Beyond the Screen: Exploring Online Slot Machine Gambling Experiences Among Young Adults in Argao, Cebu, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Online slot machine gambling has become increasingly accessible through digital platforms, raising concerns about its growing participation among young adults. This study explored the factors influencing young adults' engagement in online slot machine gambling, their motivations to continue despite potential risks, and the common impacts of this behavior in Argao, Cebu, Philippines. Anchored in a qualitative phenomenological design, the research aimed to capture the experiences of young adults who actively engage in online slot machine gambling. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven respondents aged 20 to 25 years who had at least two years of experience in online slot machine gambling. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants possessed sufficient exposure to the phenomenon. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes that reflected participants' motivations, influences, and perceived impacts. Findings revealed that gambling initiation was largely influenced by social media exposure, peer encouragement, and family modeling, which contributed to the normalization of online gambling. Motivations for continued participation were primarily driven by emotional gratification, excitement, recreational engagement, and the hope of recovering previous financial losses. While some respondents perceived online slot machine gambling as a source of entertainment and temporary stress relief, most acknowledged experiencing negative consequences. These included financial difficulties, disrupted sleep patterns, emotional distress, neglect of responsibilities, and conflicts within the family. Despite these adverse effects, occasional winnings and emotional satisfaction reinforced continued engagement. The study concludes that online slot machine gambling among young adults is a multifaceted behavior shaped by social, psychological, and digital influences. The findings highlight the need for increased public awareness, responsible digital gambling policies, and psychosocial interventions to mitigate risks and address both the motivations and consequences associated with online gambling among young adults.

Keywords: Online gambling, online slot machines, scatter, young adults, Argao Cebu

INTRODUCTION

Gambling involves placing a bet on the outcome of a game or event, often with intent to gaining a reward. Although there is no universally accepted classification, common forms of gambling include bingo, sports and lotteries, horse betting, electronic gaming machines (EGMs), card games, and chance-based casino table games like roulette and craps (Binde et al., 2017; Sahrul et al., 2024). Traditionally, offline gambling has been more prevalent (Hubert & Griffiths, 2018). However, with technological advancements and increased legalization, online gambling has grown in popularity. According to James and Bradley (2021), the gambling industry has become increasingly internet-focused, promoting various gambling types through digital communities. This shift has been especially apparent among young adults aged 18-34, who show high levels in online gambling platforms (Savolainen et al., 2022; Farias & Antunes, 2024).

In the Philippines, the online gambling market has rapidly expanded due to global trends, technological access, and evolving user preferences. The convenience and anonymity of digital platforms have made online gambling an attractive alternative to traditional forms (Statistica, 2025). One of the most prominent formats is online slot machine gambling, also referred to as scatter gambling. These games replicate physical slot machines but rely on algorithms and random number generators, making outcomes completely chance-based (Palmer et al., 2024). A meta-analysis by Allami et al. (2021), found that online gambling has stronger associations with problematic

gambling behaviours compared to offline types. In support of this, according to Evangelist et al. (2021), the prevalence of gambling in the Philippines is comparable to that in the United States, with 64% of Filipinos having participated in gambling within the past year.

The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to the rise of online gambling. A study by Lannes (2021), observed that during lockdowns, 37% of online gamblers transitioned into compulsive gambling behaviours. In 2020, these users played an average of seven days per month and 2.7 hours per day, a significant increase in gambling behavior compared to 2019. This suggests that isolation, stress, and increased digital access during the pandemic may have intensified risky gambling behaviors, particularly with easily accessible formats especially, online slot machines.

As a result, online slot machine gambling has gained considerable popularity among young adults, with the majority of participants falling within the 21 to 25 age range (Evangelista et al., 2021; Krotter et al., 2024). The accessibility of digital platforms raises concerns about its effects on this vulnerable age group, who are still developing financial and emotional regulation skills (Ghosh & Halder, 2020). While there is some existing literature that examined online slot machine gambling. Most research tends to emphasize traditional or general online gambling, overlooking this region and its unique sociocultural dynamics. This study seeks to explore young adults age 18-25 in Argao Cebu who engage in online slot machine gambling. Specifically, it aims to investigate the factors that influence their involvement, their motivations for continuing despite potential risks and the impacts of this behavior on their personal and social lives.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological design to explore young adults' experiences with online slot machine gambling in Argao, Cebu. Phenomenology focused on exploring and describing experiences to capture their essence from the respondents' perspectives (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). This approach enabled an in-depth examination of the respondents' influences, motivations to continue despite potential risks and perceived impacts related to online slot machine gambling. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which combined pre-set questions with open-ended discussion to gain deeper insights into respondents' attitudes and experiences (Jamshed, 2014). The flexibility of this method allowed the researcher to probe emerging ideas while maintaining focus, providing a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors shaping their gambling behavior.

