TECHNOLOGICAL TRENDS, BEHAVIOURAL TRACKING, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TOOLS IN GAMBLING

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BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

• Behavioural tracking technologies
• Online gambling vs. offline gambling
• Online behavioural tracking: Implications for PG screening tools
• Behavioural tracking SR tools
• Technological trends in the gambling studies field
• Conclusions

"I had a doctor staple my eyelids open. Now I can gamble online around the clock!"
TRENDS IN GAMBLING
(Griffiths, 2006)

- Gambling becoming more technologised
- Gambling becoming more convenient and accessible
- Gambling coming out of gambling environments
- Gambling becoming more anonymous and "asocial"
- Gambling converging with other technologies

“Gambling while taking a bath? Have you lost your mind?”
INCREASE IN USE OF BEHAVIOURAL TRACKING DATA

• In 2002, two separate academic papers examined BT:
  • Wang & Aquino (2002) highlighted the advantages to the gaming industry in relation to slot machines
  • Griffiths & Parke (2002) highlighted the disadvantages to the players in relation to Internet gambling
  • Both papers claimed that companies could keep track of what the customer was playing
• Behavioural tracking can clearly be used both positively and negatively.

• However, various companies are now beginning to use tracking technologies as a way of helping problem gamblers rather than exploiting them (e.g., Svenska Spel, 888.com).

• Evaluation is therefore needed on whether these tracking interventions really work.

• Tracking technologies may also have implications for future diagnostic criteria for problem gambling (Griffiths, 2009; Griffiths & Whitty, 2010)
IS ONLINE GAMBLING MORE ‘DANGEROUS’ THAN OFFLINE GAMBLING?

• The answer to this question depends on what the definitions are of ‘harmful’ or ‘dangerous’

• Or (more importantly) whether online gambling is more harmful or dangerous to particular kinds of people (e.g., problem gamblers).
There have been a number of different approaches to collecting information about online gamblers.

Most of the published studies have used one of two approaches – BT studies and self-report studies (e.g., survey studies).

Both of these approaches have advantages and disadvantages. These are now briefly evaluated:
BEHAVIOURAL TRACKING STUDIES VERSUS SELF-REPORT STUDIES
(Griffiths & Auer, 2011)

• Behavioural tracking data provides a totally objective record of an individual’s gambling behaviour on a particular online gambling website

• (Individuals in self-report studies may be prone to social desirability factors, unreliable memory, etc.).

• Behavioural tracking data provide a record of events and can be revisited after the event itself has finished (whereas self-report studies cannot).
• BT data usually comprise very large sample sizes whereas self-report studies are based on smaller sample sizes.

• BT data collected from only one gambling site tells us nothing about the person’s Internet gambling in general (as Internet gamblers typically gamble on more than one site)

• BT data does not account for the fact that more than one person can use a particular account
• BT data always comes from unrepresentative samples (i.e., players that use one particular internet gambling site)

• Whereas the very best self-report studies (e.g., the BGPS in Great Britain) use random and nationally representative samples.

• BT data tell us nothing about why people gamble (whereas self-report data can)
• BT data cannot be used for comparing online and offline gambling as data are only collected on one group of people (i.e., online gamblers).

• BT data cannot be used for making comparisons about whether online gambling is safer or more dangerous than offline gambling as data are only collected on one group of people (i.e., online gamblers).

• Self-report methods can be used to compare two (or more) groups of gamblers and is the only method we currently have to infer to what extent one medium of gambling may or may not be more or less safe.
• Some self-report studies have the potential to use nationally representative samples of gamblers

• Whereas BT studies rely on self-selected samples of gamblers who use the online gambling website in question.

• BT data tell us nothing about the relationships between gambling and other behaviours (e.g. alcohol and tobacco use, health)
• BT data cannot examine problem gambling using current diagnostic criteria (whereas self-report studies can).

