

The Changing Patterns of Gambling in Benue State: The Case of Emerging Role of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) in Contemporary Makurdi Metropolis

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This paper describes a number of significant alterations in the patterns of gambling and its Implications among the people of Benue State, Nigeria. It seeks to examine the changing patterns of gambling in Benue State; and focus on the emerging role of ICT. It explores the evolution and development of Gambling among the people and advances factors responsible for these changes. It also, analyses trends of gambling in contemporary Makurdi Metropolis and explains its implications on the society. The objectives of the study were achieved through the collection and analysis of primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected through the use of questionnaire, oral interview and personal observation. It observed that the results of the changes are both positive and negative. On the one hand, the changes had opened avenues for gambling agents to be gainfully employed and increase the social capital of those in the business. On the other hand, there has been increase in crime and other social vices as well as a rise in reported cases of delinquent behaviours associated with gambling. The paper posits that comprehensive studies that will explore the causes and implications of gambling need to be conducted in Benue State and the nation at large in order to have a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon, as well as the trajectories of its dynamics.

Introduction

Gambling as a social phenomenon has been in existence for thousands of years in human history. The earliest record of gambling appears in ancient Romans, recounting stories of peasants and emperors gambling with dice, and huge gambling debts and the fights that broke out over them. Since the last two decades, Nigeria has been witnessing unprecedented rise as well as sophistication in gambling activities. Hardly any day passes without Nigerians engaging in gambling activities as they happen in the different parts of the country. The new gambling wave cuts across all sections of the society, involving men, women and children. The changes in the patterns of gambling are drawing the attention of the popular Medias as well as economists, psychologists, sociologists and criminologists. Most of the early studies of gambling concentrated on two or three main areas: offline lottery, pool and slot. In recent times, inquiry into gambling has broadened to include such other gaming as online lottery, promo, pool, sport betting and casino slots. The gaming industry has continued to expand, benefitting from; the large and youthful population, improving internet penetration, and the increasing access to internet-enabled devices. Sports betting have slowly emerged as a lucrative segment, leveraging Nigeria's huge football culture. Some of the big leagues, such as the English Premier league, and the Spanish La Liga, have millions of fans in the country - betting provides Nigerians the opportunity to earn from what they love. Despite the temporary dip in economic activities in 2016, growth prospects are positive even as the economy rebounds, and income stabilizes [1].

Change in patterns of gambling in Benue State became apparent since the late 1990s with the advancement in technology and modernity – mobile/telecom and internet, government cashless society policies and cable/live broadcasts of sports that

impacted and led to the advent of mobile, online, and retail gaming. This implies that the growth of gaming in Nigeria and the expansion of mobile networks providing data for the Nigerian market provided the gaming landscape the right opportunity to grow. The revolution in information and communication technology (ICT) gave way to the boom in gaming/betting which facilitated gambling on a larger scale as there was increased desire for material possession by the people. Gambling has since then assumed different forms and styles with the harsh political and economic conditions engendered by corruption and mismanagement of public funds in Nigeria. Gambling have gradually moved from offline gaming to online gaming such as online lottery, promo, pool, sport betting and casino slots as earlier mentioned. It is this observed change that the researchers tried to investigate. The main objective of this study is to identify the factors that led to the change in patterns of gambling in Benue State. Other objectives include; to examine the role of ICT in the changes and the socio-economic implications of the changes in the study area and to make recommendations based on research findings.

Conceptual Clarifications / Literature Review

Gambling is the betting of money or something of value (referred to as "*the stakes*") on an event with an uncertain outcome with the primary intent of winning money or material goods. Gambling thus requires three elements be present: consideration, chance and prize. The outcome of the bet is often immediate, such as a single roll of dice, a spin of a roulette wheel, or a horse crossing the finish line, but longer time frames are also common, allowing bets on the outcome of a future sports contest or even an entire sports season [2, 3, 4, 5]. The term *gambling* is a broad concept that includes a range of different activities, including betting on races and gambling machines, gambling in bingo halls, amusement arcades and casinos, as well as playing the lottery and on the Internet. For the vast majority of players, gambling is an enjoyable form of leisure, pursued for a range of reasons – to relax, to socialize, to experience some excitement, and perhaps to win money. For these individuals, gambling losses are simply the price of the entertainment, in much the same way as cinema or football tickets are the cost of a good time [3, 4, 6].

