

Bringing Research to LIFE

Upcoming Events

Research Orientation Series

Winter 2012 Series

Week 9: Office of Research Ethics and Compliance (OREC)

Thursday, Jan. 26, 2012
1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
ORS Boardroom
540 Machray Hall

Friday, Jan. 27, 2012
12:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.
718 John Buhler Research Ctr

Week 10: Office of Research Services (ORS) - Contracts

Thursday, Feb. 2, 2012
1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
ORS Boardroom
540 Machray Hall

Friday, Feb. 3, 2012
12:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.
700 John Buhler Research Ctr

Café Scientifique

Renewing hope for spinal cord injuries

Tuesday, Feb. 7, 2012
at 7:00 p.m.

McNally Robinson Booksellers
1120 Grant Avenue

**FREE ADMISSION
EVERYONE WELCOME**

To assist us in planning seating, RSVP to:
(204) 474-9020

For more information, visit:
umanitoba.ca/research/cafe_scientifique.html

Talking to the 24-hour poker people

A 'netnography' explores a popular online casino game



Photo by Joel Durkee

Navin Bahl was awarded \$5,000 by the MGCC to support his innovative gambling-related research.

BY MELNI GHATTORA

The University of Manitoba is an institution filled with visionaries, pioneers, innovators, mavericks, and creators. These individuals walk amongst us in many forms: students, athletes, academic and support staff, professors and researchers.

One young researcher—an explorer, if you will—was awarded Manitoba's first studentship for gambling research. Navin Bahl, an I.H. Asper School of Business marketing graduate student, examines the motivations of professional poker players.

Supported by the Manitoba Gambling Control Commission (MGCC), Bahl's unique project uses new qualitative methodology called "netnography."

Netnography adapts traditional, in-person ethnographic research techniques of anthropology to the study of the online cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications. Bahl's research

includes a content-analysis of posts and discussions on online poker forums as well as online interviews with online poker players.

He narrowed in on the most prominent online poker forum. "Of the top 30 online poker forums, there are over 40 million posts on this particular site. Using theoretical sampling, I gathered relevant quotes and conducted a content analysis on that data," explains Bahl. "At this stage I am contacting poker players from this forum and have conducted 15 online interviews thus far."

Twooplustwo.com is an international online poker forum. Bahl posted on the site to find participants for an online interview. He also connected with potential interview candidates through individuals commenting on an interview with Bahl.

His next step is to approach forum opinion leaders. These individuals are identified as those most likely to write messages to transmit factual information or knowledge and can easily influence attitudes and behavior

change of forum followers. Users are also identified based on the number of posts made through an automatically assigned title: 15 posts denotes a "newbie" and 6000 is what the forum calls "carpal tunnel."

Bahl notes that there are successful poker players making hundreds of thousands of dollars and leading a successful lifestyle.

"However," he says, "what I'm trying to get at is that these [online] poker players feel stigmatized and live in a marginalized – or at least isolated – community."

He explains: "If you compare a casino gambler who is successful and making hundreds or thousands versus an online poker player, I think more people would have a negative attitude towards the online player versus the professional casino gambler."

Most of the people he has interviewed are in their 20s and predominantly male; the eldest interviewee is 52. To date he has conducted interviews with two female online poker players.

"I'm studying it from a social marketing perspective," says Bahl. "Some of the websites that are purely profit-driven, and not government-run, state that you shouldn't gamble if you are underage but do so in very fine print."

He does recognize that socially responsible websites are addressing these issues and putting safeguards in place. "But," he adds, "most sites don't offer any additional links or information on problem gambling and they aren't offering any safeguards to slow down your playing. In fact, they try and increase the pace of your gambling."

Manitoba is investigating the possibility of joining provinces with provincially-governed online gambling sites; B.C. was one of the first provinces to launch an Internet casino operation. Bahl believes that in order for the MGCC to run a successful online gambling venue, it must put safeguards in place. "Stricter laws are needed," he says.

"If Manitoba was to start an online poker venue, it should have self-limiting programs for problem gamblers or even programs to encourage self-exclusion," says Bahl. He also believes that there should be better age restriction, more accounting for problem gambling and that all gambling sites should be required to advertise solutions for problem gambling.

Though he can't say for sure when the province will make its move, he is studying the issue and feels Manitoba will follow suit and embrace the online gambling industry. "In my humble opinion, we're far from doing it within the next couple of years," he says.