

**Understanding the appeal of online gambling**  
**Opportunities and Risks associated with the affordances, motivations and gratifications of**  
**gamblers**

Dennis Rensen  
2008776/u541320

Master's Thesis  
Communication and Information Sciences  
Business Communication and Digital Media

School of Humanities  
Tilburg University, Tilburg

Supervisor: M.M.P. Vanden Abeele

Second reader: K.A. de Rooij

August, 2018

## **Abstract**

In order to understand the appeal of online gambling, 10 semi-structured interviews with Dutch gamblers' were conducted. First, it was examined what online gamblers perceived as the affordances of online gambling, and which opportunities and risks gamblers associated with these affordances. Second, we examined what online gamblers perceived as underlying needs that motivate them to play online gambling games, and to what extent the affordances of these games contribute to their need gratification. The final purpose of the study was to identify the implications of affordances in regards to responsible gambling versus offline gambling. Online gambling can be defined by particularly three unique affordances: anonymity, controllability, and accessibility. Interestingly, these affordances seem to overlap each other. The particularly affordances of online gambling do increase gambling risks as well, since the gambler can completely gamble anonymous and can gamble everywhere and at any time. The online gambling affordances helped gamblers to gratify needs, for example feeling entertained (releasing tension). However, one of the main implications that these affordances impose is that some gamblers think the affordances are benefits which they use responsibly, while affordances could be potential risk full for pathological gamblers. In conclusion affordances help to define what online gambling games are and what they provide to their users. While the affordances help to explain why gambling is an attractive activity for gamblers.

# **Understanding the appeal of online gambling**

## **Opportunities and Risks associated with the affordances, motivations and gratifications of gamblers**

### **Introduction**

Gambling can be defined as placing something of value at risk in the hopes of gaining something of greater value (Potenza, Fiellin, Heninger, Rounsaville, & Mazure, 2002). Gambling is a popular activity. In the Netherlands, 5.3 million people participate in the lottery (or lotto), and 400.000 people visit a casino on a regular basis (AGOG, n.d.).

Gambling can be considered as a form of entertainment, but for some, frequently playing gambling games can develop into a disorder. When a disorder is developed, the gambler is referred to as a pathological gambler. The exact definition of a pathological gambler is someone who is unable to resist his or her impulses to gamble (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002). In other words, the pathological gambler cannot control his actions and is therefore no longer able to gamble responsibly.

According to recent research, there are approximately 95.700 high risk gamblers and 79.000 pathological gamblers in the Netherlands (Pelgrim & Leijten, 2016). Pathological gambling is a cause of concern because it can lead to severe negative consequences in the personal and social sphere. For example, pathological gambling may lead to severe negative financial consequences, and is even identified as a factor leading to homelessness (Knezevic & Ledgerwood, 2012). Therefore, the importance of research manifests itself in trying to lower pathological gambling by identifying risk factors that can subsequently be targeted in campaigns and interventions.

The advent of the internet has changed how people gamble. Nowadays, people do not just gamble in real life casinos, they also participate in *online* gambling environments. In 2015, 1.5 million Dutch people participated in online gambling (NOS, 2015). This figure has likely further increased over the past few years. The Dutch government only recently legalized online gambling (Van Rooij, Kisjes & Willemen, 2015). While the online gambling business is growing rapidly, governments are still working on creating legislations that will minimize pathological (online) gambling behavior (Rijksoverheid, 2018).

Online gambling brings both new risks and new opportunities with respect to the issue of pathological gambling. In terms of opportunities, the online environment may help to prevent excessive gambling, for example, through the use of tracking software and the creation of transparent casino websites (Van Rooij et al., 2017). In terms of risks, however, the online environment may make gambling more accessible. Thus, gamblers may experience a lower threshold to engage in excessive gambling. Risks like abusing gambler data can also become more relevant in an online gambling environment (Van Rooij et al., 2017).

Online gambling targets a much younger audience than offline gambling (Van Rooij et al., 2017; Griffiths, Wardle, Orford, Sproston, & Erens, 2009). The latter finding aligns with the findings of a previous study conducted in Spain, which found a significant increase in young pathological gamblers after the legalization of online gambling (Chóliz, 2015). Nonetheless the differences between offline and online gambling, there is a link between them: Young adults migrate to online gambling within a relatively short period after engaging with real life casinos (Kim, Wohl, Gupta, & Derevensky, 2017). This ‘stepping stone’ mechanism implies that it is important to also look at offline gambling when examining online gambling.

As illustrated above, the online gambling industry is growing, and increasingly becoming an attractive alternative for offline gambling. To date, we are not yet fully aware of the factors that make online gambling such an attractive activity, particularly in comparison to offline gambling. Likewise, there is a need for research that expands the knowledge about what online gamblers perceive as the risk and opportunities of these factors, and the online gambling environment in general.

The aim of this study is to understand the appeal of online gambling. On the basis of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 Dutch gamblers, this study first examines what online gamblers perceive as the affordances of online gambling combined with what gamblers perceive as the risks and opportunities of online gambling,. Through asking the research question: what are the perceived affordances of online gambling (RQ1a), and which opportunities and risks do gamblers associate with these affordances (RQ1b). Second, this study identifies the needs that motivate the gambling behavior of online gamblers, and examines to what extent online gambling gratifies these needs. Therefore, the following research question will be answered: What are online gamblers underlying needs that motivate them to play online gambling games (RQ2a), and to what extent do the affordances of these games contribute to their need gratification (RQ2b). Third, the study looks at the possible implications of the affordances in regards to responsible gambling. This results in the final research question: what do online gamblers believe to be the implications of the online gambling affordances in regard to responsible gambling versus pathological gambling (RQ3)? Combined, the answer to these questions should provide us with an answer to what makes online gambling an attractive activity, and why it may (or may not) be an attractive alternative for offline gambling.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Online gambling**

Online gambling can be defined as taking a chance to win something of value (Potenza et al, 2002). Online gambling occurs in different forms, on different platforms. A number of online gambling activities can be considered as the online counterpart of an existing offline gambling activity. Table games such as black jack, poker and roulette, for example, have become digitalized, and can be accessed on an online casino platform via a mobile application or the internet browser. You can play

these games, for example, on the internet (e.g. [www.unibet.eu](http://www.unibet.eu)). They have similar rules as their offline counterparts. Table games can be split up in different forms. There are card table games (e.g. Black Jack and Poker), dice table games (e.g. Craps and Pai Gow) and random number games (e.g. Roulette and Wheel of Fortune).

Gaming machines seen in real life casinos, such as slot machines and video poker have also made a transition to online gambling platforms. In addition, random number games (e.g. bingo and keno) and scratch cards are present on online gambling platforms.

Betting games, such as sports betting games, are also available online. For example, a gambler does not have to be present at a physical location in order to bet on his or her favorite football team, this can be done effortlessly through a website or application on your phone. Sports betting is currently one of the most popular forms of online gambling (Griffiths & Barnes, 2007).

One might say that the main difference between the former forms of online gambling (i.e., online table games, online gaming machines and online betting games) and their offline counterparts is that they are more convenient to use and more easily accessible online (Van Rooij et al., 2017). The definition of online gambling, however, can be broadened to also include new gambling activities, such as *simulated gambling games*, such as candy crush (Thomas & Dickins, 2016) and rocket league (NOS, 2018). An important reason why these games might be considered online gambling activities, is that there is evidence for a stepping stone mechanism: studies show that gamblers who play such simulated gambling games are more prone to engage in monetary gambling and develop subsequent gambling problems (Armstrong, Rockloff, Browne, & Li, 2018).

One type of a simulated online gambling game is embedded gambling. Embedded gambling activities take place in online video games that are not predominantly focused on gambling, but that do have a clear gambling component in them (Thomas & Dickins, 2016). For example: video game players can play poker in GTA San Andreas or play slot machines in Pokémon Red/Blue. Embedded gambling activities oftentimes resemble offline gambling activities (e.g., poker). Therefore, it is interesting to compare how users experience these games, in contrast to their 'classical' offline counterparts.

A second type of a simulated online gambling games are video games with gambling characteristics (Thomas & Dickins, 2016). These games either provide small rewards, have an uncertain reward and/or give an opportunity to win at programmed intervals. For example: Candy crush gives small and variable rewards, and gives users the chance to spin a 'wheel-of-fortune' for extra lives (Thomas & Dickins, 2016). These games might let people gamble more than they think, because they incorporate gambling elements in a way that is not directly noticeable.

