



A Review of Gambling and Online Gambling Addiction and Their Effects as Types of Addiction*

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ABSTRACT

Due to rapid technological developments, social media platforms and virtual environments have become widely used, enabling individuals to express themselves, communicate, and seek social approval. While digital platforms have become essential communication tools, their widespread use has also produced negative consequences. Easy access to online environments, exposure to advertisements promoting gambling behaviors, and individuals' attempts to cope with economic difficulties have contributed to a growing prevalence of betting, online betting, and online gambling. This review examines gambling and online gambling addiction as behavioral addictions and explores their psychological, social, and digital determinants. The study employed document analysis as a qualitative research method. Relevant literature, including peer-reviewed articles, theses, reports, and official publications, was reviewed based on their relevance to gambling disorder, behavioral addiction, and digital media influences. The findings were synthesized through thematic analysis. The literature indicates that online gambling addiction is associated with impulsivity, sensation seeking, economic stress, low social support, and comorbid psychological conditions such as depression and anxiety. Digital media environments increase exposure, accessibility, and the normalization of gambling behaviors. Adolescents, males, and socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals are identified as high-risk groups. Online gambling addiction causes a growing behavioral health concern in the digital age. Preventive strategies should focus on risk awareness, digital media literacy, early intervention, and psychosocial support mechanisms.

Keywords: Behavioral Addiction, Gambling Disorder, Online Gambling, Digital Media, Risk Factors, DSM-5.

ÖZET

Hızlı teknolojik gelişmelerle birlikte sosyal medya platformları ve sanal ortamlar, bireyler kendilerini ifade etmelerine, iletişim kurmalarına ve sosyal onay ihtiyaçlarını karşılamalarına olan sağladığı için yaygın biçimde kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Dijital platformlar önemli iletişim araçları haline gelmiş olsa da bu yaygın kullanım bazı olumsuz sonuçları da beraberinde getirmiştir. Çevrimiçi ortamlara kolay erişim, kumar davranışlarını teşvik eden reklamlar ve bireyler ekonomik zorluklarla başa çıkma çabaları; bahis, sanal bahis ve çevrimiçi kumar davranışlarının yaygınlaşmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu anlatı derlemesi, kumar ve çevrimiçi kumar bağımlılığını davranışsal bağımlılıklar kapsamında ele almakta ve bunların psikolojik, sosyal ve dijital belirleyicilerini incelemektedir. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden doküman incelemesi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Kumar bozukluğu, davranışsal bağımlılık ve dijital medya etkileriyle ilişkili hakemli makaleler, tezler, raporlar ve resmi yayınlar incelenmiştir. Bulgular tematik analiz yoluyla sentezlenmiştir. Literatür, çevrimiçi kumar bağımlılığının dürtüsellik, impulsivite, ekonomik stres, düşük sosyal destek ve depresyon ile anksiyete gibi eşlik eden psikolojik durumlarla ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Dijital medya ortamları, kumar davranışlarının görünürlüğünü, erişilebilirliğini ve normalleşmesini artırmaktadır. Ergenler, erkekler ve sosyoekonomik açıdan dezavantajlı bireyler yüksek risk grupları olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Çevrimiçi kumar bağımlılığı, dijital çağda giderek büyüyen bir davranışsal sağlık sorunu olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Önleyici stratejilerin risk farkındalığı, dijital medya okuryazarlığı, erken müdahale ve psikososyal destek mekanizmalarına odaklanması gerekmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Davranışsal Bağımlılık, Çevrimiçi Kumar, Dijital Medya, Risk Faktörleri, DSM-5.

INTRODUCTION

In parallel with rapid technological progress, internet infrastructure and digital communication tools have continuously evolved to meet the demands of the digital age. Social media platforms and virtual environments are

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now widely used because they enable individuals to express themselves, communicate, and satisfy their need for social approval. By removing the constraints of time and space, the internet has accelerated interaction and increased young people's tendency particularly those looking for entertainment and socialization, to engage in digital environments (Kırık, 2017). Advances in computer technologies and the diversification of digital games have further attracted the attention of youth, offering rich and interactive content that enhances their appeal (Yıldırım, 2016). As a result, digital platforms have become primary tools for communication and interaction in contemporary society.

However, Kandemir (2022) says that the widespread use of digital media has also produced negative consequences. Rapid technological advancement has particularly strong effects on younger generations, who may become immersed in the complex structure of the digital world when introduced to technology at an early age. Gürsakal (2009) argues that with its interactive structure, social media transforms users from passive content consumers into active participants and represents a central outcome of Web 2.0 technologies.