Research Participants

This study involved seven young adults aged 20 to 25 years old from various barangays in Argao, Cebu, Philippines. The participants consisted of three females and four males, providing a balanced representation of experiences across genders. All respondents had firsthand experience with online slot machine gambling and had been actively engaged in the activity for two to six years. This criterion ensured that each participant possessed sufficient exposure to meaningfully describe the factors that influenced their initiation into online gambling, the motivations that sustained their continued engagement, and the impacts the behavior had on their lives.

A sample size of 7–10 participants was originally targeted, and the final number of seven respondents was deemed adequate to achieve thematic saturation, allowing for in-depth qualitative analysis while maintaining manageable data volume. The age group was intentionally selected, as young adulthood is a developmental period characterized by increased independence in decision-making, financial self-management, and heightened susceptibility to social, peer, and media influences (Bonnie et al., 2015). These characteristics made this demographic particularly relevant for examining online gambling behavior.

The study employed purposive sampling, ensuring that participants were selected based on their relevance to the study's objectives rather than through random selection. This method allowed the researchers to gather rich, experience-based accounts from individuals who could provide substantive insights into the influences, motivations, and consequences associated with online slot machine gambling. The diversity in respondents' backgrounds and years of gambling involvement contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon as it was experienced within the local context of Argao.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in Argao, Cebu, Philippines. The target respondents were young adults aged 18 to 25 who had experience with online slot machine gambling (scatter). To ensure the credibility and depth of responses, all interviews were conducted face-to-face. This method allowed the researcher to observe non-verbal cues and build better rapport with the respondents, which contributed to more honest and detailed sharing. In-person interviews were conducted in venues not affiliated with the respondent's home, or workplaces and were mutually chosen by both the researcher and the respondents to facilitate the latter's comfort during the talk. This interview format enabled the researcher, therefore, to generate explicate and contextualized discourse concerning the gamblers experiences while at the same time respecting the respondent's requirements.

Research Instrument

This research used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions that were prepared by the researcher to better understand the experiences of young adults when they gambled with online slot machines. The interviews examined how the respondents were initiated into gambling, motivations for gambling, and how their gambling affected their lives on a day-to-day basis. Demographics from the respondents were taken before the interview. This included information of the respondents such as age and how often they engaged in gambling activities. Gathering this background information assisted in putting the participants' experiences into context and in gaining a greater understanding of the differences in gambling behavior between people.

Semi-structured interviewing techniques balanced direction and adaptability, and permitted the participants to express their perspectives openly while allowing key research concepts to be treated. The questions of the interviews were framed in three topics: initiation in gambling, the reasons for remaining engaged, and the perceived effect of participating in online slot machines gambling. This method provided a rich probing into the experiences of the participants while leaving room for new observations outside the questions asked.

Audio Recorders. To ensure comprehensive data collection during in-depth interviews with respondents, audio recording was employed. This allowed for a verbatim capture of participants' responses, facilitating accurate transcription and subsequent detailed analysis of their experiences and perspectives.

Date Gathering

This study followed a phenomenological research procedure to deeply explore the experiences of young adults aged 18 to 25 who were engaged in online slot machine gambling in Argao Cebu, Philippines. The research began with the purposive selection of respondents who met the inclusion criteria, individuals within the specified age range, residing in Argao Cebu, and actively participating in online slot machine gambling, particularly on platforms of Scatter. A total of 7-10 respondents were chosen, providing a focused sample ideal for rich qualitative inquiry. Prior to data collection, respondents were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical safeguards. They were asked to sign a written informed consent form that emphasized their voluntary involvement, their right to withdraw at any time, and their ability to decline to answer any question that made them uncomfortable.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method of data collection and were conducted face-to-face to ensure the credibility and depth of responses. Each interview lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes and focused on three central themes: participants' influence to online gamble, their motivations for continued participation despite potential risks, and impact of their gambling behaviors. The semi-structured format allowed for both consistency across interviews and flexibility to explore emerging topics. With the respondents' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy during transcription and analysis. After each session, respondents were given the opportunity to ask questions or share additional thoughts, and a small token of appreciation was offered to thank them for their time and insights.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were anonymized by removing any identifying information to protect the confidentiality of participants. Both audio recordings and transcriptions were securely stored on encrypted devices accessible only to the research team. Data analysis followed a thematic approach, which involved immersing in the transcripts, generating initial codes, and identifying recurring themes relevant to respondents' gambling experiences. This analysis aimed to uncover patterns in their motivations, perceptions

