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# EXPLOITING ONLINE SOCIAL GAMBLING FOR MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*The advent of Internet technology along with its typical subsets provides a new approach to how gambling is conducted in postmodern times. Drawing on constructivist research and utilising a single case study strategy, this study examines online social gambling and real money gambling marketing communication practices as well as offers some insights into the development and implementation of effective marketing communication programmes. In contrast to existing studies, the paper, in part, proposes integrative and higher levels of marketing communication programmes between online social gambling and real money gambling environments. The paper reveals the implicit structure of meanings underlying the link between online social gambling activity and real money gambling practices.*

## INTRODUCTION

As profit-driven entities, Internet gambling companies (also referred to as 'online gambling' and 'real money gambling online' in this study) are seeking to expand into a rapidly growing online social gambling industry (Yakuel, 2013; Chang and Zhang, 2008). A few of the major Internet gambling companies and social gambling companies have already started to spend millions of dollars trying to fight for market share, while other gambling companies and social gambling companies have begun building strategic alliances (Johnson, 2013). These actions have sparked controversy within the industry in terms of how companies should handle both markets (Schneider, 2012; Goode, 2013; Morgan Stanley, 2012). This controversy, combined with limited research within the social gambling industry, has left industry leaders and scholars with different ideas about how to understand the business models of the social gambling and Internet gambling industries, and more specifically, whether or not to merge them or keep them separate (Schneider, 2012; Goode, 2013; Collson, 2012a; Rogers, 2013; Morgan Stanley, 2012). This issue has spawned debate amongst government officials about whether or not social gambling online can actually be considered 'gambling' and whether or not they should step in and regulate the online social gambling market (Alaeddini, 2013; Cohen, 2013). Furthermore, authors have different perspectives about online gaming, and there appears to be no clear definition

of what online gaming entails (Yee, 2006; Raylu and Oei, 2002; Jieun et al., 2011; Schneider, 2012). More specifically, Yee (2006) and Kaye (2012) claim that online gaming involves playing traditional video type games online; Owens (2010) and Alaeddini (2013) suggest that Internet gambling games are forms of online gaming; and Jieun et al. (2011), Roche (2012) and Odobo (2013a) suggest that the definition also includes the relatively new industry social gaming (including social gambling).

The advantage for Internet gambling companies is they can exploit marketing opportunities within the unregulated social gambling industry, which they can no longer do within the regulated Internet gambling industry. The social gambling industry is unregulated in over 99% of countries primarily because it is currently not considered gambling (Morgan Stanley, 2012). More specifically, some social gambling sites do not assign real-life monetary value to their virtual currency (fake gambling chips), while other social sites do not accept payments (wagers) from players for prizes won. Either way, both strategies eliminate one of the three key elements for something to be considered gambling (UK Gambling Act, 2005). This situation provides real money gambling sites direct access to players who are located in places where local governments have placed legal restrictions on Internet gambling marketing communication programmes and consumer buying.

At a recent gambling conference in London, some industry experts stated that social gambling and real money gambling businesses should not be viewed as identical entities but should be viewed separately as each has a unique business model (Goode, 2013) and social gamblers and real money gamblers have different motives for playing (Choi and Kim, 2004). In addition, 98% of social gamblers are unwilling to spend any money at all and therefore cannot be converted into profitable real money gamblers (iGaming Business, 2013). This data is consistent with Chang's (2010) case study, which states that 98% of social players online are unwilling to spend any money.

Other industry leaders feel differently and view both business models as a perfect fit for each other. For example, Zynga, the global market leader for social games and social gambling games online, has teamed up with BWin.Party, currently one of the largest real money gambling companies online, and entered the UK real money gambling industry in April 2013 through the social gambling brand Zynga Poker (Collson, 2012a; Pitt, 2013). Other recent examples of convergence between real money companies and social gambling companies include (1) Facebook teaming up with 888 Holdings PLC, another one of the world's largest online gambling companies, to offer a real money gambling platform on Facebook in 2013 (Collson, 2012b) and also teaming up with Gamesys Software to launch a real money bingo platform (Church-Sanders, 2012) on the Facebook platform; (2) the US\$500 million acquisition of the third largest social casino site, Double Down Interactive, by International Game Technology (IGT), which is the largest deal of its kind to date (Wall Street Journal, 2012); and (3) Caesars Entertainment, one of the largest casino companies in the US, is currently ranked number two in social gambling market share after it purchased the social gambling software company Playtika in 2011 (Tsipori, 2011; Morgan Stanley,

2012). Forming these strategic alliances (the merging of a social network/gambling company with a real money gambling company) ensures that core competencies and economies of scale can be shared to increase the chance of success while minimising risks (Rogers, 2013).

These latter beliefs of industry experts are in parallel with data found in a recent report by Morgan Stanley (2012). The report suggests that both the online gambling and social gambling business models are a perfect fit for each other. More specifically, total value is created from the difference between the customer acquisition cost and the customer lifetime value. In addition, the report suggests that the similar business models have three key stages: (1) acquire customers, (2) retain customers and drive engagement and (3) monetise customers. Moreover, the Morgan Stanley (2012) report presents a gap within the literature, which is that the forecasts are based strictly on numbers and percentages. For example, the report states that converting customers from social gamblers into real money gamblers could grow the real money gambling industry by 20% to 30% if only 10% of social gamblers are converted. The report further reveals that because 2% of social gamblers are willing to spend money on a social gambling game (e.g., buy virtual currency/gambling chips or unlock the next level of game play), a percentage of them would be willing to spend money on a real money gambling site (Morgan Stanley, 2012). However, the report produces no evidence from previous or current research which examines the conversion of a social gambler into a real money gambler by using traditional real money marketing communication programmes to justify their claims. Furthermore, the report states that both business models are identical but reveals no links between the buying behaviour of a social gambler and that of a real money gambler. With this in mind, the current paper aims to provide some insights into how marketers could effectively communicate with these segments based on their differing needs.

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND CONTEXT**

Online gaming is an umbrella term used for various types of games played on the Internet, including video/PC games, social games and gambling games. The definition of online gaming varies depending on the author's disciplinary background or perspective (Yee, 2006; Raylu and Oei, 2002; Jieun et al., 2011; Schneider, 2012). For example, authors who have conducted research on the video and PC game industry use the term 'online gaming' for players who play video games through a network (usually the Internet), on a gaming console such as a PlayStation, a personal computer (PC) (such as games like *Counter-Strike* or *Monopoly*) or on a tablet or mobile phone (Yee, 2006; Kaye, 2012). Online gaming in this context does not include real money gambling games played online due to the different financial investment and experiences (Kaye, 2012; Alaeddini, 2013).

The online gambling industry has included itself under the umbrella term 'online gaming'. The primary reason for this decision is that the word 'gambling' in online gambling can negatively affect some people because they consider gambling offensive (Prendergast and Hwa, 2003) and a taboo form of entertainment (Carey and Carey, 1984). Therefore, the online gambling industry uses the term 'online gaming' but includes casino-type games played online as well (Owens, 2010; Alaeddini, 2013). This approach allows them to have a more positive image when referring to the online gambling industry. The term 'social gaming', a relatively new form of online gaming, refers to games distributed on social networks which can be played solo or against other people via social networking sites (Jieun et al., 2011; Roche, 2012; Odobo, 2013a). Unlike traditional video games, social games are generally easier to play and focus more on allowing people to interact with friends rather than focusing on amazing graphics and fast hand-eye coordination movements (Lacy, 2009; Chang, 2010).

