

The Prevalence of Workplace Internet Gambling and its Effects on Productivity: A Survey among Management Level Professionals

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Abstract

Purpose: Productivity at the workplace is a perpetual management concern in any firm. With the advent of online sports gambling and ease of access to the internet, employers are grappling with yet other unheralded distractions coming hot on the heels of social media distractions at the work place. The purpose of this paper is to determine the level of prevalence and effect of the practice on work place productivity.

Design/methodology/approach: A mixed method approach was applied in that both quantitative and qualitative data was sought while also employing both descriptive and inferential approaches during analysis. Primary data was collected using a semi-structured online tool from management professionals of two professional membership organizations namely, the Kenya Institute of Management (KIM) and the Institute of Human Resource Management (IHRM). While the tool was sent to the entire membership database of these two institutions, convenience sampling was adopted by only considering responses from those who responded to the online questionnaire.

Findings: Significant levels of gambling at the work place exists most of which is online sport gambling. The greatest motivator of the behavior is to make some extra money while the impact includes spending upto 1 hour a day during working hours doing online sport betting.

Research limitations: This study was only limited to management-level professionals and minimal qualitative data was collected to mine more on feelings and sentiments of subjects on the topic.

Practical implications: The findings of the study justify the adoption of strategies by organizations towards reducing the undesirable impacts of problem gambling within the workplace.

Keywords

Internet Gambling; Workplace Productivity; Problem Gambling

1. Introduction

Not more than a decade ago, legal gambling in Kenya and in most parts of the world was limited to countable casinos in major towns, practiced mostly by high earning individuals and the practice largely viewed as an oddity. This has however changed in recent years and gambling is now seen as an acceptable part of Kenya's mainstream society and an almost acceptable way of making a living. This has especially been aided by the advent of internet or online gambling especially driven by sports betting which is easily done through any device that has internet connection.

Griffiths, (2009) notes that as a consequence, internet gambling has the potential to utilize these factors to maximum effect and impact on almost all areas of life including the workplace. Employees do not even have to leave their desks as they can set up internet accounts with a variety of different bookmakers, online bingo operators, or online casinos.

1.1 Internet gambling

Internet gambling or online gambling means, "the business of placing, receiving or otherwise knowingly transmitting a bet or wager by any means which involves the use, at least in part, of the Internet, but does not include the performance of the customary activities of a financial transaction provider, or any interactive computer service or telecommunications service.", (US Legal, 2016).

Online gambling or internet gambling globally was estimated to be worth \$19 billion in 2012 and expected to reach \$635 billion (596 billion euros) by the year 2022 (Nikkinen, 2017). In Africa, nations like Kenya, Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria are experiencing a massive expansion in sports bookmaking and other types of betting. Young sports football lovers are staking heavily causing a boom in betting across the nation. In Kenya, indigenous online sport betting companies like Sportpesa have experienced so much growth in less than 5 years than they have expanded to the European markets and are now sponsoring football Premier league clubs in the UK and Spain to the tune of billions of US dollars (The Star, 2016).

It has been claimed that remote types of gambling have provided the biggest cultural shift in gambling in the past decade (Griffiths et al., 2006) and that the introduction of internet gambling has the potential to lead to increased levels of problematic gambling behavior (Griffiths & Parke, 2002; Griffiths, 2003). To date, knowledge and understanding of how the medium of the internet affects gambling behavior is sparse. While about 10 years ago Griffith (2009) noted that, "Globally speaking, proliferation of internet access is still an emerging trend and it will take some time before the effects on gambling behavior surface," traditional poker, lotteries, slot machines, casino games, port bets, physical book makers have now been replaced by online gambling. Thanks to the gambling boom, most companies in the space of internet gambling are pocketing billions, arguably at the expense of gamblers and now even employers.

Internet and sports betting is, at its simplest defined by Griffiths (2003) as placing a financial stake on the result of a sporting match, in addition to on events that happen within the more massive fixture or game using internet supporting devices such as mobile phones, computers, tablets among others. In addition to betting on sporting outcomes, "sports betting" can also imply betting on other actions such as the result of a reality television program or of a political election.