The third, and perhaps most notorious type of simulated online gambling games, are video games where players have to pay money in order to unlock randomized content. This form can be considered as combinations of both the simulated gambling games and the embedded gambling games. A prime example are 'loot boxes' in video games, where players pay money to win randomized

content. Players are not aware of what the content will be before unlocking (and thus paying for) the loot box.

In recent years, there is considerable debate about the usage of loot boxes in the video game industry. The debate focuses on whether loot boxes are a form of gambling or a form of premium gaming content (Griffiths, 2018). Some say loot boxes are not gambling, since “because you always get something when you purchase them, even if it is not what you hoped for” (Griffiths, 2018). However, the argument can be made that loot boxes do fit the dictionary definition of gambling, as paying money or game credits for a *chance* to obtain something desirable is in many ways similar to gambling activities played in, for example, casinos. Moreover, in financial terms, the ‘prizes’ won are often far less valuable than the money spent (Griffiths, 2018). Simulated games such as the usage of loot boxes will be included as a form of online gambling in this study, because they seem to rely heavily on unexpected certainty and risks. It is for this reason that the Dutch government has recently decided to sanction companies that are using loot box systems that match their gambling criteria (Kanspelautoriteit, 2018).

The above categorization shows that there is a wide variety of online gambling activities, which makes it difficult to precisely define online gambling; moreover, there appear to be variations in how people define the boundaries of what they consider as gambling (Hume & Mort, 2011). With the advent of simulated embedded games, we see that gambling games can be played for free, for money or both. Money is sometimes transformed in virtual credits with which a person can gamble. Some virtual credits might be free to obtain, while other virtual credits need to be exchanged through real life currency (Van Rooij et al., 2017). In this study, we choose to focus on online gambling games that use actual money, and on online games that have the same affordances as gambling games.

### **The importance of studying online gambling from an affordances perspective**

The aim of the current study is to unravel the attraction of online gambling games. It is important to study the appeal of online gambling, as we know from research on gambling that repeated gambling behavior could transition in gambling habits, and these negative gambling habits may, over time, develop into pathological gambling (cf. Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002). Pathological gambling may have negative consequences for both the private and social spheres of individuals, and can even potentially ruin lives (Abdollahnejad, Delfabbro, & Denson, 2014; Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002; Schissel, 2001). In the private sphere, for example, pathological gambling can lead to debts and family separations. In the public sphere, pathological gambling can induce a stigma and can interfere with a gamblers normal job. If we better understand why online gambling activities appeal (or not appeal) to their players, then this knowledge may be used, for example, to inform policy workers, so that they can develop better campaigns to prevent pathological gambling, and may serve as a basis for the gambling industry to revise their gambling policies and activities.

To fully understand what makes online gambling games attractive, it is important to know what elements online gambling provides to its users. Each online gambling game and platform has different characteristics, yet they are similar in what they afford to their users. The affordance theory can help understand what utility online gambling brings towards gamblers.

The affordances concept was first introduced by Gibson. Gibson (1986) analyzed how animals perceive their environments. He argued that animals do not perceive what an object *is*, they perceive what an object *can do for them*, in other words, how they can make use of the object's utility. In short, they immediately perceive an object's 'actionable properties'. Gibson termed such perceptions of an object's utility 'affordances'. The affordances concept assumes that, similar to animals, people perceive objects in terms of their actionable properties. The affordance theory can explain how gamblers perceive online gambling games, and in particular what they perceive as the 'utility' of these games.

To fully understand what online gambling affords its users, it is important to examine both the affordances of offline *and* online gambling. Offline gambling and online gambling are intertwined. A gambler might visit an offline casino and then pursue gambling online (Kim, et al., 2017). Therefore, we might first establish what affordances offline and online gambling share in common. Online gambling most likely will have new affordances as well. Thus, second we can determine if these new affordances of online gambling make online gambling into a more attractive activity than offline gambling.

### **The affordances of offline and online gambling**

In this section, we present an a priori analysis of the affordances of online and offline gambling, based on the literature, that serves as a starting point for our study. Evans, Pearce, Vitak, & Treem (2016), defined three threshold criteria to conceptualize what affordances are in the context of media research. The first criterion is an actionable property (e.g., a smartphone affords *mobility*), and therefore an affordance is neither the object itself (e.g., a smartphone) nor a feature of the object (e.g., a touch screen). The second criterion is that an affordance cannot be an outcome (e.g. locating a photograph on social media is an outcome, but social media affords you *visibility* and *searchability*). The third criterion is that an affordance must have variability (e.g. the visibility that a social media platform affords the user can be measured on a scale, from low visibility to high visibility). Using these three criteria, the following section provides an analysis of the affordances of (online) gambling.

Offline and online gambling activities share some affordances in common. First, although there is wide variation in gambling platforms and activities, most gambling activities do have in common an element of randomness (Karlsen, 2010): The player is uncertain about the reward, if one at all, he or she will earn. The anticipation of winning an uncertain reward can be an incentive to gamble (Anselme & Robinson, 2013): oftentimes, a player finds more pleasure in the gambling uncertainty itself, than in actually obtaining the rewards.

If we match *Reward uncertainty* against the affordance criteria of Evans et al. (2016), we can note that rewards uncertainty is not a feature nor the outcome of gambling games, and there is variability in reward uncertainty across different forms of gambling. For example, when playing slot machines there is a high reward uncertainty. Each spin could earn a reward. However, games like poker can have a lower reward uncertainty because poker consists of both skill and luck. For example, if an experienced poker player plays a poker game with novice players, s/he will be less uncertain about winning the reward. Finally, there are also simulated gambling games (e.g. loot boxes) which always have a reward, it is just uncertain *which* reward you will gain. Reward uncertainty thus matches the affordance criteria identified by Evans et al. (2016) and can be considered a first affordance of gambling, that both offline and online gambling activities share in common.

Certain offline gambling games, especially those that are played in real-life casinos, encompass a degree of social connectedness, because the gambling game is played with other players and/or with a croupier. Gamblers have a perceived social connection with unknown others, when they share the same fates and form a temporary community (Cotte & Latour, 2009). This social connectedness may seem to be largely missing in online casino games. However, online gambling activities may also encompass the presence of virtual other players who compete with you in the virtual environment, or audiences who can see you playing the game, , thus resulting in a temporary community. There is variability in the sociability of different gambling activities: Casino games, in particular, have a social element in them. Therefore, *sociability* can be identified as an affordance of gambling which passes the criteria of Evans et al. (2016).

A final affordance that we can a priori identify as characteristic for both offline and online gambling is the *playability* of the game. Playability refers to the perception of skill influencing a gambling game (Mentzoni, 2012). Meaning that a gambling game can have either a skill component or can have a perception of skill. In other words, different people can experience different perceptions of ‘playability’ towards to same gambling game. Playability varies between the different forms of gambling games. A slot machine game, for example, is hardly influenced by the skill of the gambler. However, games like poker have a clear skill component (Levitt & Miles, 2011). Gamblers who are more experienced have a greater chance of winning a poker game, than beginning players. Therefore, playability is considered an affordance of gambling.

While *reward uncertainty*, *sociability* and *playability* can be considered affordances that both offline and online gambling games may share in common, online gambling brings ‘new’ affordances to the already existing gambling games. For example, online gambling, compared to offline gambling affords greater *anonymity*. This allows players to disguise in a new online identity (Cotte & Latour, 2009). Gamblers may play differently in an online environment because of this ‘anonymity’, because they may experience less inhibition (cf. Reid & Reid, 2005). Thus, anonymity may help with the freedom gamblers experience in the online environment.



A small majority (52.0%) of gamblers say that one of the main advantages of online gambling was its convenience (Van Rooij, Vanden Abeele & Van Looy, 2017). Convenience can be considered a result of the *accessibility* of a gambling platform. Online gambling can be considered more convenient than offline gambling because of its anytime and anyplace accessibility on mobile phone applications and, websites, which generate a lower threshold to gamble. Concerns over gambling mostly refer to the accessibility affordance: when gambling is more convenient and accessible it can lead towards a larger gamblers base and result in more addicted players (Griffiths & Wood, 2003). Therefore, accessibility is an affordance which is also important to gain insights on the appeal and the perceived opportunities and risks of online gambling.

*Controllability* is an affordance that is also characteristic for online gambling. The gambler can decide how long they play, when they play and what the stakes will be. If an online gambling website does not match the criteria of the gambler, then the gambler can make an easy transition towards a new online gambling website. Gamblers like the freedom they gain from this controllability in online gambling environments (Cotte & Latour, 2009).

