible Gaming tools at once but to gradually introduce a variety of them as the potential addiction escalates. Therefore, it is recommended to suggest more tools to users as their spending increases, enabling better assimilation of the information.
- Bibliographic analysis indicates that message segmentation allows for better reach of the target audience. It is recommended to segment level 2 and 3 messages, as they are critical in changing habits (level 1 serves as a warning, and level 4 involves prohibition) based on age. Thus, messages oriented towards gains or positives are recommended for those under 35, and messages oriented towards losses or negatives for those over 35.
- Since user consumption data is available, it is recommended to include a reference to the general consumption average after informing the user of their own consumption to encourage self-reflection. It is important not to draw comparisons with this average to avoid making the user feel judged.
- The current tone used is recommended to be retained, as it is currently respectful and presents different Responsible Gaming options as recommendations rather than impositions. The results of this work indicate that while tone preference varies among interviewees, the current tone does not provoke rejection, which is the primary source of refractory responses received in such emails.
- It is recommended to refocus the account reactivation email model, as it triggers suspicion when congratulating the user for a behavior that has been imposed on them (not playing due to their account suspension). As an alternative, it is suggested to utilize the email to suggest a "fresh start" that encourages the user to control their spending and use Responsible Gaming tools to enhance their user experience.
- Due to the difficulty in obtaining reliable feedback for iterative optimization of the messages, implementing phone follow-ups is recommended to assess whether the emails influence user gameplay habit modifications. Alternatively, the use of WhatsApp as a non-intrusive questionnaire method is recommended to gather more information about message effectiveness.

Additionally, the validation questionnaire has confirmed the validity of the outlined guidelines, addressing Research Question 2. The results indicate that no boomerang effects or reactance mechanisms have emerged among participants. In terms of limitations, while the proof of concept demonstrates increased email effectiveness, being a validation questionnaire within a controlled environment does not provide a detailed study of whether the new proposal modifies gameplay habits

of recipients of such emails. Furthermore, according to ONCE's own sources, the operator possesses user data matching their age, hence segmenting email distribution for young (<35 years) and senior (>35 years) users is recommended, as bibliographic analysis suggests that age-based segmentation enhances message effectiveness. Thus, personalized messaging is supported based on whether it's directed towards young individuals (who would respond to a prevention/gain profile) or seniors (who would respond to a promotion/loss profile).

Another aspect to consider is the nature of the sending operator. In this work, the gaming operator is JuegosONCE, whose unique idiosyncrasies and strong social responsibility component differentiate it from other gaming sector companies. ONCE's Responsible Gaming action plan is audited annually, receiving one of the highest ratings in the sector.

However, despite ONCE's excellence in implementing Responsible Gaming policies, from JuegosONCE's reports, one of the issues with the analyzed emails is the lack of feedback on their effectiveness. According to the operator's data, from their user database to whom these emails have been sent (inspired by those sent by operators in the Northern European gaming market), only 40-50 have responded, and most of these complaints are due to interference with their gaming habits. Thus, measuring email effectiveness outside the valuation questionnaire used in this work is objectively and reliably challenging. As future lines of research and based on the positive response from focus groups when this option was presented, the idea of implementing phone follow-ups or utilizing instant messaging applications for real users receiving such emails gains momentum to assess their effectiveness. Furthermore, providing training to key process actors (operators, vendors) and conducting seminars for future health communication specialists would be beneficial for future campaigns.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the emails provided by gaming operator JuegosONCE, we have examined the main impact factors in Responsible Gaming communication through bibliographic analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. This information has led to the creation of general recommendations, which in turn fostered the development of improved message proposals that were more positively evaluated compared to the originals in an independent proof-of-concept test, confirming the initial hypothesis. This research lays the foundation for a methodology to enhance Responsible Gaming messages and opens the door to future iterations that optimize gaming operator communication for reducing the incidence of Pathological Gambling among users.

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