Researchers in the area of gambling have noted that to date, there have been a relatively small number of studies on internet gambling. Furthermore, there have not been a variety of different studies examining different aspects of internet gambling and more so, the impact of the practice on work place productivity.

1.2 Online sports betting in Kenya

Internet/online sports betting in Kenya is not more than 5 years old with the earliest online sports betting company setting up shop in the country only in 2014, (The Standard, 2018). Since then, the Kenyan market has seen a proliferation of new firms dealing only in online sport betting and the country currently counts more than 20 such companies set up and functioning.

A local news daily (The Standard, 2018), notes that the boom in online sports betting started around 2012, some few years after the emergence of mobile technology. Bettors were not necessarily using their mobile devices at that time but rather they used to bet online in the betting houses as they had computers connected to the internet. With time, some began to switch to playing at internet cafes which were mushrooming in the country while the few who could afford to buy a personal computer (PC) ended up betting on their PCs.

The daily writes that it was only at the start of 2015 when the wave of smartphones started to be felt in Kenya that many Kenyans were able to afford smartphones, some of which were not original brands and therefore, could be purchased cheaply. The smartphone market flooded with time as retailers, cross-border traders, and internet service providers all competed against each other making almost every 3 people out of 5 having access to a smartphone. This, coupled with the abundance of mobile money service providers such as M-Pesa meant that even without a bank account or a Visa/MasterCard, anyone in Kenya who has a mobile device that can connect to the internet is able to bet online using M-Pesa and other local mobile money service providers.

So far, not much has been done in research to try and understand the phenomenon of these factors in contributing to negatives like problem gambling and gambling at the workplace at the expense of productivity.

1.3 Workplace/Employee productivity

Employee productivity (sometimes referred to as workforce or workplace productivity) is an assessment of the efficiency of a worker or group of workers in the work environment, (SHRM, 2005). Productivity may be evaluated in terms of the output of an employee in a specific period of time. Productivity can be thought of as how effectively organisations, and the people working in them, produce value from available inputs (CIPD, 2015). Because much of the success of any organization relies upon the productivity of its workforce, employee productivity is an important consideration for businesses. There is consensus that sustained productivity growth has been the main driver of higher living standards in industrialized capitalist economies.

Productivity at the workplace is affected by any number of things that a human being maybe susceptible to including ill health, indisposition in one way or another, distraction at work, engagement levels, et al, (SHRM, 2005). A report by Udemy (2018) however notes that distraction during working hours is increasingly becoming the greatest single most impactful factor to productivity at the workplace. These distractions include; small talk and

office gossip, smartphone distraction through calls, gaming etc. and using office tech for personal activities including social media and gambling.

Organisations are therefore becoming increasingly aware of the need to regulate usage of technology in the office using policies and technology itself to discourage certain undesirable behaviours that influence productivity at the workplace. There is however scanty research on the actual prevalence and impact of some of these distractions including internet gambling on productivity.

2. Study Objectives

The purpose of this paper was to establish the prevalence and effect of internet sport gambling at the workplace on employee productivity. The specific objectives of this study were:

- i) To find out the prevalence of betting among management professionals and students.
- ii) To find out the main drivers and influencers of gambling.
- iii) To find out the effect of betting on workplace productivity.

3. Literature Review

Even though the literature is limited, the constant message across the nascent research is that the popularity of online sports gambling is speedily surpassing all other forms of betting regarding participation. A UK report by Gambling Commission (2017), for instance, indicates that betting on soccer (football) has seen a momentous growth in the sports betting sector, growing 69 percent between 2009 and 2012, even though this has principally been driven by the popularity of in-play betting.

In Kenya, sports betting had grown by leaps and bounds since 2013 when the first online sports gambling company SportPesa was registered. Data released by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) in 2015 revealed that the annual gross turnover of sports gambling industry in Kenya approximates USD21 million (KES 2.1 billion). With stiff competition, the total revenue is anticipated to rise to more than USD50 million (KES 5.1 billion) in the next three years.

The boom in online sports betting commenced about 2012, some few years after the arrival of mobile technology. Gamblers were not essentially using their mobile devices at that time, but instead, they used to bet online in the gaming houses as they had computers interconnected with the internet. Over time, some started to switch to playing at internet cafes which were burgeoning in the country whereas the few who could afford to purchase a personal computer (PC) ended up gambling on their PCs (Kuo, 2017).

