

**Do social casino games influence gambling cognitions in young Australians?**

**A randomized controlled study**

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## **Statement of Authorship**

I certify that this manuscript does not contain material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any University or other tertiary institution, and that to the best of my knowledge, contains no materials previously published except where due reference is made.

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October 4<sup>th</sup> 2016

As the supervisor(s) of this thesis, I declare that this work conforms to University guidelines and is of suitable quality for submission.

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## **Word Count**

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## Abstract

**Objective:** Social casino games (SCGs) are free-to-play online gambling-themed games that structurally resemble gambling and involve purchasable virtual credits, but do not offer a financial payout and thus are not legally considered gambling activities. The aim of this study was to examine whether playing SCGs had any impact on gambling attitudes (general opinions about gambling) and cognitions (specific gambling-related biases). **Method:** This study employed a test-retest randomized controlled design. A total of 77 first-year psychology students with no previous SCG experience were recruited. An online survey measuring gambling attitudes and cognitions was administered, and then participants were randomly allocated to one of three groups: (1) *free-play* (play SCG with free credit); (2) *financed* (play SCG with \$20 purchased credit); and (3) *control* (no SCG play). The experimental groups were required to download 'Slotomania', and play for 20 minutes per day over a three-day period. A post-test survey assessed gambling attitudes and cognitions after three days. **Results:** A repeated-measures mixed ANOVA assessed changes in cognition outcomes from baseline to post-test. All three groups reported significant increases from baseline for gambling attitudes, but there were no significant group differences in cognitions. A chi-square analysis determined SCG-playing significantly decreased future intent to gamble, but did not alter general views of gambling. **Conclusions:** SCG-playing did not affect participants' attitudes towards or cognitions about gambling. Although this work is preliminary, it demonstrates the role of SCGs and financial investment in gambling migration is complex and warrants further investigation.

**Keywords:** Social Casino Games, Gambling, Attitudes, Cognitions