of risk and reward, and changes in behavior or attitude over time. By employing this structured yet flexible procedure, the study ensured methodological rigor while capturing the depth and complexity of young adults' engagement in online slot machine gambling.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, which lasted approximately 10-15 minutes, conducted in person to ensure the credibility and depth of responses. The interviews followed a structured guide, incorporating predetermined questions that explored factors influencing online gambling behavior, motivations, and perceived impacts, alongside spontaneous follow-up inquiries to clarify or deepen understanding based on the respondent's responses. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on young adults aged 18-25 who actively engaged in online slot machine gambling (Scatter) in Argao Cebu, Philippines. With the respondent's consent, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate thorough analysis and ensure the accuracy of the data. All respondent's information was anonymized, and confidentiality was strictly maintained to protect their identities and the content of their statements. Researchers adhered to ethical considerations by safeguarding sensitive information and selectively withholding any details that could compromise the respondent's privacy or expose personal circumstances (Saunders et al., 2015). Additionally, respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, ensuring voluntary and informed participation.

Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) to interpret the data gathered through semi-structured interviews. This method was well-suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data, and it aligned with the phenomenological nature of the research. Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework offered a systematic yet flexible approach that allowed for an in-depth understanding of respondents' experiences, particularly concerning their involvement in online slot machine gambling.

The first phase, familiarization with the data, the researchers transcribed all interview recordings verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness. They then immersed themselves in the data by reading the transcripts multiple times to develop a thorough understanding of the participants' narratives, emotions, and perspectives.

In the second phase, generating initial codes, the researchers systematically highlighted significant segments of the data that were relevant to the research questions. These codes captured recurring ideas and meanings across the data set.

The third phase, searching for themes, involved organizing related codes into broader, meaningful themes that reflected consistent patterns in the participants' responses. These preliminary themes corresponded to major areas.

During the fourth phase, reviewing themes, the researchers refined the initial themes by evaluating their coherence and consistency with the coded data and the full data set. Any overlapping or unclear themes were modified or merged to ensure that they accurately represented the data.

In the fifth phase, defining and naming themes, the researchers clearly defined each theme's scope and content. At this stage, each theme was given a concise label and accompanied by a thematic summary that explained its relevance to the study's objectives.

Finally, the sixth phase, producing the report, involved presenting a detailed interpretation of the findings. Data excerpts were integrated with analytical commentary and theoretical insights. Themes were discussed in relation to existing literature and the broader psychological framework of gambling behavior, allowing the researchers to draw well-supported conclusions about the experiences, motivations, and consequences of online slot machine gambling among young adults.

Ethical Considerations

This study involved participants who were young adults ages 18-25 years old engaged in online gambling which was a topic that involved personal, social and psychological sensitivities. The respondents were informed about

the goals and purposes of the research, the proposed types of data collection, and the likely results of the study. During the interviews, the researcher first briefly discussed the need, relevance, and goal of the study, and was done in the course of data collection. This entailed explaining issues of interview structure, the use of the recording equipment, and how the collected data were secured to ensure participants' anonymity and data confidentiality. Respondents were also informed of their rights, the handling of data, and the risks associated with the conducted study. They were given the chance to know more, to ask questions and to clear out things before the process went on.

Compensation. No participant in the study was enticed financially by an offer of money for his/her participation. In order to encourage them to be more cooperative during the interviews of their personal experiences in online slot machine (scatter) gambling, a token gift was given after they were through with the interview. These tokens were intended to be a reward for the time that was borrowed and the effort that they've given so that they would participate without pressure resulting from expectations of material benefits.

Voluntary Consent. Prior to the commencement of each interview, informed consent was obtained from participants (appendix a). Respondents were provided with a written informed consent informing the purpose of the interview on their experiences in online slot machine gambling form outlining the objectives and the purpose of the study, the activities involved, potential risks or discomforts, and their role in the research. Respondents were required to read the form carefully and sign it if they voluntarily agreed to participate for the interview to commence properly. This was to ensure that respondents felt safe and in control most especially when discussing potential sensitive gambling experiences. The consent form clearly stated that participation was entirely voluntary and respondents were free to decline participation or withdraw at any time without any repercussions.