It was only at the beginning of 2015 that the wave of smartphones began to be felt in Kenya. Since then, a lot of Kenyans were able to pay for smartphones, some of which were not original products, hence, could be bought cheaply. The smartphone market flooded over time as vendors, cross-border dealers, and internet service providers all rivaled each other making almost every three persons out of 5 having access to a smartphone (Yetu, 2018).

3.1 Dynamism in the gambling market

Over and above the fast growth of online sports gambling, studies have also drawn attention to the main changes like gaming that sports betting has caused. Betting is no longer constrained to just placing a stake on the outcome of a football match or horse race, but now takes account of betting “in-the-run”, “micro-betting”, and “in play betting” and where participants can place a bet on a variety of possible outcomes after the game has already started and, as it happens during a game (for example which team will be leading in a football match at halftime) (Abbott, 2017).

The rapid diversification of gambling products through Internet technologies particularly mobile phone, means that sports betting is no longer confined to local pubs, racecourses, and casinos. To be exact, the gambling market is, as Abbott (2017) advocates, ‘changing as new practices of betting are introduced, advertised and delivered via the Internet, mobile phones and related devices.’ True to this, the global nature of the World Wide Web signifies that there is a sporting activity or result at any time of the day or night available wherever in the world, for a person to place a bet on. As Luce, Nadeau, and Kairouz (2016) note, technology transcends national boundaries, fashioning an international market for betting, and for sports gambling more specifically.

According to Griffiths (2009), in many countries there appears to be a slow shift from gambling being taken out of gambling environments and into the home and the workplace. Historically, what we have witnessed is a shift from destination resorts (such as Las Vegas and Atlantic City) to individual gaming establishments in most major cities (e.g., betting shops, casinos, amusement arcades, bingo halls). More recently there has been a large increase in single site gambling opportunities (e.g., slot machines in non-gaming venues, lottery tickets sold in mainstream retail outlets), to gambling from home or work (e.g., internet gambling). It is also clear that the “newer” forms of gambling like internet gambling are activities that are done almost exclusively from non-gambling environments.

Markham, Young, and Doran (2016) provide an overview of changes to betting settings attributable to online technologies, stating that as modes of gambling get more interactive, the action becomes more social. A critical reflection is that betting has departed from being in more traditional “social” settings (for example in bars/pubs) and into the workplace and home where it can be carried out in seclusion. In the case of Internet betting, the shift is from a certain site to be in cyberspace (Kuss, & Griffiths, 2011). While this holds, Griffiths (2003) argues that “technology will continue offering new market opportunities not only in the shape of Internet betting but also in the form of more technologically advanced slot machines, interactive television (i-TV) betting and video lottery terminals (VLTs).”

3.2 Gambling at the workplace

The workplace is repeatedly used as a shield to hide the problem from relatives, and gambling and gambling-related activities are now carried out during working hours. The Internet is full of distractions for employees including social media, job seeking, news consumption (Udemy, 2018) and online gambling is just one of them. One minute employees are searching for job-related data and the next they are analyzing their favorite sports teams’ standings or chatting on social media about the favorite teams they should stake on. Though not often recognized, gambling is a substantial workplace issue through lost time, lost productivity and, in desperate circumstances, the gambler may resort to stealing.

Problem gambling has few observable signs and symptoms that are commonly associated with other addictions (e.g., alcoholism, drug addiction, etc.) and has commonly been

described as a “hidden” addiction (Griffiths, 2006). This makes identification of problem gamblers hard for employers. According to Luce, Nadeau, and Kairouz, (2016), the gambling problem is sometimes transient and goes away; on other occasions, it plateaus and remains for years; and at times it progresses to catastrophic levels. Irrespective of the duration taken in doing sports gambling, problem gamblers often experience extreme shame, financial struggles, and family problems.

Organizations are increasingly recognizing the problem of gambling in the workplace is big enough to warrant establishment of Gambling Policies at work (Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), 2018). Zyngier (2017), notes that specialists in workplace law and employers should assume gambling is taking place in their workplace, and take steps to avoid it becoming a problem. Researchers however note that minimal research has gone into gambling in the context of workplace including on such an issues like productivity.

