A three stage analysis of motivational and behavioural factors in UK internet gambling

James Mulkeen [a], Hussein A. Abdou [b,*], Jonathan Parke [a]

[a] Salford Business School, University of Salford, Salford, Greater Manchester, M5 4WT, UK
[b] Huddersfield Business School, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD1 3DH, UK

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) to determine differences in UK internet player responses to their motives for gambling online. It also evaluates their views relating to responsible gambling practices and behavioural factors. A three stage analysis applying Structural Equation Modelling (SEM); multiple regression; and multinomial logistic regression is used. The main research instruments is an internet based questionnaire. Our findings for the motivation factors highlight that the most significant factors which players perceive are escape and relaxation; financial motivation; and social and competition. In terms of player views in relation to responsible gambling practices and behavioural factors both self-exclusion and self-help; and game design are identified as the key factors. Other factors such as proactive responsible gambling; transparent terms and conditions; and use of player information are not acknowledged as significant factors by players. This study also suggests that the financial motive to gamble should be divided into the following sub-motives: 'to win money' and to 'earn income'. Our main policy recommendation includes the need for a more transparent system that places emphasis on tangible or auditable means of demonstrating ethical responsibilities, and to determine areas of improvement.

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1. Introduction

In general there is agreement that there has been significant growth in Internet gambling, that its popularity has increased and that the industry is likely to experience further continued growth as technological and Internet developments occur and the market becomes more liberal (Global Betting and Gaming Consultants (GBGC), 2007, 2010; Global Betting and Gaming Consultants (GBGC), 2009; Gainsbury, Parke, & Suhonen, 2012; Gainsbury, Russell, Wood, Hing, & Blaszczynski, 2015). Whilst the growth in internet gambling has presented many benefits, such as increased government revenue and leisure opportunities, it has also presented challenges for many regulatory and legislative authorities who have found it difficult to effectively regulate the social, commercial and clinical aspects of the Internet gambling industry (Balestra & Cabot, 2006; Rose & Owens, 2005).

Within the UK, the increased popularity and significance of Internet gambling has occurred in an era where the state and organisations are jointly responsible as guardians and guarantors of corporate citizenship (O'Dwyer, 2003; Cochran, 2007). Whilst corporate citizenships suggests that the ultimate responsibility to gamble responsibly rests with the individual player, it also places a requirement on gambling organisations

to provide their customers with sufficient, necessary and timely information so that they understand the nature and risks associated with the games, products and services that they use. In addition, such citizenship requires those providing gambling products and services to balance the need for the individual player to self-identify and self-regulate their behaviour with the organisations obligation to ensure that they operate in a responsible, transparent and non-exploitative way whilst making a profit (eCOGRA, 2007; Blaszcznski, Ladouceur, & Shaffer, 2008; Blaszczynski et al., 2011).

The main aims of this paper are to investigate UK players' perception of their motives for gambling online; and to evaluate their views on responsible gambling practices and behavioural factors. Our novel contribution includes applying a fresh methodology with a three stage analysis to identify players' motivations and behaviours. The methodology uses Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), multiple regression and multinomial logistic regression, which represents an original approach to the current literature. Whilst the study identifies a number of original contributions, we uniquely identify two sub-categories of financial motivation which are 'to win money' and to 'earn income'. In addition, we identify 'game design' and 'self-exclusion and self-help' as the main factors affecting gambling behaviour. Our paper findings also question the ethical effectiveness of self-regulation which should underpin systems of corporate social responsibility.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature; Section 3 outlines the research methodology;

* Corresponding author.
  E-mail address: h.abdou@hud.ac.uk (H.A. Abdou).

Section 4 outlines key results and discussions; and Section 5 provides summary conclusions and suggests areas for future research.

2. Review of relevant literature

An individual may gamble for a variety of reasons such as for enjoyment, as a coping mechanism, for financial reasons, and for social reasons (Walker, Hinch, & Weighill, 2005; Lee, Chae, LEE, & Kim, 2007; Abdi, 2014). Some studies have associated motivation to gamble with age (Clark & Clarkson, 2007; Gupta et al., 2013), and gender (Corney & Davis, 2010; Walker et al., 2005) and others have evaluated gender preferences for specific gambling activities (eCOGRA, 2007; Parke, Griffiths, & Parke, 2007; Wood & Williams, 2009). Gainsbury et al. (2015) also acknowledge differences in the profile of those who gamble online when compared to those who gamble using land based venues. In general these studies conclude that females are more likely to be motivated to play games of chance whereas males are motivated to play games based on skill.

