Mobile phone: The next adolescent gambling problem?

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The growth of the mobile phone industry in the UK has been widespread including mass penetration of the adolescent market. It is often claimed by marketers that online gambling makes commercial sense (i.e., the combining of gambling and the Internet into one convenient package). Gambling looks like it might take another step towards convenience with the advent of mobile phone gambling. This is gambling on the move, whenever, wherever, with the wireless world of mobile gambling. Since it is unnatural to be always near a computer, it makes the cellular phone the perfect medium for online gambling. Whenever a gambler has a few minutes to spare (at the airport, in traffic, etc.), a person can occupy themselves by gambling. Merrill Lynch predicts that online gambling will jump to $58 billion by 2004 and that mobile gambling will lead the way (Kriz, 2001).

Robert Lezec, (the CEO of the mobile gambling company, Indiqu), claims that "mobile gambling will undoubtedly be the most lucrative of all m-commerce segments over time." As with all new forms of technology, especially when used for gambling, there are some areas of potential concern.
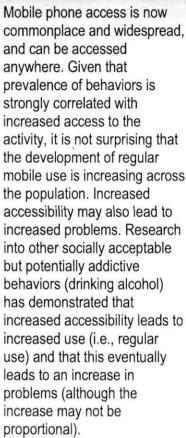
It has also been said that promoters of mobile phone gambling think it will attract *younger* gamblers. In fact, some companies are deliberately targeting the under-16 market with mobile phones specially designed for them (e.g. the Nokia 3300) although they are not targeting gambling per se. This is something that needs to be monitored.

Mobile phones that do not implement a user ID program will be very hard to trace and check – in particular when it comes to underage customers trying to place a bet.

Market research by Ericsson indicates that almost 10% of Swedes would prefer to gamble by phone and that among younger mobile users the percentage was even higher.

Access and convenience -It could be argued that mobile phones make "impulse betting" easier. It is also another example of convenience gambling.

Mobile phone access is now commonplace and widespread, and can be accessed anywhere. Given that prevalence of behaviors is strongly correlated with increased access to the activity, it is not surprising that the development of regular mobile use is increasing across the population. Increased accessibility may also lead to increased problems. Research into other socially acceptable but potentially addictive behaviors (drinking alcohol) has demonstrated that increased accessibility leads to increased use (i.e., regular use) and that this eventually leads to an increase in problems (although the increase may not be proportional).

Another problem with mobile phone gambling concerns the legal responsibilities associated with this behavior. Currently, the legal framework for mobile gambling has yet to be operationalized. As with most technological forms of gambling, e-gaming regulations and laws are in a state of flux.

Furthermore, the privacy afforded by mobile phone gambling, creates a new set of problems for law enforcement

and taxation issues. With internet gambling there are a number of ways that a person's nationality can be determined. For instance, some sites use Internet protocol addresses to determine a user's tax jurisdiction, some call for user's bank addresses, and others require social security numbers. As previously mentioned, mobile phones that do not implement a user ID program will be very difficult to trace and check. Industry analysts project it will be 2-3 years before governments and technology providers around the world can arrive at a consensus for a verifiable ID system, and encryption (Kris, 2001).

The introduction of widespread mobile phone gambling may come at a price. As with other new forms of gambling (such as internet gambling), the social impact of such activities needs to be rigorously monitored.

References
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