4. Research Methodology, Data and Analysis

The research data was collected through an online research tool that was shared with the respondents. A mixed method approach was applied in that both quantitative and qualitative data was sought while also employing both descriptive and inferential approaches during analysis.

Primary data was collected using a semi-structured online tool from management professionals of two professional membership organizations namely, the Kenya Institute of Management (KIM) and the Institute of Human Resource Management (IHRM). While the tool was sent to the entire membership database of these two institutions, convenience sampling was adopted by only considering responses from those who responded to the online questionnaire.

5. Results/Findings

5.1 Demographic profile of participants

The survey saw a total of 218 respondents participate in the study where 129 (59%) were females and 89 were males (41%). Among the interviewed respondents, the majority (63%) were aged between 28-47 years. Twenty three percent (23%) of the respondents were between 18 to 27 years.

5.2 Prevalence of gambling in the workplace

In terms of participation in internet sports gambling, the survey established that 29% of the respondents participate in different forms of gambling, with the majority (81%) being females the persons that admitted that they practice gambling.

Table 1: Prevalence of internet gambling

		Do you participate in any form of gambling including internet gambling at workplace?		Total
		Yes	No	
Gender	Female	51	78	129

	Male	12	76	88
	Prefer not to say	0	1	1
Total		63 (29%)	155 (71%)	218 (100%)

From the 29% of the respondents who participate in internet gambling at the workplace, the urge to make some extra money outside of the salary was the major driver of gambling (49%), followed by influence by family and friends at 32%. Most (25%) of the respondents who gamble at the workplace are in Human Resource roles followed by Finance and Accounting (8%), other professions were negligible (< 3%) mentioned.

Table 2: Major drivers of gambling

Drivers of gambling	Frequency	Valid Percent
Urge to make some extra money	31	49%
Friends/family	20	32%
Bets adverts	8	13%
Social Media	4	6%
Total	63	100%

Bet adverts (13%) and social media (6%) were also drivers influencing these management professionals to engage in the practice.

5.3 Impact of internet gambling at workplace

The frequency of gambling for most individuals is about 2-3 times in a week with each round lasting about 30 minutes to 1 hour with 71% of the respondents indicating as much.

Table 3: Frequency of internet gambling

Number of times per week	Frequency	Percent
2-3 times	42	71%
4-5 times (at least once a day)	4	7%
Over 5 times (more than once a day)	13	22%
Total	59	100%

Some of the dominant behaviors of internet gambling on workplace environment according to the respondents were captured by their responses as summarized in table 4 below;

Table 4: Impact of internet gambling

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
My friends call/SMS me favourable odds while I am at work	23%	23%	10%	34%	8%	2.82
Sometimes, I am forced to stop working to check on favourable odds for betting and sharing with my friends	39%	11%	11%	21%	16%	2.64

Sometimes, I borrow to finance including from my colleagues for my gambling	46%	26%	8%	16%	3%	2.05
Sometimes, I am tempted to sell something to get money to bet	59%	28%	3%	5%	5%	1.69
I have had conflicts with my workmates when I failed to pay them back their money within the agreed time	57%	28%	7%	5%	2%	1.63
I have experienced problems with management concerning betting during work hours	61%	25%	10%	3%	2%	1.61
Overall Mean						2.07

Distraction from call/SMS between gamblers to share favourable odds, being forced to stop working to check on favourable odds for betting and sharing with friends and having to borrow money to finance my gambling including from colleagues were the most prevalent behaviors of gambling practiced by those who admitted to the practice scoring means of between 2.0 and 2.8 out of 5.

5.4 Severity of after-effect of gambling

On severity of after effects, majority of the respondents (63%) who practice office internet gambling indicated one of the aftermath was experiencing what they would consider one form or the other of physical or psychological health problems with the severity ranging from always (6%), often (8%) and sometimes (49%).