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the definition of 'online gaming' will include all game types (both gambling related and non-gambling related, including the wagering of real money, virtual money or no money wagering), which are played online (including through a social network/media platform played solo or multiplayer) via a computer, a laptop, a game console, a tablet, a mobile phone or any other digital device that has Internet access and game play capabilities. This study primarily focuses on two segments of the online gaming industry: (1) social gambling online (under social gaming) and (2) real money gambling online (under online gaming). Both segments will be further defined, and a discussion of the various motivations and behaviours of the players will be presented.

### **Social Gambling Online**

Presently, no clear accepted definition is given for what social gambling entails (Griffiths, 2013; Schneider, 2012). Most studies have researched the social gaming industry as a whole as opposed to researching social gambling as a specific phenomenon (Schneider, 2012). The primary reason for this is that social gambling is a subpart of social gaming. Consequently, limited research has been conducted specifically on the online social gambling industry and its players.

According to Schneider (2012) and Yakuel (2013), social gambling is based on virtual currency, which means players pay real money to buy valid online currency (called virtual currency) to play a particular game. Virtual currency can also be used to obtain goods and services as well as to advance to the next levels of the game, but it cannot be exchanged back into real money. This concept is a very narrow definition of social gambling as it does not mention the free play aspect. Geron (2011) expands on the purchasing of free goods and virtual currencies observed by Schneider (2012) by also mentioning that players can play games for free without the need to pay. Jieun et al. (2011) produced research that developed on Geron's (2011) definition by stating that social games (including gambling-type games) are distributed on social networks which can be played solo or against other people via social networking sites. Chang

(2010) mentions that social games have different social levels. For example, Zynga's social gambling game *Texas Hold'em Poker* has some social components such as chatting, but players usually interact with strangers. *Mob Wars*, on the other hand, has a higher level of social interactivity because players do better if more of their friends join their 'mob clan'.

However, none of these authors make a distinction between social gaming online and social gambling online. Gambling Data (2012) and Odobo (2013a) state that social gambling games mimic traditional casino gambling games but are not considered forms of 'gambling' primarily because players can pay money into the game but can never make a withdrawal, and the virtual currency they purchase has no real-life monetary value (Huang, 2012). The idea of paying money into the game but not being allowed to withdraw it is consistent with Schneider's (2012) definition.

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, social gambling online will include all aspects of social gaming but with the caveat that the definition applies only to gambling-related games. This study defines 'gambling related' as referring to every game which can be found within a casino-style licensed gambling establishment. According to Rose and Owens (2009a), this type of game includes, but is not limited to: casino-style table games (e.g., blackjack, craps and roulette, slot machines, video poker machines, and the card game poker), lotteries, parimutuel betting on horse and dog races, sports betting and banked and non-banked games.

### **Drivers of Online Social Gamblers**

In general terms, authors have defined motivation as a force that drives people to take action, which can differ both in terms of levels of motivation and in terms of specific types of motivation (Schiffman et al., 2010; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Furthermore, Vallerand (1997) revealed that different motivations lead to different affective, behavioural and cognitive outcomes.

Understanding the motives which drive social gamblers online is important because motives determine choice criteria (Jobber, 2010). In addition, understanding the motivations and behaviours of an online social gambler provides key information not only for researchers, but also for marketers and game developers (Jieun et al., 2011). For this study, an important task is to identify the motivations of social gamblers to determine the existence of any similarities to the motivations of real money gamblers online. However, limited research has been conducted on the motivations and behaviours of social gamblers online. Therefore, to aid understanding of this topic, this study will draw upon previous literature which has been conducted on the motivations and behaviours of an online social gamer.

Previous literature on online social gaming focuses mainly on motivation and its role in determining player behaviour (Choi and Kim, 2004; Yee, 2006; Lampe et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2011). For example, Jieun et al. (2011) examined why people play online social games, how different types of motivations influence their attitudes toward

playing social games and people's intentions to engage in various online social game activities. They were able to identify the following six motivations of players:

1. social interaction
2. self-presentation
3. fantasy/role playing
4. passing time/escapism
5. entertainment
6. challenge/competition

In addition, 'the findings demonstrated that different types of motivations influenced attitudes toward playing [social games] and intentions to engage in different social network gaming activities differentially' (Jieun et al., 2011, p. 643). Four out of the six motivations which were identified in this research (social interaction, entertainment, passing time and self-presentation) are also consistent with the four most frequently identified motivations from previous social network and social gaming literature (Mehdizadeh, 2010; Lampe et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2011).

However, other authors who have measured player motivations have categorised the motivations differently. For example, Yee (2006) categorised player motivations into three main components and subcomponents as follows:

- Achievement Component
  - Advancement (i.e., in-game rank reputation)
  - Mechanics (i.e., next phases in the game architecture)
  - Competition
- Social Component
  - Socialising/Relationships/Teamwork
- Engagement Component
  - Discovery (i.e., discovering the game's atmosphere)
  - Role Playing (i.e., assuming/changing into a different character)
  - Customisation (i.e., customizing their character/avatar)
  - Escapism (i.e., leaving the real-world environment)

In addition, Chang and Zhang's (2008) research suggests that players will be much more motivated to play social games if the games they are playing are fun and if they facilitate a form of escape from the routines of everyday life. Zanetta et al. (2011) agree with Yee's (2006) three main components, but they also found that a strong motivational level of achievement, escapism and socialising are predictive factors of social gaming addiction. However, motivational factors for social gaming addiction go beyond the scope of this study.

Playing social games online makes constant demands on a player's attention (Buchanan, 2005). Furthermore, with regard to player behaviour, Shin et al. (2011) examined the perceived factors which contribute to a social gamer's behaviours and found that perceived playfulness and security are two key factors which play an important role in predicting players' attitude towards their intention to play a social

game. It has been suggested that a possible driving force behind the motivations of a social gambler is that they live in a jurisdiction where real money gambling online is currently illegal, and therefore, players have no choice but to play a social gambling game because no alternative is available (Johnson, 2013). However, research in this area to support this statement is lacking.

These previous studies provide a good understanding of motivations to play a social game. However, none of them address what motivates social players to purchase virtual goods or currencies. Therefore, exploring what motivates a social player to buy virtual goods and currencies is important. As previously mentioned, Morgan Stanley (2012) believes that because 2% of social players are willing to spend money on a social game, a percentage of them would be willing to spend money on a real money gambling site. Huang (2012) suggests that growing evidence of virtual goods consumption exists, but it also mentions that few studies have researched this area to provide sound evidence.

Schau and Gilly (2003) and Jieun et al. (2011) found a strong link between a player's motivation to make a strong impression on other players by playing social games online and their intentions of purchasing virtual goods and currencies (such as to send player gifts). In addition, Schau and Gilly (2003, p. 385) specifically state that 'consumers make their identities tangible, or self-present, by associating themselves with material objects and places', even in the virtual world.

### **Real Money Gambling Online**

Gambling has been a part of humanity for a very long time, and references to it have been found in some of the earliest dated records. Literature on the topic has been accumulating since ancient times (Carey and Carey, 1984). To clarify what real money online gambling is, gambling needs to be defined first. Given the long history of gambling, most literature defines it at a broad level (Scholes-Balog and Hemphill, 2012; Raylu and Oei, 2002; UK Gambling Act, 2005). Where the definition of gambling differs is within the legal context, more specifically, what each country, state or province will allow within its jurisdiction and how it defines each element of gambling from a legal perspective.

For example, for an activity to be considered gambling under common law, it must satisfy three elements: (1) consideration, (2) chance and (3) prize (Kelly, 2000; Rose and Owens, 2009a). If any one of these elements is missing, the subject is not considered gambling (Rose and Owens, 2009a). It is how each jurisdiction defines, for example, what consideration or chance is that makes gambling different from country to country. In its broadest form, the UK Gambling Act (2005) defines gambling as playing a game of chance for money or a prize. Raylu and Oei (2002) expand on this definition and state that gambling is placing a wager on a game or event that has an outcome which is to some degree determined by chance. Scholes-Balog and Hemphill (2012) split up the definition, particularly the 'playing games of chance for money' and

'wagering money on an uncertain outcome', and classify online gambling in two main forms: (1) 'online gaming' (e.g., casino games, poker games, and slots) and (2) 'online wagering' (e.g., sports betting and events betting).