Confidentiality Pledge. Given the personal nature of gambling behavior, strict measures were taken into action to protect participants' identities. The identities of interviewers and most specially the interviewees remained anonymous, and the content of interviews was treated as confidential as possible (appendix a). Interview data were stored securely on encrypted media files, accessible only to the researchers. All personal details, including names, addresses, telephone numbers, or other identifying information, were removed during transcription, ensuring that the identities of the respondents could not be identified. The confidentiality of each participant's gambling involvement in this study was upheld throughout the study and after its completion.

Right to Withdraw and Withhold Information. Due to the existing emotional and social stigma associated with the online gambling activity, respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence (appendix a). This was especially important when discussing topics that might have revealed psychological stress, family issues, financial problems, and other related issues to gambling activities. They were also explicitly granted the freedom to decline to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. Researchers fully respected these decisions and ensured that respondents were not pressured or influenced in any way to continue their participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and interprets the findings of the study in relation to the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework that guided the research. It examines the factors influencing young adults' engagement in online slot machine gambling, their motivations for continued participation despite potential risks, and the resulting impacts of this behavior. The findings are analyzed alongside existing studies and relevant theories to identify points of convergence and divergence. While the results largely support previous research, they also offer context-specific insights that deepen understanding of online slot machine gambling among young adults in Argao, Cebu, Philippines.

The findings revealed that online slot machine gambling among young adults was influenced by digital exposure, peer and family influence, and the social normalization of gambling behavior. The results further indicated that motivations to continue gambling are rooted in hope for recovery, emotional gratification, and thrill-seeking behavior, despite awareness of financial, emotional and social risks. Moreover, the study found that online slot machine gambling produces multifaceted impacts, affecting financial stability, emotional well-being, physical health, and family relationships. Each major theme is discussed in the succeeding sections to provide a deeper understanding of how these factors interplay to shape the respondents' gambling experiences.

Table 1. Factors Influencing Young Adults to Engage in Online Slot Machine Gambling

Themes	Subthemes
External Influences	Social Media Influence Family Influence Peer Influence

Table 1 presents the theme External Influences, which captures how young adults' initial involvement in online slot machine gambling was shaped primarily by environmental exposure and social contexts rather than deliberate personal intention. Respondents consistently described first encountering gambling through elements embedded in their daily lives, including social media platforms, household interactions, and peer networks. Across accounts, gambling was introduced as familiar, accessible, and socially normalized, often appearing as part of routine online engagement or interpersonal interaction rather than as a consciously sought activity.

Subtheme 1: Social Media Influence highlights how digital platforms served as the primary entry point for gambling exposure. Respondents frequently encountered online slot machine gambling through advertisements and promotional content disseminated by social media and content creators. One participant noted, *"Sa Facebook ra sad ug sa mga content creator nga nag advertise"* (On Facebook and from content creators who advertise it) (R4, age 25), illustrating how gambling content is embedded within everyday scrolling and entertainment. Another respondent explained, *"Nakakita ko ug ads sa facebook gali sa social media niya mao to na ingganyo kog duwa kay mao lage daghang ma daog ba"* (I saw an advertisement on Facebook and other social media platforms. That's what encouraged me to play because it showed a high chance of winning) (R7, age 21). These narratives demonstrate how repeated exposure to reward-focused advertising fosters curiosity and frames gambling as an appealing and potentially profitable activity, often without explicit consideration of associated risks.

Subtheme 2: Family Influence reflects how gambling behaviors were introduced and reinforced within the household environment. Some respondents described direct instruction from family members, positioning gambling as a shared activity. One participant stated, *"Kuan kaning nagstart mani katong akong uncle nag sige ug duwa ug scatter niya iya mi gitudloan"* (Well, this started when my uncle kept playing scatter and he taught us) (R1, age 20). Others reported learning through observation alone, as reflected in *"Kuan rasad, ma'am, kanang makita rasad ko, kakita rasad ko diri ani nila"* (Just from seeing it, ma'am. I saw it here from them) (R2, age 24). These accounts suggest that gambling became familiar through routine exposure in the family setting, framing it as a normal and acceptable activity rather than a risky behavior.

Subtheme 3: Peer Influence emphasizes the role of friends in facilitating gambling initiation and engagement. Several respondents identified peers as their primary source of introduction, often through shared learning and interaction. One participant shared, *"Sa akong friend"* (From my friend) (R6, age 21), while another elaborated, *"Akong barkada jd ko unang nakabalo sa scatter, ila rakong ge tudluan"* (My friends were actually the first ones who knew about the scatter feature; they were the ones who taught me) (R7, age 21). These statements highlight how peer groups functioned as informal learning environments where gambling knowledge was exchanged, reinforcing gambling as a collective and socially endorsed activity.