Historically, individuals have developed varying levels of interest and stimulation toward certain objects, substances, and behaviors, which may form the basis of addiction. Dinç (2014) argues that tendencies initially emerging as curiosity or pleasure-seeking behavior may evolve into persistent behavioral patterns over time. In modern information-oriented societies, addiction is no longer limited to substance use; Mutlu (2008) emphasizes that behavioral addictions including gambling, internet use, gaming, and social media use have become significant public mental health concerns. Similarly, Güçlü (2025) states that psychiatric classifications distinguish between substance-related and behavioral addictions and highlights that the development of addiction involves the interaction of physiological and psychological mechanisms. With the acceleration of digitalization, digital gaming and online environments have become major areas of global consumption; Binark & Sütçü, (2008) note that individuals across different age groups allocate considerable time to digital games. Although often perceived as entertainment, these activities may evolve into addictive behaviors with negative consequences for individuals, families, and society (Bayındır, 2018). Due to their accessibility, anonymity, and continuous availability, online gambling platforms have become increasingly attractive, meeting not only financial expectations but also various psychosocial needs (Dereboy & Aker, 2019; Kalkan & Kaya, 2021).

Online gambling addiction is recognized as a behavioral addiction that can negatively affect psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and social relationships. Research highlights the role of psychological variables such as self-esteem, stress, and intrinsic motivation in the development of addictive behaviors (Griffiths, 1999). Furthermore, games of chance are often perceived as more socially acceptable than gambling, and their accessibility across socioeconomic groups contributes to their normalization (Yaşar, 2010).

Despite the growing body of research on behavioral addictions, studies examining online gambling within the broader context of digital media environments remain limited. Moreover, the conceptual relationship between social media exposure, digital accessibility, and the normalization of gambling behaviors has not been sufficiently synthesized. Therefore, this study aims to provide a comprehensive narrative review integrating psychosocial, cultural, and digital determinants of online gambling addiction.

METHOD

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review the existing literature on gambling and online gambling addiction as forms of behavioral addiction and to examine their psychological, social, and digital determinants.

Problem Statement

This study seeks to identify and synthesize the factors contributing to online gambling addiction based on previous research findings and to present a comprehensive overview of its causes and effects.

Research Design

This study is designed as a narrative review employing document analysis, a qualitative research method. Document analysis involves the systematic examination and interpretation of written sources to gain understanding about a specific phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

Data Collection and Selection Criteria

A comprehensive literature review was conducted using printed and online sources. These sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, postgraduate theses, academic books, institutional reports, and official publications.

Sources were selected based on the following criteria:

- ✓ relevance to gambling disorder and behavioral addiction
- ✓ focus on online gambling and digital media influences
- ✓ publication in Turkish or English
- ✓ academic credibility and accessibility

Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The literature was coded and synthesized under key thematic categories, including:

- ✓ diagnostic criteria and classification
- ✓ risk factors
- ✓ psychosocial effects
- ✓ comorbidity patterns
- ✓ digital media and accessibility influences

Limitations

This study is limited to a narrative review of printed and online sources related to gambling, online gambling, games of chance, and digital media-related addictions. Since the study relies on secondary data, it does not include empirical data collection or statistical meta-analysis.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept of Addiction

Throughout human history, it has been observed that individuals' interests and excitements toward certain objects, substances, behavioral patterns, and events vary depending on the experiences brought by life and living. These shifting tendencies stand out as an important determinant in the emergence and development of addiction. Over time, this state of intense interest and excitement may transform into elements that form the basis of addiction. Historically, the concept of addiction has been referred to through different terms such as habitual use, addiction, and being addicted (Dinç, 2014).

In today's rapidly developing age of information and technology, it is observed that in addition to gambling addiction, technology-based behavioral addictions arising from phone, television, and internet use have significant negative effects on public mental health (Mutlu, 2008).

In recent years, a noticeable increase has been observed in the prevalence of new types of addiction resulting from computer games, internet use, and social media use. The development of addiction is shaped through the interaction of physiological and psychological factors. For instance, the use of a substance activates the brain's reward mechanism to temporarily help individuals escape internal tension and distress; this creates a strong desire to experience the resulting pleasure again and directs individuals toward repeated use. While this pleasure creates a short-term yet intense satisfaction, over time the body develops tolerance, requires higher doses, and withdrawal symptoms emerge in the absence of the substance. In particular, substances such as morphine, heroin, and cocaine, which directly affect the central nervous system, may cause severe physiological and neurological problems, and addiction may develop rapidly due to their strong effects on brain chemistry (Güçlü, 2025).