This definition of gambling-related games is based on literature by Rose and Owens (2009a) and is also closely related to the definition provided by the European Commission (2011) report on online gambling. However, the European Commission (2011) report further expands on the definition of the word 'online' (labelled as 'Internet' in the report) in online gambling.

The European Commission (2011, pp. 13–14) report states:

*Internet (and other interactive technological platforms, such as m-commerce or [Internet protocol television]) are used to (a) offer gambling services to consumers, (b) allow consumers to bet or gamble against each other (e.g., betting exchanges or online poker) or (c) as a distribution technique (e.g., to purchase lottery tickets directly online).*

Therefore, for the purposes of this report, a 'real money gambler online' is defined as anyone who deposits money into an online casino and places a wager on any gambling-related game via the Internet to win a prize or money.

Many authors have identified that a player's accessibility to gambling-related games leads to a stronger motivation to gamble (Jacques et al., 2000; McCormack and Griffiths, 2012; Griffiths, 2003; Wood et al., 2007a). Accessibility to gambling increased when gambling became available online (Wood et al., 2007a). However, given the common agreement on accessibility, authors have assigned different priorities to the factors which motivate players to gamble online (McCormack and Griffiths, 2012; Hopley and Nicki, 2010; Griffiths, 2003). For example, McCormack and Griffiths (2012) identified one major theme and four subthemes to describe the motivations for players to gamble real money online. The major motivational theme was labelled 'greater opportunity to gamble' (i.e., increased accessibility), and the four sub-motivational themes were labelled as follows: convenience, value for money, greater variety of games to play and anonymity. These findings are consistent with some of the motivational elements found in a study conducted by Griffiths and Barnes (2008), who identified ease of access, flexibility of use, 24-hour availability, large gambling game selections and anonymity as motivations for gambling online. These elements share a common ground with the themes and subthemes identified by McCormack and Griffiths (2012). In addition, Griffiths and Barnes (2008) suggested further motivations as (1) promotions and advertising and (2) gambling because family and friends gamble online. Cotte and Latour (2009) also found anonymity to be a key motivational factor. However, Hopley and Nicki (2010) identified different motivational reasons for gambling online, and 'winning money' was identified as a key motivation. Their study also identified other motivational reasons which, ranked in order of importance, included developing player skills, feeling lucky, the enjoyment gambling brings,

relaxation, escapism, excitement, to relieve boredom, the nature of competition, the challenge and being able to socialise.

These different opinions amongst authors on real money gambling motivations online present a gap within the literature. The differences in opinion and findings from previous literature come from the limitations of each of the studies (Griffiths et al., 2009; Gainsbury et al. 2012; Hopley and Nicki, 2010). For example, Griffiths et al.'s (2009) study was based on a sample of 476 participants who gambled online. The sample was taken from 9003 participants in the 2007 British Gambling Prevalence Survey. Their research studied a vast number of different types of online gamblers and their motivations, but it focused on UK players only. Gainsbury et al. (2012) conducted behavioural analysis research on the betting patterns of 11394 online gamblers. Player account data and betting pattern data were used for the analysis, but this study was limited to only one gambling website within the Australian market. Hopley and Nicki's (2010) study was even more limited in numbers and focus. The study had 179 participants and focused only on online poker players, and 85% of the subjects were European/Caucasian. In addition, the participants were self-selected from poker forums and network sites, and were also considered highly experienced players. This approach prevents the findings from being generalised to the motivations of all real money gamblers online.

## **IS THERE ANY SALIENT BEHAVIOUR IN GAMBLING?**

Consumer behaviour is commonly referred to as the process and activities which people engage in when they are searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services to satisfy their needs and desires (Appiah-Gyimah et al., 2011; Copley, 2004; Hesz and Neophytou, 2010; Tu, 2011). Furthermore, consumer behaviour is influenced by personality, motivation, culture, knowledge, psychographics/lifestyle, demographics, social, attitudes, beliefs, economic and feelings (Tu, 2011; Luna and Gupta, 2001; George, 2004; Solomon et al., 2012; Constantinides, 2004).

An insight into consumer buying can be gained from the five dimensions of buying behaviour. The five dimensions are defined from answering the following questions: (1) Who is important in the buying decision? (2) How do they buy? (3) What is their choice criteria? (4) Where do they buy? and (5) When do they buy? The answers to these questions are a result of marketing research and personal contact with the consumer (Jobber, 2010; Shahraki et al., 2012; Tamilia, 2007). Furthermore, authors have regarded how consumers buy as a decision-making process which includes the following steps: (1) problem awareness, (2) information search, (3) evaluation of alternatives, (4) purchasing decision and (5) post-purchasing behaviour (Pitta, 2013; Blackwell et al., 2005; Jobber, 2010; Constantinides, 2004; Shahraki et al., 2012; Pellémans, 1971). However, even with these frameworks and processes, Armstrong

(1991) has suggested that consumer behaviour in general research is difficult to predict.

With regard to social gambling, a recent study by Lan et al. (2013) suggested that a consumer's decision to spend time in playing a game is often necessary before they decide to purchase the goods (e.g., online games) associated with the consumption. Huang's (2012) study of purchase intentions towards virtual goods found that social identity played a key role in influencing consumer involvement and flows. More specifically, 'affective involvement showed the greatest influence on purchase intention compared to flow and cognitive involvement' (Huang, 2012, p. 252). Furthermore, Animesh et al. (2011) suggests a link between encouraging social player interaction and environmental stimulus, which can influence the virtual purchase buying behaviour of players. Pitta (2013) also mentions that consumer interactions on social networks is an important aspect of consumer engagement because social networks are transparent and consumers trust their friends' information and opinions. Consumers are more likely to make a purchase online from a brand they know or trust (Kim et al., 2011) rather than being in a state of imbalance and having to re-examine their whole decision process with new or unfamiliar brands (Pellémans, 1971). Furthermore, Evans (2012) states that engagement with social networks can go beyond the purchasing stage when consumers 'share' their purchases online.

Drawing on Odobo's (2013b) research, the majority of players (consumers) on a real money casino site not only makes purchases, but also has a substantially higher average revenue per user than players on a social gambling site where only a small subset of players make a purchase. Gainsbury et al. (2012) found a link between consumer buying behaviour and consumer gambling losses when playing on real money casinos online. More specifically, players spent more money (i.e., increased wager frequency and wagered amounts) when they started losing large sums of money. This phenomenon has been described as a decision-making process by Brockner and Rubin (1985, p. 23) where 'individuals escalate their commitment to a previously chosen, though failing, course of action in order to justify or 'make good' on prior investments'. The opposite is true as well: players tend to keep wagering if they are winning money (Sevigny et al., 2005). Further studies have shown that real money gamblers can potentially increase their level of spending in an online casino because their real money deposits are converted to electronic money (i.e., the currency they use to gamble with online), which causes their judgment of real-life monetary value to be temporarily altered for the electronic money, because players think electronic money does not seem 'real', and therefore, they increase their buying by gambling more (McCormack and Griffiths, 2012; Griffiths et al., 2005; Griffiths, 2006). Previous research by Wood et al. (2007b) on the acquisition of real money poker players online suggests that (1) increases in celebrity poker playing and endorsements, (2) increases in televised poker events and (3) decreases in the wager amount possibilities (i.e., being allowed to wager as low as 1 cent) are some of the precipitating factors of player participation.