The above list of affordances is not exhaustive, yet it provides an idea of the dominant affordances that characterize gambling, and more specifically, online gambling. In this study, this list will serve as a starting point to examine user perceptions of the appeal, and the opportunities and risks of online gambling, as compared to online gambling. See fig. 1 for an overview of the affordances that match both forms of gambling, and those that match with online gambling only.

<b>Gambling affordances</b>	<b>Online gambling affordances</b>
Reward uncertainty	Reward uncertainty
Playability	Playability
Sociability	Anonymity
	Controllability
	Accessibility

*Fig 1. A non-exhaustive list of affordances of both gambling and online gambling.*

The overview shows that online gambling offers a somewhat different scope of affordances than offline gambling. This might bring new risks and/or opportunities for active gamblers. The first aim of this study is to explore how users perceive these (and perhaps other) affordances of online gambling, and what risks and opportunities they associate with them. Hence, our first research question states:

RQ1: What are the perceived affordances of online gambling (RQ1a), and which opportunities and risks do gamblers associate with these affordances (RQ1b).

## **The uses and gratifications online gamblers gain from gambling**

The above analysis of the affordances of (online) gambling is a valuable first step in identifying the utility that gambling brings to their players. It enables us to explore the appeal of online gambling, by examining gamblers' perceptions of its affordances.

A second step is to examine how these perceptions of the affordances of online gambling relate to what the gambler needs or wants from the online gambling platform. Uses and gratification theory (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008) is a useful additional theoretical lens for this endeavor, as the theory can be used to determine how and why individuals use media, in this case online gambling, and how this relates to their perceptions of the affordances of the medium.

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) introduced the theory of uses and gratification. This theory was developed to understand why and how users consume certain media. Uses and gratifications theory assumes that consumers are active media users: consumers choose which media they want to use, depending on their needs. An underlying assumption of the theory is that people perceive media as capable of gratifying their needs.

Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch (1973) differentiated five broad categories of needs that users can gratify via their media use: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative and tension release needs. Cognitive needs refer to needs to obtain knowledge/information (Blumler, 1979). Affective needs refer to the emotional needs of the consumer and the (hedonic) desire to feel pleasure (Katz et al., 1973). Social integrative needs are affiliation needs, referring to people's desire to belong to/be recognized by a group (Katz et al., 1973). Personal integrative needs refer to the need to improve self-esteem (Katz et al., 1973). The tension release needs, finally, refer to a need to 'escape' the stresses of daily life and to relax (Katz et al., 1973).

The theory of uses and gratification was originally developed to understand how mass media work in gratifying the above need categories. However, recent studies have found ways to incorporate the theory of uses and gratification in relation to new media such as gaming, social network sites and mobile phone uses (e.g., Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Wu, Wang, & Tsai, 2010; Wei, 2008). The uses and gratifications theory has also been used to examine which devices (e.g. mobile phone or internet) people use to play online gambling games (Wei, 2008).

Players of online gambling games may try to gratify their various needs and interests through different kinds of online gambling games (Wu, Wang, & Tsai, 2010). The uses and gratifications theory can be used to explore the reasons why gamblers enjoy online gambling, and why they prefer online gambling above offline gambling, and/or above others forms of media use (e.g., the use of normal video games) (Kaye & Johnson, 2002).

The central assumption of this study is that they may do so because they perceive these games to carry certain affordances that appeal to them because they might gratify their needs. After all, each affordance of (online) gambling might fulfill different needs. Therefore, it is necessary to understand

which gratifications gamblers are pursuing, and which affordances help to fulfil their needs or, in contrast, dissatisfy their needs. This leads us to formulate our second research question:

RQ2: What are online gamblers underlying needs that motivate them to play online gambling games (RQ2a), and to what extent do the affordances of these games contribute to their need gratification (RQ2b).

An important limitation of the uses and gratifications theory is that it assumes that the consumption of media is a deliberate decision on the part of the media user. However, addictive gamblers can develop uncontrollable gambling habits (Dickerson, 1993). The habitual gambler has less control over choosing the activity – s/he is driven by a habit. Therefore, we need to take into consideration that gamblers may *initially* gamble to satisfy underlying needs, but that their gambling behavior may over time be driven by strong gambling habits.

Uses and gratifications theory (Katz,1973) presumes that users can self-reflect on their behavior when choosing which type of media they think can best fulfil their needs. The user has its own motivations for choosing to engage in online gambling. However, they might see implications of affordance in regards to responsible gambling versus pathological gambling. A gambler might see an affordances for himself as a positive motivation or as an impulse he can control, but he might also see the see the risk this affordance brings for pathological gamblers. Who cannot control their impulses.

RQ3: What do online gamblers believe to be the implications of the online gambling affordances in regard to responsible gambling versus pathological gambling?

## **Method**

### **Design**

In order to answer the research questions, we conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ten Dutch online gamblers. Semi-structured interviews are not fully structured, thus giving room for interviewees to be more in-depth about certain themes they find interesting. The benefit of semi-structured interviews is that questions can be formulated ahead of time, which makes the interviewer prepared. In addition, semi-structured interviews also allows interviewees the freedom to express their views in their own terms.

The interviews had a duration of approximately 30 minutes to an hour. A set of questions was constructed before the interviews. However, during the interview the researcher could decide to not follow the structure when the participants revealed interesting information which needed follow up questions that were not structured. An exemplary set of questions per theme can be consulted in Table 1. The full interview guide can be consulted in Appendix (A).

---

**General gambling questions**

Which games do you play?  
On which device do you play online gambling games?

**Affordances**

How would you define a game of chance?  
What would you describe as characteristics of online gambling games?  
Some people say, online gambling brings a form of anonymity, would you agree? If so, does it influence you to play online gambling games?

**Habits**

Do you have regular gambling days?  
Are there certain periods of time you play gambling games?

**Uses and gratifications**

What are your motivations to gamble?  
Does gambling give you a certain gratification?

**Opportunities and risks**

Which opportunities does online gambling provide for responsible gambling?  
What are the risks of online gambling? Are there more risks for online gambling than offline gambling?

---

*Table 1. Exemplary set of questions per theme for semi-structured interviews*

**Participants and Procedure**

We aimed to recruit online gamblers who gamble online at least occasionally, with a minimum requirement of having participated in online gambling at least once over the past three months. In order to find eligible participants; three main forms of sampling were conducted. First, through social media and social media groups a post was spread asking if for online gamblers who wanted to participate in the study. The second sampling method was through asking family and friends of the researcher if they knew online gamblers who wanted to partake in a study. The third method was through snowball sampling. When a participant agreed to an interview, s/he would be asked if s/he knew another gambler.

The actual sample consisted of ten Dutch online gamblers whom are 18 years or older - this due to the legal gambling age in the Netherlands. The participants' ages ranged from 22 years until 51 years old. The only other requirement was that the participant needed to be an active (online) gambler.

Despite deliberate efforts to recruit female participants, we only managed to recruit participants who were male. This gender imbalance likely results at least partly from a gender imbalance in the population of online gamblers: most internet gamblers are male (Griffiths, Wardle, Orford, Sproston, & Erens, 2009). The recruitment period ended when theoretical saturation occurred. Nonetheless, in the limitation section we will discuss the excluding of female participants. In addition, it was relative younger online gamblers were more accessible than older online gamblers. This phenomenon aligns with prior research, an online gambler is more likely to be a young adult (Griffiths, et al., 2009).

Figure 2 illustrates the names, gender, and age of each of the participants used for the study. Each name is a pseudonym, to ensure that each participant remains anonymous.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gambling preference</b>
Peter	Male	25	Online & Offline gambling
Tim	Male	24	Poker and online sports betting
Michael	Male	35	Online gambling
Stijn	Male	24	Sports betting & offline casino
Niek	Male	22	Poker
Freek	Male	51	Online & offline gambling
Clarence	Male	23	Online sports betting
Jake	Male	26	Online sports betting & Offline casino
Vincent	Male	25	Poker & offline casino
Ruud	Male	25	Poker & offline casino

*Fig 2. Overview of the ten participants.*

Since the target audience consisted of active gamblers, there was a risk of selecting vulnerable participants who experienced gambling related problems (e.g., financial/social problems). Given the ethical implications of the study, pre-approval of the study had been requested from the ethical review board. We obtained the approval from the ethics committee of Tilburg University – school of Humanities and Digital Science.

Before beginning the interview, the participant was informed of the study and asked to read and sign an informed consent form. The interviews were audio recorded, but other than their voice, no identifying information of the participant was recorded. Transcripts were produced at the earliest opportunity possible after completing each interview. To ensure anonymity, we use pseudonyms in the transcripts and the report. Upon the ethical committee’s request, the audio files were destroyed after

the completion of the transcripts. The transcripts will be destroyed after 10 years. In the meantime, they are stored safely in a password protected folder. The transcripts can be accessed with permission of the researcher.