Overall, the theme External Influences underscores the central role of social environments in shaping young adults' awareness and initial engagement in online slot machine gambling. The interconnected subthemes of social media, family, and peer influence illustrate multiple pathways through which gambling was introduced and normalized. These findings align with Sirola et al. (2021), who emphasized the role of online communities in increasing gambling interest, and Ajayi et al. (2024), who linked social media exposure with peer-driven initiation. Respondents' accounts further suggest that promotional content emphasizing rewards may overshadow regulatory awareness, consistent with Prasetyawati and Lamoste (2021).

The prominence of Family Influence supports Westberg et al. (2017), who argued that household environments can normalize risky behaviors through routine interaction. In this study, respondents described learning gambling practices through shared demonstrations and observation, framing gambling as casual and permissible. Similarly,

Peer Influence mirrored findings by Oyetunji-Alemede et al. (2019) and Guo et al. (2025), emphasizing the role of social circles in reinforcing gambling behavior. Notably, respondents framed peer-related gambling more in terms of enjoyment and shared experience rather than impulsivity, differing from Ajayi et al. (2024) and suggesting cultural variation in gambling initiation.

Collectively, these findings reflect Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), which posits that behaviors are learned through observation, imitation, and social interaction. Exposure through social media, guidance from family members, and shared peer experiences illustrate how environmental cues and interpersonal relationships jointly shaped gambling initiation among young adults. Rather than emerging in isolation, gambling behavior developed through continuous interaction with social contexts that normalized and reinforced participation.

Table 2. Motivation to continue online slot machine gambling despite potential risk

Themes	Subthemes
Hope for Recovery and Future Wins	Hope to win back losses Persistent through loss Optimism for next win
Recreation and Emotional Gratification	Alternative past time Anticipation and Excitement Emotional Satisfaction

Table 2 presents two major themes that explain young adults' continued engagement in online slot machine gambling: Hope for Recovery and Future Wins and Recreation and Emotional Gratification. These themes reflect the respondents' motivations as expressed in their own narratives, with each theme comprising subthemes that illustrate how participants justified and sustained their gambling behavior.

Theme 1: Hope for Recovery and Future Wins reflects respondents' strong reliance on financial hope and expectations of eventual success. Many participants described gambling as a means to regain previously lost money. Under the subtheme Hope to Win Back Losses, respondents expressed a desire to recover losses, as reflected in statements such as *"Hoping to win and recover what I lost"* (R1, age 20) and *"Ganahan ko mo duwa mamasin nga makabalos sa napilde mamawi ba bisag di na maayo"* (I like to play hoping I can get back what I lost, even if I know it's not really good anymore) (R5, age 22). These accounts suggest that gambling was viewed as an opportunity for financial redemption rather than mere chance.

Closely related, the subtheme Persistent Through Loss captured how respondents continued gambling despite repeated losses. One participant stated, *"Sige nakong pangumtan mag dahom ko nga makadaog kay na pilde naman"* (I keep on betting, hoping I'll win since I already lost) (R7, age 21), illustrating how loss itself became a reason to continue gambling. Meanwhile, the subtheme Optimism for Next Win highlighted how prior winning experiences reinforced expectations of future success. As one respondent explained, *"Ma engganyo kay dako kag daug pag last ba, so kanang the next nimo nga dula maka hunahuna ka nga basin makadaug pa ko ron"* (You get encouraged because you won a lot the last time, so in your next game, you start thinking that maybe you'll win again this time) (R3, age 23). Taken together, these narratives reflect a pattern consistent with the gambler's fallacy, wherein continued play is justified by beliefs that persistence or past wins increase the likelihood of future success, despite the unpredictable nature of gambling outcomes (Tabri et al., 2021).

Theme 2: Recreation and Emotional Gratification emphasizes gambling as a leisure activity that provided enjoyment and emotional stimulation. Under the subtheme Alternative Pastime, respondents described online slot machine gambling as an accessible form of entertainment and a way to alleviate boredom. One participant noted, *"Nya, usa sad maong sad ang nipuli ron nga kalingaw sa mga tao kay sauna muadto paman ka para malingaw ka"* (This has now become people's source of entertainment because before, you still had to go out to have fun) (R2, age 24), while another simply stated, *"Pangpawala ra sa laay"* (It's just to get rid of boredom) (R4, age 25). These accounts align with Stead et al. (2016), who emphasized that the convenience and accessibility of online gambling platforms make them appealing substitutes for offline leisure activities.