## **ESTABLISHING A LINK: SOCIAL AND REAL MONEY GAMBLING ONLINE**

Research into social gambling and real money gambling online tends to support the industry leaders and scholars who believe social gambling and real money gambling should be kept separate (Goode, 2013; Yakuel, 2013). Hopley and Nicki's (2010) study of the predictive factors of excessive playing of real money online poker was the only study which identified similar motivations to *social gambling* motivations. By contrast, other research into player motivations to participate in *social gaming* online and real money gambling online identified a few closely matched similarities (Jieun et al., 2011; Yee, 2006; Zanetta et al., 2011; Chang and Zhang, 2008; McCormack and Griffiths, 2012; and Griffiths and Barnes, 2008). Furthermore, these studies were conducted on online gaming (video gaming) and social gaming players, and not directly on social gambling players (Choi and Kim, 2004; Jieun et al., 2011; Yee, 2006; Zanetta et al., 2011; Chang and Zhang, 2008). The motivations identified by Hopley and Nicki (2010) for real money poker players online that share commonalities with social gaming players online are escapism, competition, the challenge and being able to socialise (Jieun et al., 2011; Yee, 2006; Zanetta et al., 2011; Chang and Zhang, 2008). However, all these motivational elements were found in only 5% or less of players. Ironically, the similarities with player motivations in the study by Hopley and Nicki (2010) could be explained because some of the participants were chosen from social networking sites. However, the study makes no distinction between how many participants were chosen from social networking sites versus online poker portals. Wood et al.'s (2007b) study is consistent with the study by Hopley and Nicki (2010) because socializing and escapism were identified as motivational factors, but less than 10% of players in this survey identified it as an important factor. Furthermore, both studies targeted online poker players only, which makes it hard to generalise the findings to all social gambling and real money gambling games or players.

In addition, the primary demographics of social gaming players and online gambling players do not match (Griffiths et al., 2009; Gainsbury et al., 2012; Wood and Williams, 2009; Ovans, 2012; Qualman, 2012; Hepburn, 2012). The literature indicates consistency amongst the demographics of real money gamblers online, which is about 76% male with a stronger presence in younger males (Griffiths et al., 2009; Gainsbury et al., 2012; Wood and Williams, 2009). These demographics match previous clinical studies on offline real money gamblers, which also found a male predominance (Martinez, 1983; Galski, 1987). Consequently, the social gaming demographics are approximately split 50/50 amongst men and women, with women over the age of 55 identified as the primary segment of online game players (Ovans, 2012; Qualman,

2012; Hepburn, 2012). Furthermore, males tend to engage in gaming for hedonic reasons, whereas women do so mostly for self-efficacy (Lan et al., 2013).

Few similarities were found between the consumer buying behaviour patterns of social gamblers online and real money gamblers online (Lan et al., 2013; Huang, 2012; Animesh et al., 2011; Gainsbury et al., 2012; Sevigny et al., 2005; McCormack and Griffiths, 2012; Griffiths et al., 2005; Griffiths, 2006). Authors have identified that social gamblers will increase buying consumption for the following reasons: (1) time spent playing the game before they decide to buy, (2) to establish a social identity and (3) increased social player interaction with other players (Lan et al., 2013; Huang, 2012; Animesh et al., 2011). However, research from real money gamblers found that consumer spending happens when (1) consumers are losing money, (2) consumers are winning money and (3) consumer's judgment of monetary value of real money has been temporarily altered (Gainsbury et al., 2012; Sevigny et al., 2005; McCormack and Griffiths, 2012; Griffiths et al., 2005; Griffiths, 2006).

To justify the claims of industry leaders that social gambling online and real money gambling online should converge (Collson, 2012a; Pitt, 2013; Tsipori, 2011; Morgan Stanley, 2012), this study will draw on a specific finding from a recent report conducted by Yakuel (2013) and look at it from a reverse perspective. Yakuel (2013) used company data and software to analyse the difference between social gamblers and real money gamblers, and the study identified numerous differences between player behaviours and motivations with no commonalities. However, one of the differences that this study identified was player engagement levels, on which the following was further elaborated (Yakuel, 2013, p. 72):

*. . . social gamblers are nine times more likely to engage in playing social gambling games than real money gamblers are to play real money games, because social gaming takes place on social networks where the game visibility is high, for example: 1) players are continuously bombarded with game updates and promotions in their news feeds; 2) players are interacting (i.e., chatting) with their friends who also play the social games; and 3) players can see if their friends are currently playing games online. Contrarily, because real money gamblers online play via a computer or tablet, in order to interact with the game the player must visit the website or receive an e-mail reminding them to play.*

Therefore, combining this finding with one of the real money casino's cardinal rules, 'keep players playing and keep players coming back because the odds in gambling games are favoured towards the house' (Ma, 2010; Norton et al., 2011; Thompson, 2001), one can surmise that the reason real money gambling companies would advocate entering the social gaming market is because they may be able to increase player engagement through social gaming platform techniques which are used by social gaming companies. Furthermore, as previously stated, authors have found a strong link between a real money player's accessibility and gambling-related games,

which increases people's motivation to partake in the games (Jacques et al., 2000; McCormack and Griffiths, 2012; Griffiths, 2003; Wood et al., 2007a).

## **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

As the case with constructivist perspective, the current study aims to examine the contingent nature of social activity – online social gambling. Greene (2000) argues that constructivist inquirers seeks to understand contextualised meaning...the meaningfulness of human actions and interactions- as experienced and construed in a given context (p.986). For Howell (2013), constructivist understands reality as being locally constructed and based on shared experiences and, because groups/individuals are changeable, identifies it as relativist realism or relative ontology. Gergen (2015) and others noted, the mind of the researchers ideally functions a mirror of nature and the 'traditional means of safeguarding research from bias – inter-observer reliability, double-blind methodologies, standardised questions...thus functions to cleanse the mirror' (4). A case study methodology was utilised based on researchers' judgement on 'typicality or interest' (Robson, 2011). Such a qualitative approach can offer a holistic view of the issue under investigation by providing a clear account of the respondents' understanding of the phenomenon. As recommended by Valsiner (1986), 'The study of individual cases has always been the major (albeit often unrecognised) strategy in the advancement of knowledge about human beings' (p. 11). In a similar vein, Cook and Campbell (1979) noted that 'case study as normally practiced should not be demeaned by identification with one-group post-test only design. Rather, case study is not a flawed experimental design; it is a fundamentally different strategy with its designs' (p. 96). Like, Wright and Heaton (2006), exploratory study in a case-based offers deeper insights into participants' experiential and perspectival account. The current study adopted a single case study to examine the phenomenon in its context. The data collection process was initiated through formal contacts with social gambling and real money gambling companies. The researchers arranged 28 semi-structured interviews via telephone between 23 March 2013 and 30 April 2013 with players from the PlayForFunPoker.com social gambling site. Each participant was purposefully selected by the researchers, and e-mails were sent to seek individuals' voluntary participation in the study. Interviews were scheduled with willing participants, and each participant was provided with an outline of what the interview was about. Drawing on Ozuem et al.'s (2008) study, the interviews started with an explanation of the study, and participants were allowed to ask for any clarification if needed. Participants were asked to share their experiences with social gambling and Internet gambling during the interview. The interviews were conducted by one of the authors in order to study the broader questions with regard to social gambling and its implications for the determination of marketing communications programmes. The objective of the interviews was to allow for a variety of meaning making and dialogues (Roulston, 2010; Tracy 2013; Ozuem and Lancaster, 2012). The underlying purpose of the study is not to discover the truth 'out there', but to have

a clear idea how the respondents make meaning of the phenomenon. As Denzin (1997) crisply noted, 'There are no stories out there waiting to be told and no certain truths waiting to be recorded; there are only stories yet to be constructed' (p. 267). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and all interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Dilthey (1958) articulated that to understand the meaning of human action requires understanding the subjective consciousness or intent of the actor from the inside. Our focus of analysis is on how respondents make meaning of social gambling and to question their discursive constructions on social gambling activities. To thematically analyse the data and categorise the themes in this study, the researchers followed Braun and Clark's (2006, pp. 87–93) six phases of thematic analysis process, which are as follows: (1) become familiar with the data, (2) generate initial codes, (3) search for themes, (4) review themes, (5) define and name themes and (6) produce the results. More specifically, the researchers read and re-read the data and then extracted the key issues from the data to provide a code for each data extract. The data extracts were combined based on similarities to create the initial themes and place these in a thematic map (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Ozuem and Lancaster, 2014) which showed how all the initial themes and data extracts linked to each other.

