

Engaging in mobile gambling for social interaction can lead to problem gambling

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A study carried out by the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics at NUI Galway has examined how the different gratifications sought from mobile gambling explain problematic versus non-

problematic patterns in highly involved gamblers.

For a subgroup of vulnerable individuals, [gambling](#) involvement can be pathological and reflects a personality disorder. For many others though, gambling is a non-problematic recreational activity.

The study focused specifically on mobile gambling, whereby people gamble online using their smartphones through specially designed apps and websites. Mobile gambling differs from land-based and traditional forms of gambling in that the opportunity to place bets and engage with casinos is constantly present and easily accessible.

Instead of going to a physical bookmaker or casino, mobile gambling is done quickly and swiftly, anytime, anywhere, with a few taps on a mobile device, and mobile apps have been found to promote a form of gambling that is more impulsive and habitual in nature.

The study found that high involvement in mobile gambling is not essentially problematic. Problem and non-problem gamblers differ in the gratifications they seek from mobile gambling. Using gambling apps to facilitate [social interaction](#) and avoid boredom are key motivations for problem gamblers, but not for non-problem gamblers.

Moreover, the person's mood depends on the type of passion they hold for mobile gambling. When their passion is obsessive, mood tends to be low, but is much higher when the passion is harmonious and under control.

Lead author of the study, Dr. Eoin Whelan, Senior Lecturer in Business Information Systems, J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics at NUI Galway, said: "The pandemic and the lockdown that followed has led to a surge in people gambling through their smartphones. We know that mobile gambling is different to traditional forms of gambling in that

it attracts younger people and is more conducive to risky behavior. However, for some highly involved mobile gamblers, it is not a harmful activity and can actually be associated with positive mood. For others, it can have severe adverse effects on them and their families.

"Our study sought to find out what differentiates the two groups with the findings suggesting social gratifications are much more pertinent in problematic gamblers. The link between social gratifications and obsessive gambling could be a result of the broader cultural normalization of mobile gambling. Regulators wishing to promote responsible gambling should consider restricting gambling app promotions from depictions and associations with social inclusion."

More information: Eoin Whelan et al, A casino in my pocket: Gratifications associated with obsessive and harmonious passion for mobile gambling, *PLOS ONE* (2021). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0246432](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246432)

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