In relation to motives to gamble, Lee et al. (2007) propose a model based on the following factors: excitement; socialization, avoidance, monetary and amusement. Whilst they conclude that the five-factors are highly reliable/consistent (alpha = 0.92), they suggest that the monetary motive is most effective in explaining gambling motivation and severity. They eliminate the social motive as it has no effect on the monetary motive, and they conclude that whilst the avoidance and excitement motives show no direct influence on gambling motivation and severity, they do exert an indirect influence through the monetary motive. An alternative model of gambling motivation is proposed by Lloyd et al. (2010) who highlight the following three primary motives for gambling: mood regulation; to obtain money and for enjoyment. They conclude that the more an individual plays the stronger their gambling motivation to regulate mood, obtain money and seek enjoyment when compared with those who did not have a gambling problem. They also report that females played more to regulate their mood, are less motivated by money and are less likely to derive enjoyment from gambling activities when compared to males. In addition, older players tended to play to regulate mood. Clearly there are similarities between Lee et al. (2007) and Lloyd et al. (2010) models, for example the significance of money as a motive. However, there are differences between the models, for example, Lee et al. (2007) discount the social motive whereas Lloyd et al. (2010) highlight the significance of social motive via mood regulation and enjoyment. Consequently, our paper develops on previous studies; and therefore the significance of financial, social and enjoyment factors, apart from other factors, are considered in this paper. In addition, our paper investigates whether there is a link between the identified motives to gamble and PGSI individual scores and PGSI classification.

Managing the relationship between an individual's motivation to gamble and their ability to manage their gambling behaviour in a responsible way is both complex and multi-faceted. Whilst the management of this relationship has been further complicated by the lack of a global regulation system, there is growing consensus that any management system should be based on the principle of self-regulation at an organisational level. For Power (2004) and Kingma (2004) this reflects established models of corporate social responsibility (CSR) where governments within each jurisdiction broadly outline standards which they expect organisations to meet. Individual gambling organisation and regulatory agencies in turn, become responsible for creating risk management and regulatory systems that demonstrate compliance and due diligence. Whilst this approach is driven, in part, by the global and diversified nature of contemporary business organisations, which makes it impossible to legislate for individual eventualities, one practical problem of this system is that it places greater emphasis on the monitoring of such self-regulation if the organisations responsible gambling features and tools are to be perceived as credible and effective. To achieve this aim many organisations legitimise their operational practices through third party accreditation, however, the success of such third part accreditation is questionable, as Gainsbury et al. (2012) suggests that there is conflicting evidence as to whether it is understood by consumers and whether it affects their motivation to gamble and their actual gambling behaviour.

With greater emphasis on organisations not only needing to act in a responsible way but also being perceived as acting in a responsible way (Gambling Commission, 2008; Griffiths, 2009a, 2012; Hancock, Schellinck, & Schrans, 2008; Hing & Breen, 2008; and Schellinck & Schrans, 2007) there is an increased need for players to be aware of, to understand and to trust the products and services that they use. This need places an increased obligation on gambling providers to understand what motivates an individual to gamble and to acknowledge the factors that may cause harm to those using their products and services. This is further complicated as there is agreement that players regard responsible gambling features as important and valuable (Parke et al., 2007; Wood & Griffiths, 2007, 2008) but their use by players is relatively low, and is lower where engagement with such features is voluntary (Griffiths, 2009a, 2012; Australian Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform, 2011).

To date, there is limited understanding of player perceptions of the effectiveness of operator self-regulation as a consumer protection tool in responsible Internet gambling (Gainsbury et al., 2012; and Wood & Williams, 2009, 2011). As such, our paper explores consumer perceptions of responsible gambling by evaluating players' perceptions of motives to gamble online and their opinions relating to gambling practices and behavioural factors that enable them to gamble in a responsible and ethical way.

3. Methodology

A web based questionnaire is used to collect responses from players who had accessed an online gambling site in the previous 3 months. The questionnaire contains 113 questions consisting of both open and closed questions (no further information is provided in relation to both motivational and behavioural factors using open questions). Divided into four sections, the first section of the questionnaire is designed to obtain consent from participants and collect information on their behaviour including the types of games played and frequency of play. Standard Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) questions are used to determine an individual's PGSI score and classification. The PGSI consists of nine questions using a four point Likert-scale i.e. 'never = 0', 'sometimes = 1', 'most of the time = 2', 'almost always = 3'. Based on participants' responses, a numerical score is obtained resulting in the following classifications: score of 0 = 'Non-problem group'; score of 1 or 2 = 'Low problem group'; score of 3 to 7 = 'Moderate problem group' and score of 8 or more = Problem group'.

Section two focuses on players perceptions of the factors that motivate them to play.[1] These include factors such as relaxation, excitement, boredom, financial and social. Section three establishes player attitudes towards 52 responsible gambling statements on responsible gambling practices and behavioural factors using a seven point Likert-scale (whereby 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). These statements relate to, for example, self-exclusion options, perceived knowledge of staff, problem gambling information, advice and referral in relation to problem gambling, limit setting, play for free facilities and practices, game design protocols, player analytics and stakeholder involvement in research. The final part of the questionnaire relates to socio-demographic information including age, gender and ethnic background. It should be emphasised that PGSI is determined using established measures whilst the remainder of question included in our questionnaire are developed specifically for this study. Web-based surveys have been used in previous studies and are acknowledged as a

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[1] This section also includes the factors which they perceive cause harm. However, responses to these questions have not been included in this paper.