



Fun and fair, and I don't care: The role of enjoyment, fairness and subjective norms on online gambling intentions[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Online gambling is a fast-growing phenomenon reflected in an industry experiencing rapid growth rates. Effective marketing in the industry requires a better understanding of what drives online gambling intention of recreational gamblers. This study introduces and considers the concept of anticipated enjoyment which, together with perceived fairness and social norm, impact online gambling intention. The resultant research model is tested using mediated-moderated regression among a sample of 270 respondents from an online gambling firm. Results indicate that anticipated enjoyment is an important driver of online gambling intention. Implications for management are discussed and limitations noted.

1. Introduction

The recreational online gambling sector is an important component of the digital economy that is led by European companies which represent half of the worldwide market. The [European Gaming and Betting Association \(2018\)](#) website reports that online gambling accounted for 17.5% (€16.5bn) of the total European gambling market and is expected to grow to 22% (€24.9bn) by 2020. The user profile and products of online gambling sites differ from those of traditional land-based physical gambling shops with an emphasis on sports gambling (37%), poker (24%), casinos (22%) and others (17%). The information reported is provided by H2 Gambling Capital, a firm that specialises in providing subscription data on the gambling industry to interested operators, suppliers, financial institutions and regulators. The growth in smartphone adoption and cheaper and more widespread Internet access has provided an increasing number of people with 24/7 accessibility to online gambling sites. In these circumstances, the online gambling market has witnessed increasingly aggressive marketing activities among Internet gambling firms as they compete for players and market share.

Studies of gambling in the literature (e.g., [Gainsbury et al., 2014](#)) have traditionally focused on problem gambling and related issues concerning health and addiction. However, recreational gamblers see gambling as a leisure time pursuit. The [National Addiction Service of](#)

[Singapore \(2018\)](#) provides a useful basis for understanding the difference between recreational or social gambling and problem gambling. It holds that the former refers to those who gamble for fun, are able to remain within their means and can stop anytime. On the other hand, the latter continue to invest time and money on gambling despite experiencing harmful, negative consequences. This distinction is also reflected in the literature with The [National Research Council \(US\) Committee on the Social and Economic Impact of Pathological Gambling \(1999\)](#) holding that recreational gamblers are those who gamble for entertainment and typically do not risk more than they can afford ([Custer and Milt, 1985](#); [Shaffer et al., 1997](#)). Unlike pathological gamblers they do not chase their losses.

Writing before the advent of the Internet and online gambling, [Kusyszn \(1984\)](#) highlighted the overwhelming prevalence and the widespread pursuit of social gambling as against pathological-compulsive gambling in the United States. He argued for serious study of social gambling and suggested that gambling encompasses a cognitive decision-making belief phase, an affective phase involving winning or fear of losing and a conative wagering phase. Furthermore, [Kusyszn \(1984\)](#), p. 136 noted that: “A wager is a play. Through play, gamblers confirm their existence and affirm their net worth”. He argues that a most fruitful and veridical perspective is to look at gambling as psychic play that allows its consideration as a leisure phenomenon. More recently, [Calado and Griffiths \(2016\)](#) who undertook a systematic review

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of empirical research on problem gambling between 2000 and 2015, identify 69 studies and conclude that there are variations in problem gambling rates in countries across the world ranging from 0.12% to 5.8%, and in Europe between 0.12% and 3.4%. Although the focus of their paper was on problem gambling, their findings indirectly confirm Kusyszyn (1984) earlier observation about the overwhelming prevalence of social or recreational gambling. This paper takes up the challenge and considers the expanding online gambling industry and seeks to better understand the pursuit of online gambling as recreational activity.

Issues of fairness of the products, games and services offered by online gambling firms are increasingly a concern among players and regulators (Cook, 2017; UKGC, 2017a, 2017b; Wood and Williams, 2009; Yani-de-Soriano et al., 2012). In addition, given the stigma that gambling can still carry, social norms are also likely to be an important consideration in customers' intention to undertake online gambling. Despite such concerns, the online gambling market continues to grow. It would appear that the anticipated enjoyment, which the pursuit of online gambling is able to provide, significantly impacts players' intention to gamble online.