Participants were informed that they can receive a copy of the master thesis. When a participant wished to receive a copy of the master thesis, they were to note their contact information on a sheet of paper that was separately from the interview data to ensure anonymity, and that paper is to be destroyed after completing the thesis.

### **Data analysis**

Open questions were used in the interviews which were audio recorded and later transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) identify 6 phases in a thematic analysis. The first step is to get familiar with the data. This includes transcribing the data. The second phase consists out of generating initial codes for the analyses. These can be used to identify possible themes. In the current study, such initial codes were largely priori pre-defined. Exemplary codes are: opportunities, risks, affordances, needs, motivations, and gratifications. In the third phase, we actively searched for these themes in the transcripts, and during phase four they were refined and reviewed. In phase five, we defined and named each of the themes. The last stage involved the final analysis and write-up of the report.

## **Results**

### **RQ1: Perceived affordances of online gambling**

The first research question guiding this study asks what online gamblers perceive as the affordances of online gambling (RQ1a), and which opportunities and risks they perceive and experience due to these affordances (RQ1b). To answer these two sub questions, we conducted a thematic analysis focusing on which affordances online gambling is perceived to have, and what opportunities and risks online gamblers relate to them.

We a priori determined six, possible, dominant affordances of gambling and online gambling in fig 1. These affordance were based on previous literature and matched the three threshold criteria of Evans et al. (2016). The analysis of the interviews revealed that the affordances stated in the theoretical framework were confirmed. Offline and online gambling games had similar affordance, but online gambling had three unique affordances; anonymity, controllability, and accessibility.

**Reward uncertainty.** With respect to *reward uncertainty*, the interviewees all indicated that one of the reasons to gamble is to win something. When asked to define what gambling is, the interviewees explicitly described games of chance that involve the possibility of winning a reward.

“For me a game of chance, is something you play and you have a chance to either win or lose something.” (Ruud, 25).

This finding shows that interviewees’ understanding of what gambling is, is coherent with how scholars describe gambling, namely as an activity that can be defined by reward uncertainty (Fiorillo, Tobler, & Schultz, 2003). The risks that reward uncertainty bring to gambling is that gamblers are never sure if they could win a reward. Meaning that people could potentially risk their life savings for a quick gamble which they wanted/expected to win.

Interestingly, however, the interviewees disagreed on whether gambling involved monetary rewards. Some interviewees, like Tim (24), specified that the reward needed to be a monetary reward. However, other participants, such as Vincent (25) and Peter (25), disagreed and said that a reward could also be something else:

“At a carnival, you can pick a rope and win a stuffed animal, if you choose the right rope. This is also a game of chance” (Vincent, 25).

Reward uncertainty is both applicable for online and offline gambling. In both scenarios the interviewees would be motivated to gamble for the possibility to win a reward.

**Sociability.** One of the affordances that we identified a priori for mostly offline gambling was sociability, especially in the context of casino games. Prior studies have indicated that offline casinos are an enjoyable way to socialize with fellow gamblers and friends (Holtgraves, 2009; Lee, Lee, Bernhard, & Yoon, 2006). Our interviews confirm that gamblers go to a casino to socialize with their friends. They see it as a “night out” with friends:

“For me, going to a casino is a night out with friends. You make a plan, dress up and visit the casino. It takes some time, which makes it a higher threshold” (Ruud, 25).

Prior research indicates that mostly elderly people visit casinos because of the social aspect of the offline casino (MCneilly & Burke, 2001; Tarras, Singh, & Moufakkir, 2000; Wong & Rosenbaum, 2010). However, during the interviews, the younger participants also indicated that the social aspect was one of the main motivations to go to a physical casino. Specifically, visiting the casino with friends was a main motivator. Therefore, the offline casino fulfilled the need to enhance social interaction (cf. Katz, 1973; see also RQ2a and b).

Sociability thus plays a key role in offline casinos. However, in online casinos, there are also possibilities for sociability, for example, gamblers may have a conversation with other gamblers



through chatrooms. This is not perceived as the same quality of offline sociability, however. One of the interviewees illustrates how the social aspect differs from offline casinos and online casinos:

“I like the social aspect of the offline casino’s more. If you lose, then you can just drink some beer and watch other tables. However, online there are the possibilities of chatting [at online poker tables], and sometimes you meet a nice group of people and you start chatting. However, that is nothing compared to real life conversations” (Jake, 26).

In offline casinos, the social aspect can be a primary motivation for gamblers to visit the casino. However, even though an online casino does provide the possibility of online social interaction, the difference is that this social interaction is never the primary motivation to visit an online casino. That online gambling is perceived as less social is also confirmed in quantitative research, as 19.7% of people consider it a reason to avoid online gambling (Van Rooij et al., 2017).

While the interviewees agree that ‘qualitative sociability’ is an affordance of offline casino visits, this affordances can also be a stimulus for deciding to *not* go to an offline casino. Vincent, for example, does not like to visit the casinos on a regular basis:

“When going to a [offline] casino, people know that you have been there. If you go multiple times, 8 or 12 times, then a man will come up to you. He will say that you need to come with him and ask you how you are doing, to decide if your gambling behavior is a problem. They can help, or just deny you the entrance to the casino” (Vincent, 25).

The above quote illustrates that gambling is not always socially accepted – it is stigmatized: people might think worse of you if you are a gambler. Therefore, going to a real life casino, where they can be actively seen gambling, can feel exposing for gamblers. This can lead to feelings of discomfort. Thus, the sociability and anonymity affordances seem intertwined: because of its sociability, some prefer a more anonymous environment of an online casino to the offline casino. This is an opportunity for online gambling. The anonymity of online gambling can ensure that people do not have to worry to be recognized.

**Anonymity.** As previously mentioned, sociability and anonymity seem to be intertwined affordances. Thus, anonymity seems to be a motivator for online gamblers who seek out a more anonymous environment. In one case, the interviewee Clarence expressed that the anonymity of online casinos gives people a chance to save their faces. He illustrates this through the following example:

“When you go a casino too often, you might get a reputation of being an addicted gambler, which is not nice. There is a stigma on gambling. Playing online is something you can keep to yourself.” (Clarence, 23).

The anonymity of the online gambling environment is appealing because it can remove some of the negative stigma attached to gambling (McCormack & Griffiths, 2010). Therefore, the gambler can feel that his gambling activities are less exposed to the world. This can make the activity a more entertaining experience for the gambler. However, when the online gambler is addicted, then the risks occur that family and friends might have a harder time to notice the addiction.

The anonymity does not only provide the opportunity to 'hide' gambling activities from the outside world. Michael (35) explains that the anonymity also gives him the opportunity to exert more control over what he reveals about his gambling activities to others, and what not. This is particularly interesting when it comes to communicating about monetary wins and losses.

“My wife always knows when I gamble. I do not hide it for her. However, anonymity does give the benefit that you do not have to tell people if you won. *I can decide to tell it to my friends*” (Michael, 35).

This perspective on anonymity is an interplay with the affordance of controllability. The gambler plays in a more anonymous environment. This gives the gambler the choice to tell his friend about his experiences, either winning or losing. If the gambler would go to a casino with friends, then they can see him win or lose, which may cause the gambler discomfort. Therefore, online gambling gives the opportunity of the gambler to stay in control. While the controllability gives the gambler the opportunity to inform his surroundings.

**Controllability.** The interviewees indicated that the online environment affords the player more control. As illustrated with the quote from Peter below, they have the opportunity to decide what they want to play:

“Online [gambling] gives me control over what I want to play. Offline, I am dependent on friends to go to a casino, but online I can plan whenever I want to play.” (Peter, 25).

The gambler controls which game they want to play and the wagers they want to make. This gives them greater freedom to play what they want (tournaments, different tables, low wagers, etc.). This finding aligns with previous research that claimed that gamblers want the freedom to play their own game (Cotte & Latour, 2009). Offline gambling is more time- and place-bound. In addition, offline casinos require higher minimum wagers than online casinos. Ruud gives an illustration about how he is more in control over the events of online gambling:

“Tournaments in offline casino’s make you dependent on their organization. They can organize a poker night on Monday, but you might want to play on another day.” (Ruud, 25).

**Accessibility.** The low threshold of online gambling can be seen as both a risk and an opportunity for gamblers. Gambling can be done wherever and whenever – it has a 24/7 accessibility.