Behavioral addictions include patterns such as gambling, eating, and sexual behaviors, as well as technology-based addictions that arise from interactions between humans and machines. Griffiths argues that these addictions encompass both traditional behavioral patterns and emerging technology-related behaviors. In this context, individuals may engage in technology-related addictions either passively, such as watching television, or through activities requiring active participation, such as playing computer games. Furthermore, Griffiths (1999) emphasizes that multimedia interaction features provided by technological devices such as visual and auditory stimulation are among the factors that increase individuals' susceptibility to developing addictive behaviors.

Online Gambling Addiction

Online gambling addiction is considered a psychiatric disorder characterized by an individual's loss of control over gambling behavior, turning to gambling with the motivation of financial gain, developing unrealistic thought

patterns, and continuing the behavior despite negative consequences. This condition may have serious negative effects on both physical and psychological health (Rizeanu, 2014). Although gambling is a widespread activity in society, it becomes pathological when it leads to individual and social problems. Since pathological gambling and substance use disorders are based on similar processes that activate the brain's reward system, these shared mechanisms were taken into consideration in the classification of gambling disorder in DSM-5 (Morrison, 2016).

Pathological gambling is considered a disorder related to impulse control and may cause severe psychological, social, and economic problems. It is stated that sociocultural, genetic, cognitive, and biochemical factors contribute to the development and prevalence of this disorder (Demet, 2009). Pathological gambling, characterized by repetitive gambling behavior, may deeply affect family life, social relationships, and work life, and may result in severe consequences such as financial losses, family conflicts, illegal behaviors, and suicide attempts (Güriz, 2012).

Gambling behavior does not always have an impulsive nature, and not every gambler experiences impulse-control problems. Although anxiety and mood disorders are frequently observed among individuals who gamble or engage in online gambling, gambling disorder is considered a unique problem area. Due to its repetitive behavioral patterns, it is suggested that this disorder should be classified within substance use disorders (Schuckit, 2013).

Francis (2015) argues that online gambling disorder shows significant similarities to substance addiction in terms of cognitive, neurological, behavioral, and genetic characteristics. In addition, gambling disorder is known to co-occur frequently with substance use disorders. Anxiety level, attention problems, loss of behavioral control, and gambling-related losses are among the main indicators used to evaluate whether an individual has a gambling problem

Diagnostic Criteria for Gambling and Online Gambling Addiction

According to DSM-5, Gambling Disorder is defined as persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behavior leading to clinically significant impairment or distress within a 12-month period. For a diagnosis, at least four (or more) of the following criteria must be met: needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money to achieve the desired excitement; becoming restless or irritable when attempting to reduce or stop gambling; repeated unsuccessful efforts to control or stop gambling; being excessively preoccupied with gambling (e.g., reliving past experiences, planning the next venture, thinking of ways to get money to gamble); gambling when feeling distressed; returning to gamble in order to "chase" losses; lying to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling; jeopardizing or losing significant relationships, job, education, or career opportunities due to gambling; and relying on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations (Association, 2013).

In DSM-5, the severity of gambling disorder is graded based on the number of criteria met: 4–5 criteria indicate mild severity, 6–7 indicate moderate severity, and 8–9 indicate severe gambling disorder. Defining pathological gambling involves challenges because it includes weak impulse control, compulsive characteristics, and similarities to other types of addiction. This has also led to debates regarding whether gambling disorder should be considered a mental disorder. However, one of the dominant views in the literature is that gambling disorder should be addressed as an independent mental disorder (Karadağ, 2023).

Etiology of Gambling and Online Gambling Addiction

Gambling addiction is defined as a psychiatric disorder that adversely affects individuals' economic conditions, cultural lives, and social relationships and is fundamentally characterized by impaired impulse control. Güçlü (2025) states that this disorder disrupts multiple areas of functioning and reflects weakened behavioral regulation. The factors contributing to the development of gambling addiction are multidimensional, and various theoretical perspectives have been proposed to explain gambling behavior. Blaszczynski & Nower (2000) suggest that individuals with gambling disorder often exhibit personality traits such as risk-taking tendency, sensation seeking, impulsivity, and heightened reward sensitivity.

Epidemiology of Gambling and Online Gambling Addiction

Cultural factors are known to play a decisive role in the widespread nature of online gambling addiction. Karadağ (2023) states in his study that gambling addiction is more prevalent in societies where cultural adaptation is difficult and assimilation pressure is intense. Cultural justifications for gambling behavior may differ among individuals: while some gamble for financial gain, others view gambling as entertainment, a leisure activity, or a means of socialization. However, gambling tendencies may be higher among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. de Castro (2005) reports that risk groups include individuals from certain ethnic backgrounds, divorced middle-aged women, and individuals with psychological problems.