The subtheme Anticipation and Excitement captured the emotional arousal experienced before and during gambling. Participants described feelings of excitement and nervous anticipation, as reflected in *"Before ko mag duwa malipay unya excited makadaog ba ko or dili"* (Before I play, I feel happy and excited, wondering if I'll win or not) (R7, age 21) and *"Before kay ma enjoy ka unya exciting sd. During dula kay kulba kay mahadlok mahurot ang kwarta"* (Before playing, I enjoy it and feel excited; during the game, there's nervousness because I'm afraid the money might run out) (R5, age 22). These experiences illustrate how emotional stimulation becomes a reinforcing factor in continued gambling, aligning with Griffiths and McCormack's (2012) assertion that digital gambling environments heighten involvement by intensifying anticipatory excitement and emotional engagement during play. Additionally, the subtheme Emotional Satisfaction highlighted how the act of playing itself motivated continued engagement. One respondent shared, *"Ang ka katol sa kamot gani or ang lingaw ba naa gani dira, malingaw man gud ka"* (It's the itch in the hands or the fun—you really enjoy it) (R3, age 23), while another emphasized the emotional payoff of winning despite losses, stating, *"If pildi, pildi lang. If daug gud, ma'am, tingob man gud imong makuha"* (If I lose, then I lose. But if I win, I get all the winnings at once) (R2, age 24).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that young adults' continued engagement in online slot machine gambling is shaped by a combination of financial optimism, emotional reinforcement, and recreational use. These motivations align with Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), which posits that individuals engage with media to fulfill psychological and social needs such as entertainment, emotional satisfaction, and escapism. In this context, online slot machine gambling functioned not merely as a game of chance but as a psychologically reinforcing cycle of hope, excitement, and gratification, sustained by technological accessibility and social normalization despite respondents' awareness of potential risks.

Table 3. Impact of Online Slot Machine Gambling

Themes	Subthemes
Impaired Personal, Social, and Financial Functioning	Family and Social Strain Occupational and Academic Negligence Financial Strain and Management
Negative Impact on Well-Being	Emotional Distress Regret and Self-Blame
	Disrupted Daily Routine
Familial Normalization	Perceived harmlessness Role modeling Family Shared Gambling Practices Gambling as a Source of Financial
Perceived Financial Benefit	Assistance Ability to Meet Daily and Personal Needs Reliance on Gambling

Table 3 presents four major themes that capture the impact of online slot machine gambling among young adults in Argao, Cebu, along with their corresponding subthemes and supporting utterances. Collectively, these themes illustrate the multidimensional consequences of gambling behavior, affecting personal discipline, social relationships, emotional well-being, family dynamics, and financial decision-making.

Theme 1: Impaired Personal, Social, and Financial Functioning emerged from repeated accounts describing strained family relationships, neglect of responsibilities, and poor financial management. Under the subtheme Family and Social Strain, respondents described distancing themselves from family members and engaging in

conflicts due to gambling-related behavior. One participant shared, *"Ako nilayo ko nila (mama ug papa) kay tungod sa akong mga binuhatan ng wala nako'y control sa akong kaugalingon"* (I distanced myself from my parents because of my actions and because I lost control of myself) (R2, age 24), while another stated, *"Mo sukol ko sa akong ginikanan kay kung suguon, di ko makatuman kay dula akong gi-atubang"* (I talked back to my parents because I cannot follow instructions since I am focused on gambling) (R5, age 22). These narratives suggest that gambling disrupted family harmony and weakened interpersonal relationships, consistent with findings by Holdsworth et al. (2019) and Langham et al. (2015), who emphasized how gambling-related behaviors contribute to family conflict, social withdrawal, and relational strain.

The subtheme Occupational and Academic Negligence reflected respondents' difficulty fulfilling daily responsibilities, as gambling increasingly took precedence over work, chores, and studies. This was illustrated in, *"Di ko ka trabaho sa amoa, ma malingaw nan ko'g dula. Di ko ka pakaon ug kanding asta manok kay mo lahos kog duwa labina ma buntag"* (I can't work at home because I get too entertained by playing. I can't even feed the goats and chickens since I go straight to play, especially in the morning) (R7, age 21). This pattern aligns with Budiman et al. (2020), who reported that excessive gambling disrupts productivity, time management, and role performance. Meanwhile, Financial Strain and Mismanagement surfaced through repeated admissions of diverting essential funds toward gambling, as seen in *"Imbis para sa kaon, nahurot sa scatter"* (Instead of using the money for food, I spent it on scatter) (R2, age 24 Such financial behaviors support Holdsworth et al.'s (2019) findings that gambling often leads to overspending and misuse of essential resources. The recurrence of these patterns across interviews explains why this theme emerged as a central finding.