“I do think that the main development in gambling is that it is nowadays always accessible. You can play whenever you want to play. You only need an internet connection” (Ruud, 25).

The accessibility can be seen as an opportunity of online gambling. Players can gamble from their own home. Like Ruud illustrates, all he needs is an internet connection. However, it can also be dangerous when online gambling has such a low threshold since it can lead to more addicted players (Griffiths & Wood, 2003).

Therefore, according to the interviewees, the accessibility of online gambling can be considered a risk. When gambling becomes more accessible, then more people can play which increases the number of pathological gamblers (Griffiths & Auer, 2011). During the interviews the gamblers agreed that accessibility was a risk of online gambling.

“Gambling has a very low threshold. So, if you are susceptible to gambling, you can easily go online and play it and stay addicted” (Peter, 25).

Online gambling compared to offline gambling has fewer restraints. Even the age verification can be manipulated, with aligns with the affordances of anonymity (e.g. you can lie about your age). This makes online gambling easily accessible for a broad audience. Not only is the accessibility lowered through online devices. Online gambling also makes monetary transactions quicker and easier than in Casino.

“You can easily put more money in your [digital] gambling account. It is done very easily and quickly. In a [offline] Casino, if you run out of money, you need to go back to an ATM. Thus, the money might become more real than online.” (Michael, 35).

**Playability.** The interviewees indicate themselves that there are various gambling games available but that they differ in the *playability*. The comment below illustrates how there a different forms of playability in gambling games.

“High level poker games show that people are really playing poker. They watch their opponent, they only play good cards and try to bluff. However, with a game like roulette, it does not give you any control. You just put money on a few numbers, and hope they fall” (Michael, 35).

Each gambling game has its own skill component (Levitt & Miles, 2011). Especially, in gambling games such as poker the skill component becomes a major factor. Playability influences how a game is played. When games become more skill-based and are played with other people, the gambler needs to be more focused on the game. The online environment aids in achieving such a focus, as it presents a more controlled environment in which gamblers can concentrate.

“I always play poker on my laptop. The reason for this is that I know I have a stable internet connection and will not be disturbed. Poker tournaments can take a long time. So, it is important you have the time” (Niek, 22).

Niek illustrates that playability and controllability rely on each other. When a game has high playability then the player needs to have full control over how he can play the game. The state of control also aligns with escapism (Katz, 1973). The interviewees seek a controlled environment away from the rest of the world.

### **Synthesis RQ1**

With respect to research question 1a, the interviews indicate that the affordances that were identified a priori based on the extant theory were indeed the main affordances that gamblers recognized in online gambling games. The affordances seem to overlap each other, as most affordances provide benefits to the user in combination with other affordances. With respect to research question 1b, most interviewees connect the affordances of online gambling mostly to opportunities. However, the affordance of accessibility is considered a risk. The interviewees stated that online gambling is more accessible than offline gambling, which makes playing online gambling games almost effortless. This is perceived as risky for the development of pathological gambling.

### **RQ 2; Underlying needs that motivate them to play online gambling games, and to what extent do the affordances contribute to their need gratification.**

To answer the second research question: what the underlying needs are that motivate gamblers to play online gambling games, and to what extent the affordances contribute to their need gratification. We used the uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1973). In order to seek out the needs and the gratifications the participants would have that motivate online gambling behavior.

### **Motivations to gamble**

First, when analyzing the interviews in terms of what motivations online gamblers have to engage in online gambling activities, a common statement made by the interviewees is that they seek a form of entertainment, and this entertainment is something they experience during online gambling. The player is bored and wants to do something fun, says Peter.

“I think one of the reason for me to gamble is being bored. Gambling brings a form of entertainment. It is not like I would skip a night out with friends, but when I have nothing better to do, it can be a fun way to pass some time” (Peter, 25).

Online gambling can be seen as a form of leisure. Gamblers can become susceptible to gambling when they are looking for an entertaining activity to do. Online gambling has a low threshold and this ensures the gamblers experiences a quick and accessible ‘enjoyment’. This aligns with the theory of Katz (1973), which stated that people can choose particular media for the value of simply being entertained, in order to gratify their need for escapism. In addition, it is a quick form of entertainment. Which amplifies the importance of the affordance of accessibility.

Secondly, it was suggested that online gambling is being played for its entertainment value. However, during the interviews the interviewees said they would also play online gambling games to earn rewards, mainly the monetary rewards were interesting. Therefore, the affordance of reward uncertainty is a crucial factor in deciding to play a game. A motivator to try to win rewards is when the gambler had earned some extra money in a month.

“I only gamble if I can miss the money. So, if I got a little bonus at work or I got leftover money, at the end of the month” (Stijn, 24).

The third motivation was that the interviewees see it as extra money with which they can win extra money. However, if they do not win, then this is not a complete loss for them since it was unexpected money. The interviewees claim that their expenditure on gambling does not affect their normal spending.

An interviewee argued that playing gambling games also gives a feeling of adrenaline. Which aligns with seeking a form of tension release (Katz, 1973). For example, this occurs when he would play an exciting game of poker.

“It can be very exciting to play a game of poker, because I want to win you know. I want to beat the other players at that table” (Vincent, 25).

The example of Vincent illustrates that people are feeling excited during and after a game. Especially if they won an important game. This excitement also comes from a form of competitive behavior. The gambler likes to win (Dixon, 2007). When a gambler wins it can increase its self-esteem which is important for fulfilling ones personal integrative needs (Katz, 1973). When people win they are proud and will feel better about themselves. In this case, Vincent wants to win from his opponents. However, you can also win during gambling games versus “the house”.

## **Synthesis RQ2**

Interviewees stated different motivations for gambling. The main motivations for engaging in online gambling was to seek out entertainment, to win a reward and to experience a competitive game. The affordances of accessibility and reward uncertainty are crucial for gamblers to decide to gamble.

Online gambling is more accessible which makes it more convenient for an instantaneous form of entertainment. Reward uncertainty is both a motivator for offline and online gambling. The gambler wants to risk winning a reward, which can release some tension.

### **RQ 3; Implications affordances in regard to responsible gambling.**

To answer the question of what online gamblers believe to be the implications of the online gambling affordances in regard to responsible gambling compared to pathological gambling, we analyzed the interviewees' responses in terms of how the affordances could have implications for their gambling behavior.

Interestingly, the topic of simulated embedded gambling in video games, was oftentimes mentioned as a concern of our interviewees. Van Rooij, et al. (2017), discussed the risks of video games and gambling games that are becoming more interlaced. The first implication affordances bring are new trends such as the use of 'loot boxes' and 'free-to-play' games could make people more susceptible for online gambling with real money. Clarence illustrated the conundrum of games that are playable for every age, but use a gambling element.

“For me, it is weird that you can play Fifa at every age, but you can buy packs that give you a random chance at players. Which looks a lot like gambling. I think they should put an age restriction on this element. So that the main game is for everyone, but if you want to pay for the packs you need to be at least 18” (Clarence, 23).

Affordances look past the features and design. In addition, an affordance is not good nor is it bad. However, online gambling affordances do pose an implication in the debate of responsible gambling versus pathological gambling. The embedded simulated gambling games (e.g. loot boxes as well) have similar affordances as online gambling games. However, these games are targeted at a younger audience (e.g. Fifa pg. 3+). When similar affordances occur, it becomes an implication, because younger audiences can experience a smaller gap towards becoming online gamblers (Thomas & Dickins, 2016).

Secondly, people do indicate that there are also common connections between the simulated embedded gambling and the online gambling games. However, most of the interviewees did not think it would be necessary to ban these sorts of games. They did suggest better regulations. For example, using age regulation for games where people pay money to 'win' certain content. Especially, if this content can be sold on other platforms for money.

The third implication of the affordances of online gambling is when some interviewees experience the affordances as riskier when they consume other substances. Freek illustrates how online gambling behavior changes, for the worst, when consuming alcohol.

“One time, I came home Saturday evening, and I had taken some alcoholic drinks. When I went online to poker, my entire playing behavior changed [for the worst]. So then, I decided I would not do this ever again” (Freek, 51).

Using other substances can influence your gambling behavior. Thus, substance abuse during online gambling can be dangerous. The gambler can lose more money than was intended, because of alcohol or drugs. Gambling under influences is related to pathological gambling (Abdollahnejad, et al., 2014). The accessibility affordances plays a crucial role in this debate, because gamblers who are under the influence can now easily access a gambling site. Especially, for more pathological gamblers this development can be dangerous. Since pathological gambling and substance abuse can have a strong interplay relationship (Abdollahnejad, et al., 2014).