Research indicates that early exposure to adverse family conditions increases gambling risk. Stinchfield (1997) found that growing up in a fragmented family structure, such as parental loss or divorce, is associated with increased gambling behavior, while Chou & Afifi (2011) emphasize that insufficient social support constitutes a significant risk factor. Similarly, Cavion (2008) reported in their study of immigrant populations in Canada that adaptation difficulties, unemployment, and cultural incompatibility may trigger gambling behavior. Gender is also considered an important risk variable in gambling disorder. Derevensky (2012) and Wickwire (2007) found that males, particularly during adolescence, develop gambling disorder earlier and more intensely than females. Hardoon (2004) reported that the prevalence of gambling disorder among male adolescents is approximately five times higher than among females. Moreover, the presence of individuals with gambling disorder within adolescents' close social environments constitutes a strong risk factor for gambling behavior (Canale, 2016).

DISCUSSION

Online gambling addiction is considered a psychiatric disorder characterized by an individual's loss of control over gambling behavior, turning to gambling with the motivation of gaining profit, developing unrealistic thought patterns, and continuing the behavior despite negative outcomes. Gambling addiction is defined as a psychiatric disorder that negatively affects individuals' economic conditions, cultural lives, and social relationships, and is fundamentally characterized by weakened impulse control (Güçlü, 2025). It is stated that individuals with online gambling addiction may hope to compensate for their losses by achieving higher gains, increase adrenaline levels by gambling with large amounts of money, and desire to obtain profit quickly. Cultural factors play a decisive role in the widespread nature of gambling addiction. It has been observed that gambling addiction is more common in societies where cultural adaptation is experienced as difficult and assimilation pressure is intense (Karadağ, 2023).

Cultural justifications for online gambling behavior may differ among individuals: while some gamble for financial gain, others perceive gambling as entertainment, leisure, or a means of socialization. However, gambling tendencies may be higher among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. de Castro (2005) suggests that risk groups include individuals from certain ethnic backgrounds, divorced middle-aged women, and individuals with psychological problems.

Findings indicate that growing up in a fragmented family structure at an early age such as parental loss or divorce (Stinchfield, 1997) and insufficient social support (Chou & Afifi, 2011) increase the risk of gambling. A study conducted with immigrant individuals in Canada revealed that adaptation difficulties, unemployment, and cultural incompatibility were among the factors triggering gambling behavior (Cavion, 2008).

Research results show that the prevalence of gambling disorder among male adolescents is approximately five times higher than among females (Hardoon, 2004). Furthermore, the presence of individuals with gambling disorder in adolescents' close environments has been identified as a strong risk factor for gambling behavior (Canale, 2016).

When the literature on gambling, online gambling addiction, and games of chance is examined, many studies indicate that these problematic behaviors are strongly associated with both positive and negative affective states (Anderson & Brown, 1984; Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2011; Blaszczynski, 1986; Hendriks, 1997; Miyazaki, 1999; Petry, 2001; Steel & Blaszczynski, 1998; Ye, 2012). In this context, it can be stated that the findings are consistent with previous research results or show similar characteristics to gambling addiction in terms of emotional variables.

Accordingly, these results are consistent with studies in the literature suggesting that gambling and online gambling addiction, as well as dissociative symptoms, are associated with increased levels of depression. This indicates that dissociation and avoidance symptoms should be taken into consideration when evaluating gambling and online gambling addiction and problematic gambling behaviors. In particular, for individuals who turn to online gambling as a way to escape depressive symptoms, dissociative experiences during gambling may be perceived as pleasurable and may function as a temporary escape from distressing emotions or thoughts (Hopley & Nicki, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Gambling and online gambling represent a social reality experienced across different social groups and may lead to problematic behavioral patterns in vulnerable individuals. Exposure often begins at an early age, and young people whose decision-making abilities are still developing may gradually become active participants. This widespread engagement can produce significant individual and societal consequences. Social perceptions and cultural attitudes play a crucial role in shaping these outcomes, as games of chance are frequently regarded as more harmless or socially acceptable than gambling. Socio-cultural context and economic conditions further influence how individuals interpret and engage in such activities.

Within the context of rapid digitalization, online gambling addiction has emerged as a significant behavioral health concern. Unlike traditional gambling environments, online platforms offer continuous accessibility, anonymity, and personalized engagement mechanisms, all of which increase the risk of problematic use.

Overall, online gambling addiction should be understood as a multidimensional behavioral addiction shaped by psychological vulnerabilities, digital accessibility, and sociocultural influences. Addressing this growing problem requires integrated preventive strategies, including regulation of digital gambling exposure, increased digital media literacy, early risk screening, and accessible psychosocial support services.

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