Table 5: Severity index of internet gambling

How often do you experience what you'd consider physical or psychological health problems related to gambling	Frequency	Percent
Never	23	37%
Sometimes	31	49%
Often	5	8%
Always	4	6%
Total	63	100%

Thirty seven percent (37%) indicated they never experienced any health related problem that they could associate with the practice

5.5 Sentiments about gambling

The majority of the respondents felt that gambling business is a sector that government should strictly regulate as it is a large contributor of the idleness of the young populace. With majority of the people relying on gambling fortunes to earn a living, most people expressed dissatisfaction with how gambling had exposed people including whole families to social ills including; tearing families apart, leaving others with financial burdens, employees losing jobs after being caught practicing the oddity in the office among others as summarized below.

Table 6: Sentiments about internet gambling

Respondents sentiments about internet gambling	Distribution of respondent with similar sentiments	Nature of sentiment toward the practice
"Gambling should be outlawed as it makes people to be lazy and can spoil future generations."	25%	Negative
"Government should increase taxes on gambling to discourage it"	16%	Negative
"It distracts people from doing their normal duties and sometimes inconveniences gamblers and their family."	12%	Negative
"It is extensively advertised, it's like any time you visit a site, for you to continue browsing you got to read the advert on gambling."	8%	Negative
"Waste of money and a lot to youth"	7%	Negative
"It is also a killer; suicide by gamblers including students who blow their fees on gambling"	6%	Negative
"It is going to drain the moral ethics of work. It is encouraging easy/quick earned money/wealth. People are psychologically affected due to the anxiety of waiting for favorable outcome of betting. Once they lose they become depressed and they end up being addicted hoping to win in future."	5%	Negative
"Although I do not gamble, I suggest that organizations need to come up with policies to regulate and control any gambling and betting at the work places"	4%	Positive
"I see it as addictive, causes failure and neglect of responsibilities"	3%	Negative
"Gambling is a zero-sum game. I win what another person loses."	3%	Negative
"Online gambling is done for fun and at most to add you money but people should not depend on it entirely the way young people do currently to get rich quickly."	3%	Positive
"Once a loser, a gambler's performance is negatively impacted"	2%	Negative
"Betting should be confined to casinos."	2%	Neutral
"Gamblers should be heavily fined when caught or even taken to jail for many years to learn a lesson because gambling can lead to things such as stealing so as to gamble."	1%	Negative

Notwithstanding, some people still applaud gambling as a good source of income but still warns about getting addicted to the activities.

6. Discussions and Conclusion

The analysis has revealed that a significant number of employees engage in gambling activities at workplace enough for it to be a management concern. The prevalence and frequency could be higher than reported with previous research showing that most people are ashamed of admitting to the practice. The greatest driver of gambling including at the

workplace is the need to make some extra money outside of the employee's salary followed by influence from close acquaintances like friends and family.

Most of the effects at the workplace among those who practice the oddity are negative and include wastage of man hours and consequent negative impact on productivity due to the arguably high frequency of involvement in the practice during working hours. Other negative effects at the workplace include borrowing money from colleagues, frustrations with losing that were likely to affect productivity, getting into trouble with management for being found betting during working hours, embezzling to fund gambling and getting into trouble with colleagues whenever the respondents were unable to pay money borrowed for purposes of betting. It's also instructive to note that out of all the respondents who indicated they are involved in workplace gambling, only a negligible percentage had found themselves in trouble with the employer meaning detection was not easy.

Most of the sentiments expressed by those engaged in the practice were mostly negative including indications that gambling was addictive and the government should exercise more controls around it than it's currently doing.

The paper's conclusions agree with Griffith (2009) that problem gambling has few observable signs and symptoms and this makes identification of problem gamblers hard for employers. It is also worth highlighting that the identification of problem internet gamblers may be even harder than other problem gamblers. This is because many of the behaviors concerning the exploitation of time may simply not apply as internet gamblers will be gambling from within the work environment rather than gambling at an outside gambling establishment. However, different from 2009 when Griffith did his research and workplace gambling was not a big problem, it's now in 2018 a big problem that management needs to think about a bit more deliberately.

Management clearly needs to have strategies on this issue and raise consciousness among employees as they seek more concrete solutions like instituting policies, conducting background checks before onboarding employees and blacklisting betting sites within their work environment using technology. Indeed, in the absence of recognizing this, gambling especially in developing countries like Kenya where unemployment rates are high, can easily become a serious economic (occupational) and social (health and relationships) problem.

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