Theme 2: Negative Impact on Well-Being highlights the emotional and physical consequences of online slot machine gambling. Respondents frequently reported emotional distress, regret, and disrupted daily routines. Under the subtheme Emotional Distress, participants described irritability and frustration, such as *"Usahay makasapot"* (Sometimes it makes me angry) (R4, age 25). Emotional fluctuations were further emphasized in the subtheme Regret and Self-Blame, where respondents articulated intense emotional highs and lows, as expressed in *"Grabe akong kalipay kung makadaog, pero guot kayo sa dughan kung mapilde"* (I feel very happy when I win, but extremely heavy-hearted when I lose) (R7, age 21). Feelings of remorse were also common, reflected in *"Ay oh, maka feel ug pagmahay uy!... hangtud noun mahurot, magmahay gyud ig human"* (Oh yes, I really feel regret! Then end up losing everything—you really regret it afterward) (R1, age 20). These emotional patterns are consistent with Pchajek et al. (2023), who highlighted the psychological distress associated with repeated gambling engagement.

The subtheme Disrupted Daily Routines emerged from repeated reports of irregular sleep patterns linked to gambling. One respondent shared, *"Matug ko mga alas tres, mumata kog alas singko sa hapon"* (I sleep at 3AM and wake up at 5PM) (R3, age 23), while another stated, *"Mumata gyud ko alas 12AM para mo duwa"* (I really wake up at 12AM just to play) (R1, age 20). These disruptions reflect findings by Abbott et al. (2020), who noted that online gambling contributes to sleep disturbance, fatigue, and reduced daily functioning. Together, these emotional and physical consequences explain the prominence of this theme.

Theme 3: Familial Normalization reflects how gambling became accepted and normalized within the household. Respondents repeatedly described family environments where gambling was tolerated, shared, or modeled by relatives. The subtheme Perceived Harmlessness was evident in statements such as *"Okay ra sa balay kay wala koy bisyo"* (It's okay to gamble at home because I have no other vices) (R1, age 20). Shared gambling practices further reinforced normalization, as illustrated by *"Oo kahibaw sila... akong ate tig scatter sad mao okay ra sila"* (Yes, they know… my sister also plays scatter, so it's fine with them) (R6, age 21). The subtheme Role Modeling was reflected in parental behavior, with one respondent stating, *"Kaming daddy mas grabe si daddy ug sugal"* (My dad gambles more than I do) (R3, age 23). These accounts align with Westberg et al. (2020) and Greer et al. (2023), who emphasized that family norms, modeling, and shared practices play a critical role in normalizing gambling behaviour and reducing perceived risk.

Theme 4: Perceived Financial Benefit captures respondents' belief that gambling could provide financial assistance despite its risks. Under the subtheme Gambling as a Source of Financial Assistance, respondents stated, *"Makatabang labi na ug dako kog madaugan"* (It helps a lot, especially when I win big) (R1, age 21). Some participants described using winnings for daily and educational expenses, aligning with the subtheme Ability to Meet Daily and Personal Needs, as expressed in *"Nagamit nako sa allowance ug bayranan sa*

skwelahan ug snacks" (I use my winnings for allowance, school expenses, and snacks) (R6, age 21). Continued dependence on gambling was evident in the subtheme Reliance on Gambling, particularly when other income sources were unavailable, as shared in *"Labi na karun na nag stop kog work"* (Especially now that I've stopped working) (R4, age 25). This perception of short-term gain aligns with Stead et al. (2016)**,** who noted that immediate rewards often justify continued engagement in risky behaviors despite long-term losses.

Overall, the findings reveal that the impact of online slot machine gambling among young adults in Argao, Cebu, spans four interconnected domains: impaired functioning, diminished well-being, familial normalization, and perceived financial benefit. These results are consistent with previous studies highlighting the complex consequences of online gambling (Holdsworth et al., 2019; Langham et al., 2015). The persistence of gambling behavior despite emotional distress and financial instability can be understood through Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1990), wherein favourable attitudes toward gambling, permissive social norms, and perceived control over the activity jointly reinforce continued participation. While online slot machine gambling may temporarily fulfill emotional or financial needs, it simultaneously fosters psychological dependence, social strain, and risky behavioral patterns that persist despite awareness of their adverse effects.

Implications

The findings of this study hold significant implications for understanding the multifaceted nature of online slot machine gambling among young adults in Argao, Cebu. While the activity is often viewed solely through the lens of risk and harm, this research reveals that some respondents perceive online slot machine gambling as offering benefits, such as emotional satisfaction and financial relief through winnings. The presence of these perceived positive effects suggests that interventions should not only focus on the risk awareness but also on addressing the underlying needs that online slot machine gambling appears to fulfill, such as entertainment, stress and financial relief.