The marketing of online gambling raises ethical concerns that need to be considered and addressed. However, this research does not focus on ethics. Rather it adopts a consumer behaviour perspective and seeks better understanding of online gambling intentions. The paper starts by considering the theoretical context and adopts TRA - Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), to underpin the relationships among anticipated enjoyment, perceived fairness and social norms, and their impact on online gambling intention. A number of studies have suggested or used the TRA to examine gambling behaviour among different populations (e.g., Cummings and Corney, 1987; Moore and Ohtuska, 1997, 1999; Oh and Hsu, 2001). The TRA lends itself well to the circumstances of recreational gamblers where the gambling decision is a volitional process. Researchers who have used the TRA in a gambling context have proposed modifications to provide a better conceptual model (e.g., Moore and Ohtuska, 1997; Oh and Hsu, 2001). We follow a similar approach by introducing the concepts of anticipated enjoyment and perceived fairness as drivers to purchase intention in an online gambling context with a view to better understand online gambling intention. Each of the constructs are described and hypotheses and a research model are proposed. Data are collected from 270 customers of an online gambling firm and analysed using mediated-moderated regression. Results are reported, implications are discussed, limitations are noted and possible areas for further research are indicated.

2. Literature review

Online gambling is the fastest growing form of gambling, yet a look at the academic literature on gambling shows that research on marketing and consumer behaviour of online gambling is still relatively limited. The main reported motivations for the use of online gambling are convenience, ease and comfort (Wood et al., 2007) that have been made possible by the rise of Internet technology. Fun, excitement and entertainment (American Gaming Association, 2006) and relief from boredom and excitement (Derevensky and Gupta, 2007) have also been highlighted while an online survey of 10,838 online casino and poker players from 96 countries reported high levels of mistrust and concerns regarding online gambling (Gainsbury et al., 2013). It is clear that a sense of enjoyment or anticipated enjoyment, together with perceived fairness, which are the main focus of this study may be important drivers of online gambling intention.

This research investigates how anticipated enjoyment and perceived fairness together with social norms impact online gambling intention. Purchase intention has a long history in marketing research and is considered the last stage before actual behaviour, which in the context of the online gambling industry would represent online gambling

intention. Several theories have been developed to seek to understand behavioural outcomes of which the Theory of Reasoned Action - TRA and its elaboration in the Theory of planned Behaviour - TpB (Ajzen, 1985) are among the better known. In the context of Information Systems, the emphasis has primarily been to understand employees' acceptance and use of IT technology. As a result, elaborations of TRA and TpB have been proposed that include: the Technology Acceptance Model - TAM (Davis, 1985) together with extensions e.g., TAM 2 (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000), hybrids e.g., Combined TAM and TpB (Taylor and Todd, 1995) and syntheses in the form of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Technology - UTUAT (Venkatesh et al., 2003). It has been argued that UTUAT with at least eight independent variables is rather chaotic (Bagozzi, 2007) and requires a significant number of variables (van Raaij and Schepers, 2008). This research employs the simpler TRA with its focus on subjective norms and attitude toward the specific behaviour as antecedents to behaviour intention. While TRA has previously been used in a traditional land-based gambling context (e.g., Moore and Moore, 1999), its application to the online gambling context is limited. To do so, we introduce the notion of an affective, pre-purchase, anticipated enjoyment construct to replace attitude to the specific behaviour, retain social norms, and introduce perceived fairness as a key antecedent to both social norms and anticipated enjoyment.

3. Anticipated enjoyment

3.1. Expectations and anticipation

The notion of anticipated enjoyment brings to mind issues of expectations that have been intimately linked to satisfaction in the services marketing literature. Satisfaction is defined by Oliver (1997, p. 13) as “the consumer's fulfilment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under- or over-fulfilment”. The process theory that underlines this definition of satisfaction envisages expectancy disconfirmation, resulting from the discrepancy between what is expected and what was experienced. It is clear that while satisfaction occurs post-consumption, expectation is a pre-consumption prediction. Oliver (2006, p. 576) defines expectation as: “an anticipation of future consequences based on prior experience and other many and varied sources of information.” The author further argues that consumers “will pursue those products which they expect to fulfil their needs. Thus, the expectation and not the need is what the consumer brings into the purchase” (Oliver, 2006, p. 577). Expectations are best thought of as standards employed by customers that Oliver holds can be predictive (will) and ideal (should/ desired). Predictive expectations are pre-purchase cognition about the performance of a product (Park and Choi, 1998), and represent a consumer's prior beliefs about the future performance or attributes of a product (Ngobo, 1997; Summers and Granbois, 1977). Anticipation is a central theme in the conceptualisation of predictive expectations. Research shows that when ideal rather than predictive expectations are asked, reported satisfaction is necessarily lower (Tse and Wilton, 1988). Zeithaml et al. (1993) have used focus group interviews to propose antecedents to expectations in a service context. The authors envisage ‘expected service’ as consisting of a continuum extending from ‘desired’ to ‘adequate’ service with a zone of tolerance in between. The two end-points on the continuum are seen as influenced by a variety of antecedents.

3.2. Satisfaction and enjoyment

As noted above, satisfaction is a post-purchase phenomenon that is purely experiential and results from the comparative processes to expectations whether ideal or predictive. However, enjoyment is a reflective process that in the case of online gambling occurs as a result of

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