One implication of the affordances of online gambling, which could be considered as an opportunity, came forward during the interviews was that people should be informed about the risks of gambling. This can be done by a pop up message/video before playing a gambling game on an online platform. This would influence the *controllability* of the game, since it gives more information about the risks, but might lower the *accessibility* since gamblers need to complete more steps in order to gamble.

“I think, and it already happens sometimes, that the organizations who make money from gambling, also need to indicate the risks of gambling to people. Especially to people who are susceptible. It is the responsibility of those companies to make people aware” (Freek, 51).

### **Synthesis RQ3**

Affordances bring several implications in regards to responsible gambling versus pathological gambling. First, affordances can play an important role in the debate whether embedded simulated gambling games should be considered as online gambling since they possess similar affordances. These games might induce young gamers in becoming online gamblers, and thus risking them in becoming more pathological gamblers. The second implication of the online gambling affordances, is that they become more risk full when people combine gambling with substances abuse. Substance abuse can turn responsible gamblers into more pathological gamblers (Abdollahnejad, et al., 2014). The third, more practical, implication of online gambling affordances is when companies/governments try to educate gamblers into becoming more responsible gamblers. However, when for example pop up warnings or better age verification systems are added to online gambling platforms, then it could immediately have effects on the current affordances. The more warnings a gambler needs to see, the

higher the *accessibility* becomes. However, the low *accessibility* is one of the benefits for playing online gambling instead of offline gambling.

## Discussion

This study aimed to explore what makes online gambling into an attractive activity. To that end, the first objective of the study was to identify the perceived affordances attributed to online gambling and which opportunities and risks gamblers associate with these affordances. The second objective of this study was to determine the underlying needs that motivate gamblers to play online gambling games and to what extent the affordances of online gambling contribute to their need gratification. The third objective was to identify what online gamblers believe to be the implications of the online gambling affordances in regard to responsible gambling.

With respect to the first aim, this study found that the affordances found in the theory were mentioned spontaneously by the interviewees. Online gambling seems to be particularly characterized by three unique affordances: anonymity, controllability, and accessibility. Anonymity refers to gambling in an environment in which limited information about a person is needed. Controllability refers to the degree of control the gambler has during online gambling, they decide the platform, the amount of wagers and who which information they share with others. Accessibility refers to the various degrees of how accessible online gambling games are. Generally speaking online gambling has a much lower threshold than offline gambling.

During the analyses, it was found that offline gambling and online gambling share a similar set of affordances, such as reward uncertainty and playability. However, sociability appeared to be an affordance that applies mostly to offline gambling. The interviewees had similar thoughts that offline gambling usually involved social interactions, usually interactions with friends who joined them for gambling on a 'night out'.

Surprisingly, the affordances seemed to overlap, in the sense that they are oftentimes contingent upon each other: For example, online gambling is easily accessible, which associates closely to controllability. When online gambling is always accessible, the player has more freedom and control to choose whenever he wants to participate in what type of activity (Cotte & Latour, 2009). This controllability, in turn, is associated with anonymity, in previous conducted research about media communications there was found evidence of affordances which had an overlap and could interplay which each other (Helles, 2013).

The affordances-perspective also helps to shed light on the perceived risks and opportunities of online gambling, which was one of the main objectives of this study. There was a consensus among the interviewees that the accessibility of gambling in particular could be problematic for people who have a tendency towards addictive behavior. The interviewees agreed that the accessibility was an



advantage of online over offline gambling, but they also warned that it was too easily accessible. They argued it was a risk of online gambling.

With respect to the aim of determining the underlying needs that motivate gamblers to play online gambling (RQ2), this study found that online gamblers would try to seek out entertainment and gain monetary rewards through online gambling. Even though there is clear link between offline casino visitors and online casino visitors (Kim, et al., 2017), the interviewees did give an extra motivation for going to the offline casino. Namely, sociability is one of the main motivators for going to the offline casinos. Therefore, the affordances of reward uncertainty and playability plays a crucial role in motivating people to play a(n) (online) gambling game, as these affordances enable the players to experience ‘the pleasure of the hunt’ via the excitement that they derive from the combination of entertainment and the quest for a monetary gain. What differentiates online gambling from offline gambling, is that the accessibility affordance makes this form of escapism (cf. Katz, 1973) available at any time.

This study aimed to indicate the gratifications players would receive from playing a gambling game. One of these gratifications was the satisfaction of competitiveness. Online gamblers like to play competitive games and to beat either a real opponent (e.g., poker) or beat the ‘house’. This provides the gambler with excitement and a feeling of adrenaline.

With respect to the final aim, to establish the possible implications of affordances in regards to responsible gambling versus pathological gambler. The first implication arises when games have similar affordances as online gambling games. For example, loot boxes have similar affordances as online gambling. They have reward uncertainty. The player will win a reward, but they are not sure which reward. In addition, loot boxes have varying forms of accessibility and controllability. These new forms of embedded stimulated gambling games reach younger audiences, which might experience a smaller gap towards online gambling (Thomas & Dickins, 2016). When younger audiences become more exposed to online gambling, it could potentially create risks of them becoming more susceptible to pathological gambling (King, Delfabbro, & Griffiths, 2009). The interviewees acknowledged that there are many similarities between loot boxes and online gambling. Therefore, they advised some restrictions might be needed, especially if the value of the loot boxes could be traded outside of the game for real life currency.

Other implications of the affordances is when online gambling is played while abusing other substances. Since online gambling has low *accessibility*, it becomes more dangerous when the gambler has increased impulses which he cannot control. He might make wrong decisions considering the amount of money he wagers. The final implication of affordances is that they are both the benefit for gamblers as well as the risk. For example, gamblers want to have accessible gambling platforms. However, the *accessibility* is also what generates possible risks for pathological gamblers.

In conclusion, the affordances theory contributes to our understanding of online gambling. They can help define which games have similarities to gambling games, especially considering the

recent debate about loot boxes and other forms of stimulated games (NOS, 2018). Affordances can help as well in relation to the uses and gratifications of online gambling. Affordance can define the benefits what gamblers gain from online gambling, while the uses and gratifications explains why gamblers choose these affordances above other forms of media or above visiting offline gambling events.

### **Limitations and future research**

This study has a number of important limitations that we need to address. First, we did not manage to recruit female interviewees, despite efforts. This is probably partly due to the fact that internet gambling is mostly done by young, male gamblers (Griffiths, et al., 2009). Nonetheless, our study offers only a male perspective on online gambling.

Second, this study focused on the motivations and needs of individuals in order to understand how online gambling affected the interviewees. Since the study was limited to ten interviews, it is not possible to make broad generalizations about an entire population. However, follow-up quantitative research can provide more information about the broader population.

One issue that was not addressed in this study was whether interviewees were pathological gamblers according to clinical question tests (for example, Gambino & Lesieur (2006) The South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) questionnaire). Therefore, this study cannot claim that some interviewees faced gambling problems unless they stated so themselves – which was not the case. The main objective was to explore the affordances of gambling, the motivations of the gambler to gamble, and what the possible risks and opportunities of gambling were. This can be done without a clinical questions test, since this allowed the gamblers to talk openly about their own perception about gambling. It is possible, however, that the perceptions and experiences of pathological gamblers are different from those of the, seemingly, responsible gamblers in the current study. Follow-up research using a clinical sample, or at least incorporating a clinical test, is advised to further explore whether and how pathological gamblers may deviate in their responses.

Finally, further studies need to be carried out in order to validate which risks and opportunities will influence real online gambling behavior. This study focused on interviewees sharing their perspective on both their behavior and opinions about online gambling; however, their actual behavior might contrast some perceived observations. Future research may focus on actual gambling behavior and try to manipulate the presence and strength of the affordances to see how they can influence actual gambling behavior (e.g. adjusting accessibility of online gambling games).

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this qualitative semi-structured interview study make several contributions to the current literature. First, they point towards a set of affordances of online gambling games that

differentiate online gambling from offline gambling, and that explain why gambling is an attractive activity for gamblers via the opportunities that they create. Second, this study indicates that the affordances of online gambling seem to overlap and influence each other, which implies that affordances can amplify each other. In addition, the perceived affordances are related to the gratifications the gambler seeks from playing an online gambling game: as accessibility is a primary affordance of online gambling, online gambling provides a faster and easier escape than offline gambling. Third, this study provides additional information about perceived gambling risks, with the advent of simulated embedded gambling in video games as an obvious concern of online gamblers. The (online) gambling affordances may play a significant role in societal debate to establish what kind of games are characterized as gambling games, and what makes them attractive.