**Table 1. Major Themes.**

Major Themes	Description	Key Issues
Trusted	Intangible benefits and feelings gained by social gamblers that do not come directly from real money gambling sites	Friends, Family, Culture, Government, Regulation, Sports Figures/Celebrities, WOM, Trial Play
Effective	The positive attributes of real money gambling online and advertisements that social gamblers favour	Win Money, E-mail/Spam, Bargains, Bonuses, Sports Venues, Technology, Sexy Girls
Intrusive	What social gamblers identified as the negative components and failures of real money gambling online and advertisements	In-game Ads, Pop-ups, Facebook, Spam, Friends, Want My Money, Saturation

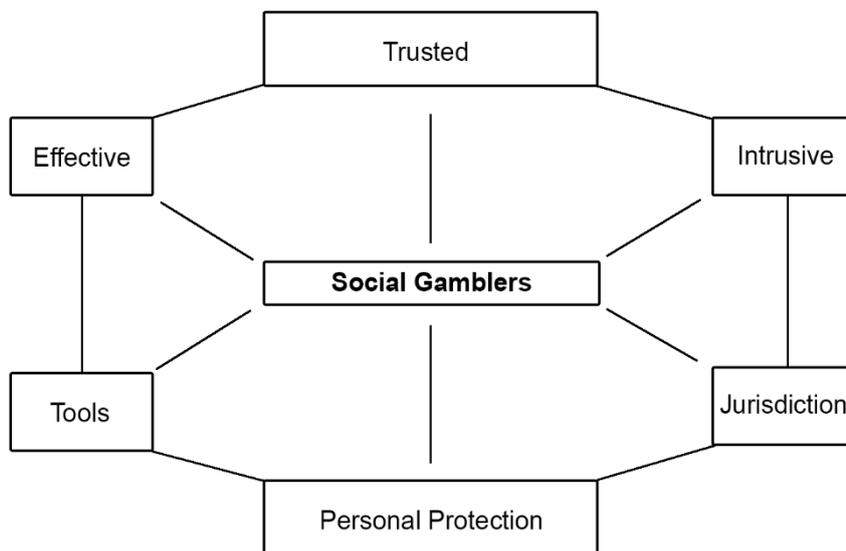
**Table 2. Permeated Themes.**

Permeated Themes	Description	Key Issues
Personal Protection	Negative perceptions and beliefs on how real money gambling sites are being portrayed	Scam, Safety, Security, Unfair Odds, Environment, Regulate

Jurisdiction	Circumstances which result from where social gamblers reside	Illegal, Use to Play, I Want to Play, Regulate
Tools	The channels used by real money gambling sites to advertise which social gamblers were able to recall	TV, Internet, Website, Facebook, Print, E-mail/SPAM, Sports/Events, Word of Mouth, Mobile, Land-based Casino, Traditional Mail, Radio

Figure 1 shows how the major themes and the permeated themes identified within this research are interrelated with each other.

**Figure 1. Network Diagram of Emerged Themes.**



The network diagram illustrates the initial, basic foundation of how the Major and Permeated themes interact with each other, and more importantly, how they interact with social gamblers online (i.e., the respondents). Individually, each theme has enough influence on some social gamblers as they consider or try playing real money gambling games for the first time or the first few times, respectively. For example, if one of the key issues in the Trusted theme has been satisfied by the social gambler (e.g., word-of-mouth recommendation from a friend), enough influence is present to persuade the social gambler to try real money gambling games online. The opposite is also true: a theme on its own can also influence some social gamblers not to play. For example, if one of the key issues in the Intrusive theme was satisfied by the social gambler (e.g., received a spam e-mail about gambling), this can be enough to deter the social gambler from participating.

Moreover, other social gamblers needed more than one theme to be present for them to want to partake in real money gambling online. These types of social gamblers illustrate how the themes in the network diagram interact with each other to influence

the social gambler. For example, a social gambler decides to try real money gambling online because his or her cousin said he or she was also playing on this site (Trusted theme), and the particular site was offering free gambling money to first-time players (Effective theme), and the particular site expressly stated that its gambling licence was government regulated (Personal Protection theme). This example shows how the interaction of three themes was needed to influence the social gambler.

Finally, from a more complex perspective, when more than one theme is being used to influence the social gambler, one theme may overpower the other theme. For example, a social gambler does not want to partake in real money gambling online because he or she heard about scams from other players (Personal Protection), but then he or she sees an advertisement that a real money gambling site has a big jackpot prize (Effective theme) and that the site is operated by a government body (Trusted theme). Therefore, the latter two themes can overpower the first theme and can influence the social gambler to partake in real money gambling online. The 'centrality' to each theme and their interrelationships was identified by the researchers because they captured something important in relation to the overall research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). This case was also true with the permeated theme Tools. However, this particular theme was primarily identified based on prevalence within the data. Each theme is discussed in the following sections.

## **Major Themes**

### **Trusted**

Trust from intangible sources was a pattern identified within the data which relates to how social gamblers started playing real money games or why they would start playing. Hume and Mort (2011) found that word-of-mouth was more effective in promoting real money gambling sites online than advertising, and Pitta (2013) stated that people trust their friends' opinions and advice on brands more than they trusted advertisements. These two arguments are consistent with data which were gathered from the respondents, in which word-of-mouth recommendations from trusted sources were seen as legitimate reasons why social gamblers first started gambling real money online. For example, one respondent stated:

*It's fun. I've been social gambling online for a long time now. Coming from an Asian family this is a norm; gambling is in our blood. I did try Internet gambling once before because my cousin told me about a site he was playing on and winning a lot of money. I asked if they paid him his winnings and he said yes, always. So I signed up and played but I did not win any money. Normally, I would have thought I was scammed, but my cousin seems to be doing well so it can't be. I will probably try it again if they offer me some kind of free spins or something like that.*

The recommendation originating from the respondent's cousin was enough to not only get the respondent to try real money gambling, but also to alleviate fears of being scammed. Another respondent stated:

*Most of my experience has been with the game of poker at my friend's house games where it's less formal and minus all the bells and whistles, although I have played at casinos as well. I will touch up on gambling on the Internet. I used to always stay away from playing cash poker games online because I heard about scams and things like that. But my friends told me that the Government of Canada has opened up a site, or I guess it would be the Government of British Columbia, so it's safe. They told me to just make sure the site I am playing on was protected by some kind of Government protection or a logo or something like that. I have not tried it yet, but now I know there are safe places I will give it a try.*

In this example, the friends also exhibited trust in online gambling and showed the respondent how to find reputable gambling sites when searching online. The respondent's confidence in their friends and in government-regulated sites was enough to change this respondent's opinion to consider partaking in real money gambling. Furthermore, trust did not necessarily need to come from someone who was known personally to the respondent when choosing a real money gambling site. For example, one respondent mentioned:

