

# Is internet gambling 'doubly addictive'?

Gambling addictions always result from an interaction and interplay between many factors including the person's biological and/or genetic predisposition, their psychological constitution, their social environment and the nature of the activity itself (Griffiths, 1999). There is no precise frequency level of a gambling game at which people become addicted since addiction will be an integrated mix of factors in which frequency is just one factor in the overall equation. Professor Mark Griffiths & Dr Richard Wood from the International Gambling Research Unit, Nottingham Trent University briefly overview the literature on 'internet addiction' and examine whether internet gambling can be 'doubly addictive'.

Gambling has long been known to be potentially addictive. Coupled with several research reports that the internet may be addictive (Griffiths, 2000a), it has been speculated that internet gambling may be 'doubly addictive'. However, further examination of this appears to show no evidence for such speculations. Technological addictions such as internet addiction can be viewed as a subset of behavioural addictions and feature all the core components of addiction (e.g., salience, euphoria, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict and relapse (Griffiths, 2002). Young (1999) claims internet addiction is a broad term that covers a wide variety of behaviours and impulse control problems, and categorized by five specific subtypes. These are;

- **Cybersexual addiction:** compulsive use of adult websites for cybersex and cyberporn.
- **Cyber-relationship addiction:** over-involvement in online relationships
- **Net compulsions:** obsessive online gambling, shopping or day-trading.
- **Information overload:** compulsive web surfing or database searches.
- **Computer addiction :** obsessive computer game playing (e.g. Doom, Myst, Solitaire etc.)

Griffiths (2000a) has argued that many of these excessive users are not "internet addicts" but just use the internet excessively as a medium to fuel other addictions. Put very simply, a gambling addict who engages in their chosen behaviour online is not addicted to the internet. The internet is just the place where they engage in the behaviour. However, in contrast to this, there are case study reports of individuals who appear to be addicted to the internet itself (e.g. Young, 1996; Griffiths, 2000b). These are usually people who use internet chat rooms or play fantasy

role playing games - activities that they would not engage in except on the internet itself. These individuals to some extent are engaged in "text-based virtual realities" and take on other social personas and social identities as a way of making themselves feel good about themselves. In these cases, the internet may provide an alternative reality to the user and allow them feelings of immersion and anonymity that may lead to an altered state of consciousness. This in itself may be highly psychologically and/or physiologically rewarding. To a gambling addict, the internet could potentially be a dangerous medium. However, to date there is no evidence that internet gambling is 'doubly addictive' particularly as the internet appears to be just a medium to engage in the behaviour of choice.

Another concern that has been noted relates to the relative anonymity of internet gambling, which may lead to disinhibition and increased levels of gambling. However, Griffiths (2003) has pointed out that, using online customer tracking, internet gambling operators can collect lots of data about the gambler. For instance, on joining loyalty schemes, players supply lots of information including name, address, telephone number, date of birth, and gender. In addition, many internet gambling sites require valid credit card details before a customer can begin playing. Service providers know a gambler's favourite game, the amounts they have wagered, and they can track the playing patterns of their customers. While this may be worrying for some players concerned about their privacy, it also offers the opportunity to monitor excessive gambling. Such information could be used in a socially responsible manner by

internet usage, namely that many, many people do not bother to read terms and conditions and, even if they do, they may not fully understand them. The risk of terms and conditions being overlooked or misunderstood may also increase due to "heat of the moment factors", such as excitement of the occasion or the need to place a bet with speed and haste. Thus, consent might not be obtained despite the contents of the terms and conditions.

● It can therefore be said that the consent argument introduces contractual law (i.e., "civil" law) concepts into a process that is more closely connected with the criminal law. The police are not hindered by contractual law considerations and nor should anti-corruption investigators merely because they are operating in the private as opposed to public sector. There is a public interest in investigating allegations of corruption.

To emphasise, NADPO's position is not that the consent argument does not "stack up", rather that there is a much better solution, namely a statutory gateway, hence the proposals made. It would be better all round if the consent argument, presently the only option, could be put to one side.

**How the statutory gateway works**

The statutory gateway provides a clear alternative to the selection of consent as the Schedule 2 or 3 condition required by the first data protection principle, due to the contents of the sixth condition within Schedule 3, which, where material, reads as follows:

6. The processing

(c) is otherwise necessary for the purposes of establishing, exercising or defending legal rights.

If the proposed gateway is

introduced into the Gambling Bill the sports governing body could request the transfer of data where necessary for the purposes of exercising their legal rights as secured by the gateway, being the legal rights to prevent or detect corruption and/or to apprehend or prosecute offenders.

For personal data, a similar route forward is found in the fifth condition to Schedule 2 which, where material, reads as follows:

5. The processing is necessary

(b) for the exercise of any functions conferred on any person by or under any enactment,

The functions exercised are, again, the prevention or detection of corruption and/or the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

**Safeguards**

The proposed gateway introduced the concept of a "licensed organisation concerned with the investigation of corruption in sport". This concept has particular significance within the context of NADPO's submissions.

It is essential that the rights of the individual be always respected, which requires comprehensive regulatory supervision of the sports governing body. Thus, the writer envisages a process of licensing as a condition precedent to the use of the proposed statutory gateway; only those sports governing bodies that have obtained the prior licensing or authorisation of a responsible body will be entitled to use the gateway. A system of prior licensing or authorisation will aid the effective "policing" of the sports governing body.

The writer envisages a very rigorous licensing procedure, which will consist of three elements:

● The payment of a substantial

licensing fee;

● Proof of adherence to a clear Code of Practice containing provisions concerning education and training, records management, practice and procedure etc;

● Regular independent auditing of the licensed sports governing body.

The purpose of the licensing procedure is to ensure transparency, to avoid the charge that disreputable organisations could have access to personal data and to secure public confidence in the system. It is suggested that a suitable licensing body would be the appropriate Secretary of State, with the licence taking the effect of a statutory instrument or order. Naturally, licenses would be subject to renewal and revocation procedures.

In addition to regulation through licensing, the Information Commissioner would maintain all his statutory powers. Thus, the sports governing body would be subject to two primary levels of regulation under these proposals. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the Data Protection Act contains provisions under which Data Controllers can be brought before the criminal courts, the civil courts and the Information Tribunal.

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