## References

- Abdollahnejad, R., Delfabbro, P., & Denson, L. (2014). Understanding the relationship between pathological gambling and gambling-related cognition scores: the role of alcohol use disorder and delusion proneness. *International Gambling Studies*, *14*(2), 183-195. doi:10.1080/14459795.2014.886711
- AGOG. (n.d.). Aantal gokverslaafden - Stichting AGOG Nederland. Retrieved February 22, 2018, from <http://www.agog.nl/gokken-en-gokverslaving/aantal-gokverslaafden>
- Anselme, P., & Robinson, M. J. (2013). What motivates gambling behavior? Insight into dopamine's role. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, *7*. doi:10.3389/fnbeh.2013.00182
- Armstrong, T., Rockloff, M., Browne, M., & Li, E. (2018). An Exploration of How Simulated Gambling Games May Promote Gambling with Money. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. doi:10.1007/s10899-018-9742-6
- Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, *1*(3), 385-405. doi:10.1177/146879410100100307
- Auer, M., & Griffiths, M. (2011). APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING ONLINE VERSUS OFFLINE GAMING IMPACTS. *Gambling research*, (3), 45. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michael\\_Auer4/publication/306097829\\_Approaches\\_to\\_understanding\\_online\\_versus\\_offline\\_gaming\\_impacts/links/57b0960b08aeb2cf17c47254/Approaches-to-understanding-online-versus-offline-gaming-impacts.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michael_Auer4/publication/306097829_Approaches_to_understanding_online_versus_offline_gaming_impacts/links/57b0960b08aeb2cf17c47254/Approaches-to-understanding-online-versus-offline-gaming-impacts.pdf)
- Blaszczynski, A., & Nower, L. (2002). A pathways model of problem and pathological gambling. *Addiction*, *97*(5), 487-499. doi:10.1046/j.1360-0443.2002.00015.x

- Blumler, J. G. (1979). The Role of Theory in Uses and Gratifications Studies. *Communication Research*, 6(1), 9-36. doi:10.1177/009365027900600102
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Chóliz, M. (2015). The Challenge of Online Gambling: The Effect of Legalization on the Increase in Online Gambling Addiction. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 32(2), 749-756. doi:10.1007/s10899-015-9558-6
- Cotte, J., & Latour, K. A. (2009). Blackjack in the Kitchen: Understanding Online versus Casino Gambling. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(5), 742-758. doi:10.1086/592945
- Dickerson, M. (1993). Internal and external determinants of persistent gambling: Problems in generalising from one form of gambling to another. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 9(3), 225-245. doi:10.1007/bf01015920
- Dixon, M. R. (2007). WHY BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS SHOULD STUDY GAMBLING BEHAVIOR. *Analysis of Gambling Behavior*, 1. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/716e/165fd23dab9b987a7368215641e8d7380c11.pdf> #page=46
- Evans, S. K., Pearce, K. E., Vitak, J., & Treem, J. W. (2016). Explicating Affordances: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Affordances in Communication Research. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 22(1), 35-52. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12180
- Fiorillo, C. D., Tobler, T., & Schultz, W. (2003). Discrete Coding of Reward Probability and Uncertainty by Dopamine Neurons. *Science*, 299(5614), 1898-1902. doi:10.1126/science.1077349

- Gainsbury, S., & Blaszczynski, A. (2011). A systematic review of Internet-based therapy for the treatment of addictions. *Clinical Psychology Review, 31*(3), 490-498.  
doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2010.11.007
- Griffiths, M. D. (2018). IS THE BUYING OF LOOT BOXES IN VIDEO GAMES A FORM OF GAMBLING OR GAMING? *Gaming Law Review, 22*(1), 52-54.  
doi:10.1089/glr2.2018.2216
- Griffiths, M., & Barnes, A. (2007). Internet Gambling: An Online Empirical Study Among Student Gamblers. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 6*(2), 194-204. doi:10.1007/s11469-007-9083-7
- Griffiths, M., & Wood, R. T. (2003). Risk Factors in Adolescence: The Case of Gambling, Videogame Playing, and the Internet. *Journal of Gambling Studies, 16*(2/3).  
Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1023/A:1009433014881.pdf>
- Griffiths, M., Wardle, H., Orford, J., Sproston, K., & Erens, B. (2009). Sociodemographic Correlates of Internet Gambling: Findings from the 2007 British Gambling Prevalence Survey. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 12*(2), 199-202.  
doi:10.1089/cpb.2008.0196
- Helles, R. (2013). Mobile communication and intermediality. *Mobile Media & Communication, 1*(1), 14-19. doi:10.1177/2050157912459496
- Holtgraves, T. (2009). Gambling, gambling activities, and problem gambling. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 23*(2), 295-302. doi:10.1037/a0014181
- Hume, M., & Mort, G. S. (2011). Fun, Friend, or Foe: Youth Perceptions and Definitions of Online Gambling. *Social Marketing Quarterly, 17*(1), 109-133.  
doi:10.1080/15245004.2010.546939

- Jolley, B., Mizerski, R., & Olaru, D. (2006). How habit and satisfaction affects player retention for online gambling. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(6), 770-777. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2006.01.017
- Kansspelautoriteit. (2018, April 19). *Sommige loot boxes in strijd met kansspelwet*. Retrieved from <https://www.kansspelautoriteit.nl/nieuws/alle-nieuwsberichten/2018/april/artikel-0/>
- Karlsen, F. (2010). Entrapment and Near Miss: A Comparative Analysis of Psycho-Structural Elements in Gambling Games and Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 9(2), 193-207. doi:10.1007/s11469-010-9275-4
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and Gratifications Research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509. doi:10.1086/268109
- Kim, H. S., Wohl, M. J., Gupta, R., & Derevensky, J. L. (2017). Why do young adults gamble online? A qualitative study of motivations to transition from social casino games to online gambling. *Asian Journal of Gambling Issues and Public Health*, 7(1). doi:10.1186/s40405-017-0025-4
- King, D., Delfabbro, P., & Griffiths, M. (2009). The Convergence of Gambling and Digital Media: Implications for Gambling in Young People. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 26(2), 175-187. doi:10.1007/s10899-009-9153-9
- Knezevic, B., & Ledgerwood, D. M. (2012). Gambling Severity, Impulsivity, and Psychopathology: Comparison of Treatment- and Community-Recruited Pathological Gamblers. *The American Journal on Addictions*, 21(6), 508-515. doi:10.1111/j.1521-0391.2012.00280.x

- Lee, C., Lee, Y., Bernhard, B. J., & Yoon, Y. (2006). Segmenting casino gamblers by motivation: A cluster analysis of Korean gamblers. *Tourism Management*, 27(5), 856-866. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2005.05.009
- Levitt, S., & Miles, T. (2011). The Role of Skill Versus Luck in Poker: Evidence from the World Series of Poker. doi:10.3386/w17023
- Lim, K. D. (2000). A Case of Pathological Gambling – Its Features and Management. *Singapore Medical Journal*, 42(5), 217-219. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.597.1912&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Martin, R. J., Usdan, S., Nelson, S., Umstatted, M. R., LaPlante, D., Perko, M., & Shaffer, H. (2010). Using the theory of planned behavior to predict gambling behavior. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 24(1), 89-97. doi:10.1037/a0018452
- McCormack, A., & Griffiths, M. D. (2010). Motivating and Inhibiting Factors in Online Gambling Behaviour: A Grounded Theory Study. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 10(1), 39-53. doi:10.1007/s11469-010-9300-7
- McNeilly, D. P., & Burke, W. J. (2001). Gambling as a Social Activity of Older Adults. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 52(1), 19-28. doi:10.2190/a4u7-234x-b3xp-64ah
- Mentzoni, R. A. (2012). *Structural Characteristics in Gambling* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen , Bergen, Norway). Retrieved from [http://bora.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/6542/Dr.thesis\\_Rune%20Mentzoni.pdf?sequence=1](http://bora.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/6542/Dr.thesis_Rune%20Mentzoni.pdf?sequence=1)
- NOS. (2015, November 27). 1,5 miljoen Nederlanders gokken op buitenlandse sites. Retrieved from <https://nos.nl/artikel/2071604-1-5-miljoen-nederlanders-gokken-op-buitenlandse-sites.html>