*I often play at home, but also from my mobile phones when waiting on other people or events. That's the beauty of playing poker on Facebook. I started playing as a curiosity in that I was interested in playing real online poker, but I wanted to get a feel for the game first. I consider myself a middle-level player now, and I don't think I'm ready just yet. But when I am, I will probably choose the gambling company that sponsors my favourite football player. I can't remember the name of the gambling site, but I would assume it is a reputable site if they can afford to sponsor a football club. Plus, football clubs only team up with credible companies, as far as I know. This is another good thing about Facebook poker in that you don't have to worry about this kind of stuff.*

In this example, the trust came from the sponsorship of their favourite football player. This particular statement is consistent with findings in the literature that popular marketing channels used by Internet gambling companies include event and team sponsorships (Weibe, 2008) and celebrity endorsements (Wood et al., 2007b), which play key roles in their marketing communication programmes and customer acquisition. Furthermore, this statement also resonates with Lan et al.'s (2013) study in the sense that a player's decision to spend time in playing a game before they decide to purchase the goods is sometimes necessary. Overall, trust was identified to have an important role amongst the social gamblers who were interviewed.

## **Effective**

Another theme was identified from the data which emerged from the positive attributes of Internet gambling advertisements favoured by social gamblers and was therefore labelled 'Effective'. One respondent claimed:

*Most, if not all, through email solicitation. For the most part, my e-mail sends them all to my junk mail and the few that got through I ended up taking up one of their offers. It wasn't so much that I liked their ad, apart from the sexy girl, it was more at a time in my life when I was really bored and was looking to fill up some of my spare time. I have also seen advertising for casinos online a lot, either on TV or side of buses. As I am not a big fan of casinos the ads were nothing more than flashy images and besides noticing the scanty peacock feathers on a model in a bikini dressed lady I didn't notice much more on the ad.*

In this example, the use of sex and girls in advertising captured the interest of the respondent on more than one occasion. Furthermore, it strengthens Phelps et al.'s (2004) argument that e-mail marketing is effective. Another example of e-mail marketing (spam e-mail) from a respondent was identified in the following statement:

*It's not that I am opposed to gambling or gambling online. Like, I will gamble money in traditional casinos here and there. I even did make a purchase on a few occasions online and I believe one time I was seduced by a really nice bonus deal and the other I think was to win a big jackpot. Online casinos are really good at offering bargains that you can't get at traditional casinos. I guess their email just happened to get me at the right place at the right time. But, mostly my gambling online is on Facebook where you don't have to gamble money you just play for fun and points to challenge your family and friends.*

In this particular example, e-mail/spam marketing was not the sole reason that prompted the player to try real money gambling online. The respondent was also attracted by the potential to enjoy 'free money', 'big wins' and 'quick wealth' promised in the marketing messages. These three particular references also follow some of the popular marketing communication programmes of Internet gambling companies found in previous literature. Another example of 'free money' and 'win money' being used effectively was identified in this respondent's answer:

*I made my first gambling bet on my mobile phone and it wasn't even for poker. I was at a football match with my friends, and a female model from Ladbrokes approached us and gave us a card that gave us a £10 free bet. She told us it was easy to do and that we could sign up with our mobile phones and use the £10 free bet on this match. I thought it was a great advertising technique. They made it very convenient for us by using our mobile phones, and of course, a hot bird offering free money to win money. What male would say no to this? So I did it. And I will do it again if I have the opportunity.*

This example again shows a respondent being attracted by sex and girls, and that a sports venue was used successfully by an online gambling company. In addition, the convenience of technology was tied into this marketing communication programme, which was found to be favourable by the respondent. Overall, this theme shows that effective marketing strategies were found to be favourable by numerous social gambling respondents.

### **Intrusive**

In addition to the positive marketing communication attributes that emerged from this study, the negative components of real money gambling companies and their marketing communication programs were also identified as patterns from the responses. For example, one respondent said:

*Online casino ads are everywhere. I see them mostly on TV and related to sports and mostly entertainment venues. I don't mind these ones as I can block them out. But they are also now more on Facebook too. It is getting a bit annoying to see adverts like these all the time. All they want is your money. They are even starting to show up more often in my news feed on my mobile phone and iPad. I really hope Facebook will stop this. I think maybe it's because I play bingo on Facebook and I am being selected because my friends don't get them.*

This response follows Binde's (2007) observation that Internet gambling adverts seem to be very pervasive. Furthermore, this respondent suggests that Internet gambling companies are starting to saturate Facebook with advertisements and because the respondent could not 'block them out', she found them intrusive. Unwelcome forms of advertising appeared to be a strong reason for disliking Internet gambling companies amongst a number of respondents. In addition, a reference was also made about 'wanting my money', which was interpreted by the researcher on a few occasions in the responses provided. Another example of disruptive marketing was alluded to in the following reflection:

*I don't like it when friends who play invite me to play a game they are playing in order to get a referral bonus. I think less of the friend. If I were to gamble online, it would be via an advert that invited me to play risk free at first. I don't like to pay before I play; I need to be hooked first. I like the ads that are flashy and are littered up with bright colours; it makes it interesting to look at. I guess it's done in Flash or something. I also see a lot of the colour green, which is my favourite colour. But most of the ads are wanting you to come play, which means that they want your money. The other ads tell you that gambling is a disease and that is a good thing. I usually don't pay much attention to pop-up ads; I find them annoying. I have also found the games via Internet searches. Other than this, I'm not aware of seeing any other type of ad on any other medium promoting the gambling sites.*

The researcher found it interesting that this particular respondent does not like it when their friends use social interactions (inviting friends to play) for real money gambling sites, which, ironically, opposes one of the key motivational factors for social gamers to play online (Jieun et al., 2011). Another key issue, which also established the theme of intrusion, was contempt for pop-up ads. These also had strong prevalence in many of the data extracts found in the responses, including this one:

*The place I see the most gambling advertisements is when I'm playing the poker games in social networks. There are tons of them. When there is a break during the tournaments, they have annoying pop-up ads that say you will get more free chips and free money if you sign up and play. They also like to send out a lot of spam e-mails too. I had to change my e-mail address because I kept getting a lot of spam mail from gambling sites and cheap Viagra sites. When companies do this kind of advertising, I won't buy from them. Facebook is also starting to have a lot of gambling advertisements on the right side. But these ads don't actually bother me that much as I usually just ignore all the ads on Facebook unless something really catches my eye.*

While spam marketing has been shown to be an effective tool for acquiring real money gamblers online, it can also be a deterrent for new players, as was the case with this respondent. Furthermore, Internet gambling companies need to be aware of the undesirable aspects of their marketing communication programmes to mitigate the negative consequences imposed on social gamblers' buying behaviour consumption.

### **Permeated Themes**

Permeated themes are standalone themes which cannot be listed under major themes but are of equal importance. In this research, the emerged themes which were related to consumer buying behaviours or mediums represent the permeated themes.