In a social perspective, the study implies that family and peer environments play a pivotal role in shaping gambling behaviours. The normalization of online slot machine gambling within households highlights the importance of community-based prevention programs that promote responsible leisure activities and financial discipline. Public education campaigns should emphasize the deceptive nature of perceived "easy win", helping young adults recognize that the temporary advantages of online gambling are often outweighed by its lasting emotional and economic consequences.

Moreover, the study's findings regarding the influence of social media advertisements and influencer marketing underline the urgent need for policy-level interventions. Regulatory bodies and digital platforms must enforce stricter content monitoring, particularly to limit gambling promotions accessible to younger audiences. Local governments and educational institutions can collaborate to strengthen digital literacy and responsible gambling initiatives that counteract misleading online content.

Psychologically, the reported experiences of excitement, thrill, and regret highlights the need for mental health professionals that provide healthy alternatives for emotional gratification. Counseling and outreach programs can be developed to help individuals manage stress and emotional triggers without resorting to online slot machine gambling activities.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study encountered several limitations that could possibly influence the reliability of its findings on the gambling experiences of young adults engaging in online slot machine gambling. With a sample size of only 710 respondents, the findings may fail to fully represent the diverse experiences of young adults engaging in online gambling, thereby restricting generalizability. Moreover, the research focused solely on individuals aged 18–25, limiting perspectives to a single age group. Broader insights might emerge if respondents from other age ranges were included, as gambling behaviors and motivations can differ across life stages. Furthermore, the geographical focus was limited to Argao, Cebu, reducing sociocultural and economic diversity and thus restricting a comprehensive understanding of gambling contexts in other places.

In addition, data collection relied on self-reported interviews, which may have been prone to biases such as social desirability or recall errors, where participants might have altered their responses due to shame or fear of

judgment. Moreover, the interview duration further constrained opportunities for deeper emotional or personal disclosures, while the sensitivity of gambling as a topic will likely lead to guarded or incomplete information. Finally, the narrow scope, which centered solely on online slot machines and excluded other forms like online casinos, prevented meaningful comparisons across different types of online gambling.

With these limitations, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen future research on this topic. Future studies should increase sample sizes and include a more diverse range of respondents to enhance the generalizability and international applicability of findings. Expanding the geographical scope to cover both urban and rural areas may provide a broader understanding of online gambling experiences across different contexts, while employing triangulation methods and mixed-method approaches, such as combining interviews with anonymous surveys, could mitigate self-report biases and strengthen data credibility. Allocating more time for interviews, ideally between 30 to 60 minutes, would allow for deeper exploration of personal experiences. Additionally, future research should broaden its focus to encompass various forms of online gambling to enable comparative insights. Furthermore, while the study identified potential positive outcomes, such as entertainment or social benefits, it strongly advises against engaging in online gambling or relying on it as a source of income, given the inherent risks, financial instability, and potential harms associated with such activities. These enhancements would not only address the current study's limitations but also to contribute to a deeper understanding that can inform effective interventions and policy development.

CONCLUSION

In today's digital age, the intersection of growing technology and social interaction continuously reshape human behavior with the rise of online slot machine gambling reflects how influence, motivation, and impact interact within this evolving nature of risk-taking and leisure. The increasing accessibility of online slot machine gambling signifies a visible proof of how modern society intertwines with leisure and convenience both enjoyment and opportunities that simultaneously pose risk to individuals' financial, emotional, and social aspects. While some young adults engage in online slot machine gambling as a form of leisure and relief, its impacts extend beyond recreation, manifesting in financial mismanagement, disrupted sleep patterns, emotional distress, and strained family relationships. This shift explains a broader change in values where instant gratification and digital engagement takes place in the pursuit of satisfaction and escape.

It is essential to understand that participation in online slot machine gambling is not purely a personal act but also a reflection of the broader life dynamics. Findings indicate that the normalization of online gambling within households and peers reinforces its acceptance, making it more difficult for individuals to recognize its harm. Moreover, the emotional exhaustion, financial strain, and physical toll resulting from this behavior affect not only the gamblers themselves but also their families and communities. Addressing the underlying issues requires a multidimensional approach, combining education, regulation, and mental health support, to promote responsible online gambling and financial literacy. By encouraging awareness, implementing stricter policies, and fostering self-control, society can mitigate the risks associated with online slot machine gambling. Ultimately, enhancing understanding and accountability in the face of digital temptations is vital in building a healthier, more informed, and socially responsible community.

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