- NOS. (2018, April 26). Populaire games overtreden gokregels. Retrieved from <https://nos.nl/artikel/2228041-populaire-games-overtreden-gokregels.html>
- Pelgrim, C., & Leijten, J. (2016, September 13). Bijna 80.000 gokverslaafden in Nederland. *NRC Handelsblad*. Retrieved from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/09/13/bijna-80-000-gokverslaafden-in-nederland-a1521159>
- Potenza, M. N., Fiellin, D. A., Heninger, G. R., Rounsaville, B. J., & Mazure, C. M. (2002). Gambling. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, *17*(9), 721-732. doi:10.1046/j.1525-1497.2002.10812.x
- Quan-Haase, A., & Young, A. L. (2010). Uses and Gratifications of Social Media: A Comparison of Facebook and Instant Messaging. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, *30*(5), 350-361. doi:10.1177/0270467610380009
- Raacke, J., & Bonds-Raacke, J. (2008). MySpace and Facebook: Applying the Uses and Gratifications Theory to Exploring Friend-Networking Sites. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *11*(2), 169-174. doi:10.1089/cpb.2007.0056
- Reid, D. J., & Reid, F. J. (2005). Online Focus Groups: An In-depth Comparison of Computer-mediated and Conventional Focus Group Discussions. *International Journal of Market Research*, *47*(2), 131-162. doi:10.1177/147078530504700204
- Reinhard, C. D., & Dervin, B. (2000). Media Uses and Gratifications. *21st Century Communication: A Reference Handbook 21st century communication: A reference handbook*, 506-515. doi:10.4135/9781412964005.n56
- Rijksoverheid. (2018, June 19). *Extra maatregelen om kansspelverslaving te voorkomen*. Retrieved from <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/kansspelen/nieuws/2018/06/19/extra-maatregelen-om-kansspelverslaving-te-voorkomen>

- SCHISSEL, B. (2001). Betting Against Youth. *Youth & Society*, 32(4), 473-491.  
doi:10.1177/0044118x01032004004
- Singh, A. J., Moufakkir, O., & Holecek, D. F. (2007). Development of a trip profile for elderly American casino visitors. *Journal of Retail & Leisure Property*, 6(1), 61-68.  
doi:10.1057/palgrave.rlp.5100044
- The definition of gambling. (n.d.). In *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved from  
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/gambling>
- The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception. (1986). *James J. Gibson and the Psychology of Perception*, 279-295. doi:10.2307/j.ctt1xp3nmm.20
- Thomas, A., & Dickins, M. (2016). Is it gambling or a game? Simulated gambling games: Their use and regulation - Australian Gambling Research Centre. *AGRC Discussion Paper*, 5. Retrieved from <https://aifs.gov.au/agrc/sites/default/files/agrc-dp5-simulated-gambling-paper.pdf>
- Treem, J. W., & Leonardi, P. M. (2012). Social Media Use in Organizations: Exploring the Affordances of Visibility, Editability, Persistence, and Association. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2129853
- Van Rooij, A. J., Vanden Abeele, M. M. P., & Van Looy, J. (2017). Gambling and Gaming in Belgium: Opportunities and Risks associated with Online Digital Gambling. Ghent, Belgium: imec-mict-Ghent University
- Van Rooij, A. J., Kisjes, H., & Willemen, R. (2015). Gokken en (online) gokverslaving. *Internetverslaving*, 95-106. Retrieved from  
<http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-6888768>
- Verplanken, B., & Orbell, S. (2003). Reflections on Past Behavior: A Self-Report Index of Habit Strength1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 33(6), 1313-1330.  
doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.2003.tb01951.x

- Wei, R. (2008). Motivations for using the mobile phone for mass communications and entertainment. *Telematics and Informatics*, 25(1), 36-46.  
doi:10.1016/j.tele.2006.03.001
- Wong, I. A., Rosenbaum, M. S., & Liu, M. T. (2014). An Examination of Value Equity in Event Service: The Moderating Role of Event Experience. *Proceedings of the 2010 Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual Conference*, 152-155.  
doi:10.1007/978-3-319-11797-3\_89
- Wood, R. (2008). Why Swedish people play online poker and factors that can increase or decrease trust in poker Web sites: A qualitative investigation. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, (21), 80. doi:10.4309/jgi.2008.21.8
- Wood, R. T., & Griffiths, M. D. (2008). Why Swedish people play online poker and factors that can increase or decrease trust in poker Web sites: A qualitative investigation. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, (21), 80. doi:10.4309/jgi.2008.21.8
- Wood, R. T., & Griffiths, M. D. (2014). Understanding Positive Play: An Exploration of Playing Experiences and Responsible Gambling Practices. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 31(4), 1715-1734. doi:10.1007/s10899-014-9489-7
- Wu, J. H., Wang, S. C., & Tsai, H. H. (2010). Falling in love with online games: The uses and gratifications perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(6), 1862-1871.  
doi:10.1016/j.chb.2010.07.033

## Appendix

### Appendix A: List of pre-defined questions which could be answered by interviewees.

Kenmerken persoon:

Geslacht?

Leeftijd?

Wat is je hoogst afgemaakte huidige opleiding?

Werk je op dit moment, studeer je, en/of blijf je thuis?

Woon je samen met andere mensen of woon je alleen?

*Start:*

Wat is voor jou een kansspel?

Er zijn allerlei soorten kansspelen in omloop en ze verschillen sterk. Welke kansspelen, gokspellen, of spellen die sterk lijken op kansspelen speel je?

Bijvoorbeeld: spelen op binnenlandse en buitenlandse

goksites, online poker, lotterij , of gokken via je mobiele telefoon

Op welk apparaat speel je ze?

In welke context speel je ze? Gokken op afstand, internet, in-persoon, etcetera.

Hoeveel geld besteed je meestal aan zo'n spel?

Wat is er leuk aan / niet leuk aan?

Speel je nog spellen die een beetje lijken op kansspelen, maar dit misschien niet echt zijn?

Zoals gok-achtige spellen zonder inzet van geld, apps op de telefoon, spellen met lootboxes

Heb je gehoord over het de nieuwe ontwikkelingen in games waaronder lootboxes? (Zonee, uitleg)

Wat zijn je gedachten van free-play to play games die een gok element in hun game toepassen?

Speel je weleens free to play games. Wat vind je hiervan. Is dit ook een vorm van kansspelen.

Online gokken onderscheid tussen offline en online gokken. Wat is voor jou het verschil tussen online en offline gokken?

(vraag door naar elementen gemeenschappelijk, en verschillend zijn)

*Ontwikkeling online gokken:*

Wat vind je van online gokken?

Hoe denk je dat online gokken het gedrag van gokkers verandert?

Heb je je eigen gokgedrag zien evolueren doorheen de voorbije jaren? Hoe? Heeft de digitalisering hier een rol in gespeeld?

Welke kansen denk je dat online gokken biedt met oog op verantwoord gokken?

Welke risico's denk je dat online gokken biedt met oog op verantwoord gokken?

*Features(/affordances)*

Speel je wel eens met vrienden?

Wat zijn leuke kenmerken van (offline) gokken? En wat zijn negatieve kenmerken van (offline) gokken voor jou?

Wat maakt online gokken interessanter dan offline gokken?

Wat maakt online gokken minder interessant?

Ervaar je vrijheid bij het online gokken? Zoja, op welke manieren

Sommige mensen zeggen dat online gokken een anonimiteit met zich mee brengt. Wat zijn je gedachten hierover?

Welke omstandigheid leidt tot offline en online. Wat is de invloed van de keuze. Verschillen de motive, offline en online.

*Gewoonte('s)*

Zijn er vaste gewoonte- momenten (in de week, maand, of in het jaar) dat je met online of offline gokken aan de slag gaat? Wat voor momenten zijn dit en welke situaties zijn dit?

Heb je een vaste klantenkaart?

Heb je meerdere accounts op verschillende goksites (of een account met geld)?

*Uses and gratifications:*

Ga jij wel eens gokken als je in een bepaalde stemming bent, of juist niet? Wat zijn je motieven om te gaan gokken?

Welke gevoelens ervaar je voor of na het gokken? TIJDENS

Vind jij het wel eens moeilijk om niet te gaan gokken?

Heb je wel eens het idee dat je minder zou willen gokken?

Vult gokken een bepaalde behoefte voor jou als persoon?

Ben je ooit in behandeling geweest voor problemen rondom gokken of middelengebruik?

Ga je de komende maand weer gokken? Welke spellen?

zelfcontrole

*Ervaring met gokken:*

Wat is je mening over gokken en online gokken in het algemeen?

Welke betekenis hebben kansspelen in je dagelijkse leven, en waarom?

Wat is je leukste ervaring met gokken?

.Wat is je minst leuke ervaring met gokken?

Blootstelling aan/houding ten opzichte van reclame over (digitaal) gokken

Welke rol speelden deze kansspelen vroeger, tijdens je opvoeding thuis?