### **Personal Protection**

This theme is somewhat related to the Trusted theme, but there was sufficient uniqueness in the data to allocate a permeated theme under 'Personal Protection'. This permeated theme is strongly defined by a respondent's personal need to feel safe and secure. For example, one respondent replied:

*I have played on a couple of sites for real money. It is a different type of playing than in a casino where I prefer to play. I think there is more luck in a casino for players than playing on web games. Casinos appear to be more secure, and you hear less stories of people getting scammed in casinos than on web games. This is also why I like to play social games. I can practice my blackjack skills without feeling like I'm being scammed.*

This response was interpreted by the researcher to mean that land-based casinos and Internet casinos do not share the same image in terms of security amongst social gamblers. The respondent suggests that land-based casinos seem to be a secure

environment as a result of the number of scam-related stories associated with online casinos. This reflection closely mirrors the findings of King et al. (2010) and Sevigny et al. (2005), who identified unethical practices used by Internet gambling companies, such as changing the level of pay-out ratios from trial mode to real money mode. This observation was made more explicit by another respondent who stated:

*My general sense, and it may sound crazy, is that the odds are stacked against you with flesh and blood venues (such as casinos), so I could only imagine what those odds would be in an online casino where the software was written by the company's IT people who can easily rig the odds if there are no government regulations in place. I signed up and played blackjack on a site and won a few bucks, but soon after I got crushed and that didn't feel good.*

This respondent claimed that online casinos can easily provide unfair odds without the player ever knowing. The respondent based this assumption on personal experience and a perception that humans and companies have an incentive to cheat others if no government rules are in place. This respondent may have lost money in blackjack as a result of countless reasons which may not necessarily be related to rigged odds. However, the player continued to feel uneasy, and the perception of unfairness remains. Another respondent also made a reference to land-based casinos and the feeling of safety in reflecting that:

*There are too many ads for online casinos, and the ads seem to be non-ethical and my money doesn't feel safe. This is just my opinion. I'd rather play at a casino or with friends. At least I know it's safe. However, if there was a bad beat jackpot or big jackpot prize, I'd probably be more interested. Actually, advertising a bad beat or a jackpot would be an effective message, I think. People are willing to risk a small bit of money if they could win a big amount of money. They just need to feel safe, I think.*

This respondent reiterates the strong link between safety and land-based casinos and lack of safety in online casinos. However, it can be concluded that the effective use of marketing could alleviate the need for safety if it is appealed to in a relevant and meaningful way, such as incorporating a bad beat jackpot or big jackpot prize in the message. Another finding that was identified from another respondent's interview was that the negative feelings of safety and security towards an online casino, based on a previous experience, could also be overturned, when the respondent answered:

*I have very little time played for real money online. The little that I have done was years ago when it was legal in the US and I lost about \$100 or so and never went back to it. I doubt if I would ever do it again because I'm sceptical of the credibility of online poker sites and the players. Too much chance for collusion and things like that. Maybe if the US were to legalise Internet gambling like they have been talking about and a Las Vegas casino were to operate it or*

*regulate it, I would consider playing online again. This would make it more safe and secure.*

This respondent suggests that their scepticism towards online gambling sites might be reversed if proper measures were taken by the gaming sites to make players feel more secure. Furthermore, this particular respondent's answer also adds to the emerging theme of Jurisdiction.

## **Jurisdiction**

Johnson (2013) argues that social gamblers live in a jurisdiction where Internet gambling online is currently illegal, and therefore, they have no choice but to play social gambling games because they have no legal alternative. This argument was common amongst many responses from people who lived in a jurisdiction where online gambling is illegal. For example, one respondent reflected:

*No, I have not gambled online. At first I didn't because I did not trust this kind of gambling, and I would rather go to a real casino and gamble even if there is no luck at all. Then, I heard about people winning and my friends were all doing it too, but by the time I felt a little comfortable with the idea of online poker, it was made illegal in the US. Now, I don't have the chance to unless I try a site that accepts US players illegally and then I run the risk of having my money taken by the government. So I only play Zynga Poker for now or PlayForFunPoker.com too because they let you win money for free.*

This particular respondent wanted to participate in the kinds of online gambling which are prohibited in the area in which he lives. The next response shows a similar pattern. However, the choice to play Internet gambling games was taken from this particular respondent when the government banned this form of gambling. The respondent said:

*I think I was addicted because I found it extremely enjoyable and every now and then I'd win at it. Plus, the people are usually nice when you chat with them. It all started when ESPN started to televise poker games on TV. It's fun because you can win or lose even if you are a bad player. I consider myself a decent player who has a lot to learn. But now I can't play anymore because my Full Tilt Poker account was shut down by the Department of Justice. I think they should do what Canada is doing and have the government lottery companies run the gambling sites.*

The Jurisdiction permeated theme was identified in only a small number of unique respondents, and the theme emerged as a result of where the respondents lived. The researcher found this pattern important to the study because it clearly showed that the majority of these particular respondents wanted to participate in Internet gambling but was prohibited by government legislation. Furthermore, certain countries, such as the US, are currently in the process of changing their Internet gambling laws by making it legal for their citizens to play in a regulated market (Ramakrishnan and Ghosh, 2013).

In addition, prior to the ban on online gambling in 2006, the US market was the largest online gambling market globally (Church-Sanders, 2009).

## Tools

The Tools theme emerged from the responses to a certain question, specifically, if the respondents could recall where they had seen Internet gambling ads. Most respondents had similar views. For example, one respondent noted:

*Gambling advertisements are all over the place. I see them on TV, magazines, webpages, YouTube, online, newspapers and commercials. I even get them in my e-mail's junk box almost every day. Facebook has started to show a lot of ads also. I think it's because gambling companies can afford to spend a lot of money on advertising. Even when I walk down the street, I can't escape passing a William Hill or Ladbrokes betting shop.*

Given the specificity of the question, the respondent was able to provide a list of places where he saw online gambling ads without needing to struggle or think in-depth. This was common amongst the majority of the respondent's answers, including this one:

*I see them often during my Internet searches. The most places I will see advertising is at sports venues, which is where I started. I'm also interested in watching horse racing too, so I see ads frequently there. They like to focus their attention on getting people to bet in the moment. Other than that, I have also seen them on billboards, TV commercials, especially late at night, and during televised poker events.*

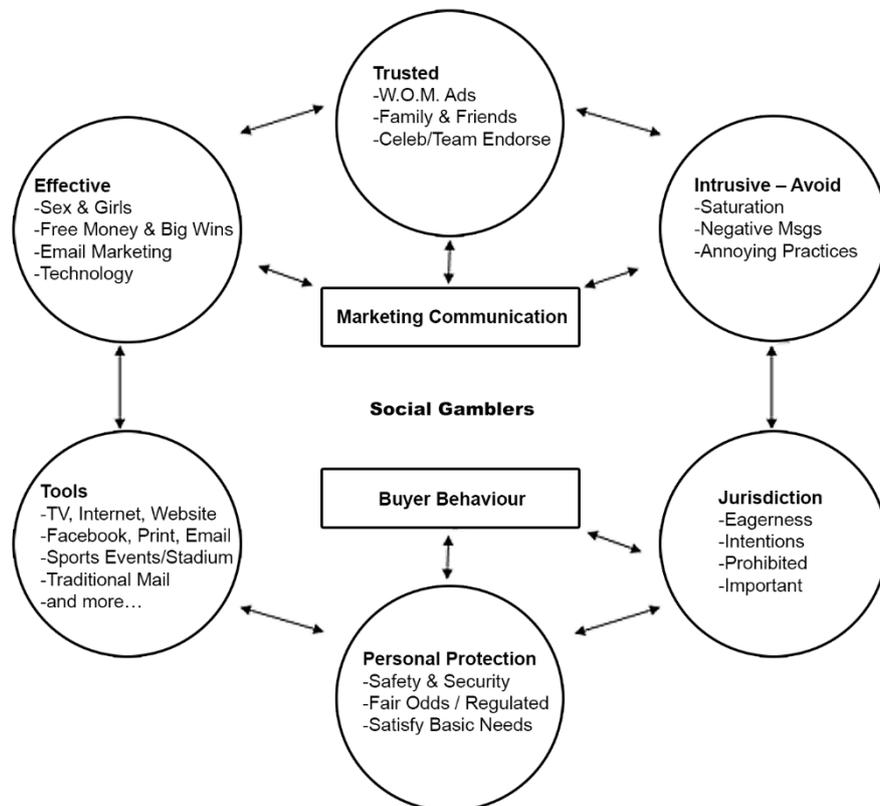
This response added to the list of places where respondents have seen online gambling advertisements but from a different perspective. This respondent particularly chose to include references to sporting events and how these related to him. This pattern was also found in a number of other respondents. For example, one respondent reflected:

