

Chapter 10

Effects on Gambling Behaviour of Developments in Information Technology: A Grounded Theoretical Framework

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth and acceptance of online gambling is concerning to academics and clinicians in the field of pathological gambling research. This study proposes a theoretical framework that outlines the effect of technological developments in information technology (IT) on gambling behaviour. The aim of the study is to produce theoretical propositions that can be investigated empirically in future research. Grounded Theory was employed to enable a theoretical framework to conceptualise online gambling behaviour and the utility of IT in gambling behaviour. In total, eight participants were interviewed via semi-structured interviews until theoretical saturation was achieved. The theoretical framework was contrasted against existing problem gambling research. Grounded Theory has indicated that developments in IT have been a catalyst for Elevated Gambling Involvement, in terms of both participation and pre-occupation, and that this phenomenon was produced via the following behavioural constructs: Increased Outcome Control, Reduced Discipline, Expediency and Consumer Value.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Participation in online gambling activities is increasing rapidly (Griffiths, 2010). The increase in participation in gambling has the compound accumulative effect of removing negative stigma attributed to the risk behaviour, justifying it as a socially acceptable leisure activity (LaPlante & Shaffer, 2007; Cornish, 1978). The rapid growth and acceptance of online gambling is concerning to academics and clinicians in the field of pathological gambling research (LaPlante, Kleschinsky, LaBrie, Nelson, & Shaffer, 2008a). However, this social issue is compounded by the fact that many treatment professionals and clinicians have little knowledge available about the nature and causes of disordered online gambling simply because there is a distinct lack of research on this subject. Gambling pathology is considered to be an under researched phenomenon (Meyer, Hayer, & Griffiths, 2009; Shaffer, Peller, LaPlante, Nelson, & LaBrie, 2010). It is highly probable that what is accepted knowledge from pathological gambling research will not necessarily be directly applicable to online gambling.

Online gambling comprises radically variant environmental and structural characteristics compared to the traditional modes of gambling that current etiological knowledge is based on. Currently, online gambling is still conceptualised in accordance with theory relating to offline gambling behaviour. Furthermore, research has been directed towards developing harm minimisation strategies for online gambling on the assumption that the risk factors involved for developing a pathological gambling disorder online is identical to risk factors involved offline. There is potential for focusing on responsible gambling strategies that are not online gambling specific. Put simply, there is potential for missing the risk factors for development of pathological gambling unique to online gambling if the gambling studies field

relies solely on existing offline research without understanding the complexity of cognitive and behavioural processes existent within online gambling. According to Shaffer et al. (2010) “Many of the policy development efforts rely on professional opinions and/or conventional wisdoms related to gambling generally, and internet gambling, specifically” (p. 271).

To date, only a handful of peer-reviewed studies are available that focus specifically on online gambling. Shaffer et al. (2010) conducted a literature search for internet gambling research that yielded only 30 studies that had internet gambling as the focus. Within these 30 studies the majority were simply commentaries (20) and the remaining studies were based on self-report rather than empirical behavioural data. The self-report studies were further limited through a lack of representativeness via self-selected samples and low response rates. As Baumeister, Vohs, and Funder (2007) demonstrated, self-report data is often incongruent with observed behavioural data. With this in mind, exclusively using self-report evidence to determine internet gambling social and health policy in the absence of behavioural data is imprudent.

In the literature review Shaffer et al. (2010) omitted the two empirical studies that provided actual behavioural data. Perhaps the most pertinent conclusion in the longitudinal behavioural study of internet sports wagering was that the participants demonstrated an adaptation to the behaviour (LaPlante, Schumann, LaBrie, & Shaffer, 2008b). Put simply, gambling behaviour decreased over time; with a particular decline observed within the first 90 days of initially gambling within that specific betting account. With reference to this finding LaPlante et al. (2008b) concluded that assumptions that internet gambling will stimulate excessive patterns of gambling were erroneous. However, research has also demonstrated that online gamblers bet across several different betting accounts and on different gambling activities (i.e., not just sports wagering) simultaneously (Parke,

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