• In fact, BT data studies cannot tell us anything about problem gambling as this is not a variable that has been examined in any of the published studies to date.
INTERNET GAMBLING AND PROBLEM GAMBLING
(Griffiths & Auer, 2011)

• A number of empirical studies have reported that problem gambling is more prevalent among internet gamblers than non-internet gamblers

• Only one study has been published that compared internet gamblers and non-internet gamblers using a nationally representative sample

• Griffiths et al (2009) DSM-IV scores showed that problem gambling prevalence rate was significantly higher among Internet gamblers than non-Internet gamblers (5% vs 0.5%)
• However, medium of the internet could be a less protective environment for vulnerable gamblers (e.g., problem gamblers)

• More importantly, what exactly is an “online gambler”? (Wardle & Griffiths, 2011)

• Very few people only gamble online – most online gamblers also gamble offline. Therefore, the internet merely provides ‘convenience’ gambling
One of the aims was to explore whether any there were any differences in profile between people who choose to gamble in certain modes and consider, briefly, whether gambling behaviour varied between these groups (n=7756)

- Offline gambling only (80.5%; 0.9%/0.4%)
- Online gambling only (2.1%; 0%)
- Mixed mode gambling - different activities (6.8%; 4.3%/3.4%)
- Mixed mode gambling – same activities (10.6%; 2.4%/0.8%)
ONLINE BEHAVIOURAL TRACKING FOR PG SCREENING CRITERIA: IMPLICATIONS
(Griffiths, 2009)

• Various members of the online gambling industry have claimed that problem gambling can be identified online.

• If this is true, it has implications for current problem gambling screening instruments.

• A brief analysis of the extent to which each DSM criterion of problem gambling can be identified online shows that only a few behaviours can be identified.
CAN INTERNET PROBLEM GAMBLING BE IDENTIFIED USING DSM-IV CRITERIA?
(Griffiths, 2009; Griffiths & Whitty, 2010)

- Salience/Preoccupation (good possibility)
- Tolerance (possibly)
- Relapse (possibly)
- Withdrawal (unlikely)
- Escape from reality (unlikely)
- Chasing losses (definitely)
- Conceal Involvement (unlikely)
- Unsociable Behaviour (unlikely)
- Ruin a Relationship/Opportunity (unlikely)
- Bail-out (slight possibility)
ACTUAL ONLINE PROBLEM GAMBLING BEHAVIOUR?

- Chasing losses
- Total preoccupation with gambling
- Increase of gambling behaviour (time & money) over time
- Playing a variety of stakes
- Playing a variety of games
- Player ‘reload’ within gambling session
- Frequent payment method changes
- Verbal aggression in chat rooms
- Constant complaints to customer services
- Most importantly it is change in usual behaviour
BEHAVIOURAL TRACKING SR TOOLS

- *Svenska Spel* launched package of SR tools (*PlayScan*) that aims to prevent problems with gaming in an active way.

- *PlayScan* designed to detect players at risk of developing gaming problems and offers them tools to change their behaviour.

- *PlayScan* has been compared to a safety belt (i.e., something you use without intending to actually make use of).

- The tool measures increases and/or decreases of players’ gaming behaviour and uses a ‘traffic light’ identification system.

- The use of the system is voluntary, but *Svenska Spel* strongly recommends its customers to use it.
TECHNOLOGICAL TRENDS IN GAMBLING

(Griffiths, 2011)

• Feminization of remote gambling

• Increase in numbers of digital natives

• Increase of empirical research into remote gambling

“Grandma would love to hear about your home run, Ryan...right after the flop.”
• Increase in mobile gaming

• Increase in gambling via social networking

• Increase in gambling convergence and cross-fertilization of technologies
• Increase in technological advertising and marketing of gambling

• Emergence of new type of problem gambling

• Increase in online help and therapy for problem gamblers

"I'm going to Internets Anonymous... we meet in a Yahoo chatroom!"
CONCLUSIONS

• Technology is changing the way:
  – gamblers are playing games
  – gamblers are being tracked
  – gamblers are being marketed to
  – gamblers are receiving help

• Problem gambling appears to be more prevalent online although this doesn’t necessarily mean the online medium is more ‘dangerous’
• It may mean that it causes more problems for those who are more vulnerable

• BT technologies are changing the way that we view problem gambling behaviour

• Technology may help identify and define problem gambling in terms of actual gambling behaviour rather than consequences of it