*Gambling adverts have recently started to show up a lot when I'm watching hockey. Bodog advertises a lot during hockey and during sport highlights. But they only advertise their .net site as it is illegal to advertise the .com site, from what I heard. You can even play against Roberto Luongo on PlayNow.com. But that site is government-owned, so they can advertise anywhere. I guess TV and online are the most places I see gambling ads. I have also noticed ads in my news feed when I am on Facebook for mobile casino games.*

Prevalence was used to extract the specific data from the responses, and these were ranked in order of popularity. Starting with the most popular, TV, Internet, Website, Facebook, Print, E-mail/Spam, Sports Events/Stadiums/Sponsorships, Mobile, Land-based Casinos, Traditional Mail and Radio were all extracted directly from the responses. Word-of-mouth advertising and celebrity/sports endorsements were interpreted from the responses by the researcher and added to the list. These tools

closely match the previous findings in the studies of Weibe (2008), Palsson (2013) and the Committee of Advertising Practice (Compliance Report, 2010).

**Figure 2. Network Diagram Interaction defined through Practice.**



The findings from the analysis show that the social gambling respondents are willing to try real money gambling online or have already tried it a few times beforehand. The three major themes, which are closely related to marketing communication programmes, found that trust from external sources and effective advertising techniques positively influence the 28 social gambling respondents' buying behaviour. Conversely, negative or intrusive advertising methods deterred the social gambling respondents from buying. Two of the permeated themes, Personal Protection and Jurisdiction, are closely related to buying behaviour as they affected the buying behaviour decision-making process. For example, the social gambling respondents needed to feel a sense of security or safety before they decided to make a purchase on a specific gambling site. Once the key issues outlined by these five themes are addressed, the findings identified from the sixth theme (Tools) can be utilised as a way to reach and influence the social gambling respondents via marketing communication programmes.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Firstly, to strengthen the credibility and transferability of the findings in this study and the developed conceptual framework, a similar study should be undertaken to determine if the findings can be replicated by using more representative samples. This can be done by adopting the methodology of this study and the conceptual framework developed, and applying it to another setting, such as a different online social gambling site. Secondly, this study identified Jurisdiction as an important permeated theme, but discussed it from a broad perspective only. An important area for future research on social gambling online would be to focus on players specifically in the US market. The US government is currently reconsidering the illegality of this type of entertainment within the US jurisdiction, and the US market was once the largest real money online gambling market globally prior to the ban on online gambling in 2006 (Church-Sanders, 2009; Ramakrishnan and Ghosh, 2013). Thirdly, previous literature focused on the motivations of online gaming and social gaming players online. However, none of them specifically target or separate the motivations of social gambling players online. This specific future research direction could provide a focused insight into the motivations of social gamblers online as they could differ from those of social gaming online. Finally, a key future study for social gamblers online would be to explore how financially beneficial they are to the real money gambling industry. Future research should explore the financial investments which social gamblers are willing to make when playing real money gambling games and to determine if social gamblers are in fact valuable to real money casinos.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This study explores and identifies key issues which concern the social gambling and real money gambling industries online, and offers assistance to the current debate that industry leaders and scholars have with regard to understanding the business models of the two industries, more specifically, whether or not to merge them or keep them separate. From a basic marketing perspective foundation, the findings of this study slightly favour the industry leaders who suggest that the social gambling industry and real money gambling industry can be merged by identifying certain marketing practices which can be combined by both industries. This study offers marketing executives first-time insight into how Internet gambling marketing communication programmes influenced online social gamblers' buying behaviour with the use of PlayForFunPoker.com as a case study.

Prior to a discussion of the main findings, it should be noted that the nature of the PlayForFunPoker.com social gambling company used (i.e., offering poker games only), combined with the selected research strategy directly affects the limitations of this study, as the findings from a single case study and the conceptual framework developed from this study may not be generalised to all social poker players online. In

addition, the generalisation of social poker playing games may not apply to other social gambling games, such as social casino games and social bingo games, played online because players may have different motivations and buying behaviours associated with the games they play. This study also did not determine how profitable the social gamblers were to the real money gambling companies once the social gamblers convert into real money gamblers. Furthermore, the key issues and findings identified within the major and permeated themes are comprehensive. However, they may not necessarily be exhaustive. Finally, given the dynamic nature of the social gambling and real money gambling industry, the findings from this study may just be a snapshot of this particular point in time, and future studies may uncover contrasting findings.

The qualitative findings from this study complement the Morgan Stanley (2012) quantitative study by presenting similarities between the buying behaviour of real money gamblers and social gamblers online, which supports the first phase (acquisition) suggested by the Morgan Stanley (2012) business model of the online gambling and social gambling industry. Moreover, the findings identified within the Jurisdiction theme not only contribute to but also strengthen Johnson's (2013) suggestion that a possible driving force behind the motivations of a social gambler is that they live in a jurisdiction where real money gambling online is currently illegal. Therefore, players have no choice but to play a social gambling game because no alternative is available. Furthermore, this research has successfully developed a conceptual framework model on an elementary level, which utilises dimensional themes that are networked together to illustrate how the social gambling respondents can become real money gamblers online through marketing communication programmes. Scholars who study social gambling online can incorporate the conceptual framework model within their study and can further develop the basic elements of the model. Finally, this study contributes to the birth of online social gambling literature by specifically isolating and exploring social gambling players from social gaming players. Therefore, future research is recommended to be carried out in this new area of study based on the limitations of the research and the key areas that were found important.

Internet gambling companies should consider investing in marketing research to further explore the findings of this study by applying them to different settings. Internet gambling companies should focus their marketing research efforts on the important key issues identified within the six themes. In particular, further studies should investigate the marketing influences found in the Trusted, Effective and Intrusive themes. For example, sports celebrities, sports venues and events, e-mail marketing, sexy girls, messages to win money/free money and avoiding annoying advertisements should be further examined as these specific findings, which were identified from the social gambling respondents in this study, share common ground with previous research studies conducted on real money gamblers (see Griffiths and Barnes, 2008; Dyal et al. 2009; McMullan and Miller, 2010). By further examining the identified similarities between the two industries, Internet gambling companies could realise

economies of scale by combining certain marketing communication programmes and processes based on similar buying behaviour patterns if the findings are found to be favourable. For example, by using sports celebrities in advertisements, real money gambling companies could utilise this marketing strategy by promoting one sports celebrity figure to both industries as both real money players and social gambling players found this a positive approach. In addition, the findings of this study show that real money gamblers online appear to share more similarities with social gamblers online specifically, then with social gamers online as a whole (see Jieun et al., 2011; Yee, 2006; Zanetta et al., 2011; Chang and Zhang, 2008; McCormack and Griffiths, 2012; and Griffiths and Barnes, 2008). Therefore, marketing executives should isolate social gamblers from social gamers and continue to explore the perceptions and feelings they have about the real money gambling industry as it affected social gambling respondents' buying behaviour in this study. For example, under the Personal Protection theme, negative perceptions and feelings (i.e., 'incentive to cheat players' and 'scams') deterred the respondents from partaking in real money gambling games. Finally, Internet gambling companies should use the findings from this research to guide their future marketing research efforts to better understand the online social gambling industry. However, Internet gambling companies should not make business-related decisions on the social gambling industry because the findings are based on a sample of only 28 interviewed respondents which were purposefully selected from a single online social gambling company – PlayForFunPoker.com.

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