

Is technology always good for the society? An analysis of online gambling among adolescents in Spain

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Extended abstract

The generalization of the use of the Internet, as well as its continuous development, has motivated several changes in society and people's daily lives (Ling, 2004). While many of these changes are positive (e.g., greater access to information...), there are also negative consequences for the individuals' health and well-being, such as anxiety, depression, and poor-quality sleep due to the misuse of this new technology (e.g., Abbouyi et al., 2024; Pang and Quan, 2024; Woods and Scott, 2016). Moreover, Internet may also have negative social consequences such as poorer or fewer social relationships (Koyuncu et al., 2014) and loneliness (Marttila et al., 2021), increasing the likelihood of suffering bullying through these channels.

More recently, new technologies have facilitated the possibility of gambling via the Internet (Calado & Griffiths, 2016; Sztainert et al., 2018), which has emerged as a potential problem that can have serious physical and mental health consequences both for the gambler and for their close environment. Indeed, the number of online gamblers in Spain was already close to 1,5 million of citizens in 2020, and it is continuously increasing (Dirección General de Ordenación del Juego, 2021). With the aim of contributing to the online gambling literature, this study focuses on adolescents (as they are, at the same time, the group with the highest internet use and the most vulnerable group (Malak et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2014) and analyses a variety of factors associated with this behavior in Spain, an under researched cultural context. Understanding the role of the proportion of income devoted to online gambling is fundamental in order to identify high risk groups and develop policies targeted specially to these groups and minimize the impact of this behavioral addiction in the Spanish society.

Specifically, the paper mainly focuses on the role of conflictual relationships and its moderation effects in the proportion of spent income devoted to online gambling, and considers the role of several other socio-demographic characteristics as well (e.g., gender, age, immigrant, parents' educational level...). To that end, interval regression analyses are used with a nationally representative sample of Spanish adolescents (n=38,010; $M_{age} = 15.69$; 51.4% females). This methodology is especially appropriate to not only find significant predictors, but also provide quantitative interpretations of their associations with the behavior.

The results indicate that spent income, bullying victimization and poor-quality or conflictual relationships with the mother are positively associated with online gambling. Moreover, the last two predictors moderate the association between spent income and online gambling. The results also indicate that parents and schools have some room to maneuver. Thus, informative campaigns at school integrating parents could reduce online gambling directly and indirectly via the improvement of adolescents' conflictual relationships. Moreover, special attention should be paid to boys, among whom most online gambling takes place.

Keywords: Online gambling; Internet addiction; Conflictual relationships; Interval regression

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