However, for minority gambling losses are uncontrolled and often represent a desperate attempt to win back money rather than to enjoy a game. For these individuals, problem gambling consists of behaviour that is out of control and that disrupts personal, family and employment relations. It can also initiate a spiral of related problems from debt and bankruptcy, to criminal activity, domestic violence, familial breakdown and suicide [6]. Public perceptions of gambling are often misleading. On the one hand, people are usually aware that gambling poses serious risks to those who are predisposed to gamble excessively. However, on the other hand, it is also acknowledged that gambling can have positive consequences for communities (e.g. via providing a source of revenue for sporting clubs or humanitarian causes) and can be an enjoyable pastime for individuals [7, 3, 4, 8, 9]. There is ample evidence showing that people's attitudes toward gambling are good predictors of how much people gamble and how likely they are to experience gambling related problems. A common finding is that those who hold more positive attitudes toward gambling are more likely to gamble and to experience gambling-related problems [7, 4, 5]. Nigeria youth especially undergraduates are engaging themselves in gambling as a means of surviving; this is an intricate issue of special concern as this behavior may predispose them to pathological/compulsive gambling [7]. The impact of the extensive availability, advertising, and sanctioning of legalized gambling is of concern in the fields of public health and addictions. Among adults, the prevalence of disordered gambling has increased significantly from 1977 to 1993 [7, 3, 4].

In recent times there has been much excitement about the Nigerian gaming market for reasons which are not farfetched, given its demographic asset, which presents a growth for many companies and steady increase in the number of sports betting firms in Nigeria. The effect of this trend is reflected in the emerging numbers of actual and potential gamblers, especially among youth. As a consequence, attention has been directed towards youths addicted to the extent that they have resigned from gainful employment and resorted to gambling, with others manifesting significant health complications. Opponent of sports betting in Nigeria associate it with idleness among youth with claims that up-to 70% of this subpopulation are not productively employed. In response, the Government of Nigeria imposed a levy on all gambling revenues received and also tightened laws on all gambling companies through the National Lottery Regulatory Commission (NLRC) [7, 1, 3, 4]. In Nigeria, the most common of gambling is sports betting, in particular football. Other forms gambling includes Ludo, Chess, Draught (Checker), Poker/Card, Internet/mobile based wagering, raffles draws, and promos, lottery, Coupon, Pool, Casino and Slot machines. Although gambling has existed for some time in Nigeria in the form of seasonal lotteries, sport betting is relatively new and has taken the country by "storm". Currently, there are over ten sports betting outlets in every major town with suggestions that the majority of betters are youth aged between 15- 40 years.

The economic impact of gambling in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. For instance, Gross casino gambling revenues in Nigeria rose by 17.1% in 2014, continuing the pattern of double-digit annual increases. Since 2009, growth has been averaging 15.6%, compounded annually to USD45.8 million in 2014. That advance reflects a strong economy. Nominal GDP over the

2009-14 periods increased at a 14.2% compound annual rate and real GDP expanded at a robust 5.7%, compounded annually. It is expected that taxes and levies will rise to an estimated USD8.6 million in 2019 from USD5.7 million in 2014, growing by 8.6% on a compound annual basis [10, 11]. Through the National Lottery Regulatory Commission (NLRC), the government has acted to license a consulting firm to run a National lottery with huge prizes to be potentially won [4, 3].

Of the 53 African countries, Nigeria is undoubtedly the largest market by virtue of its population making it the preferred investment destination for most gaming companies. Because of this, a number of Nigerians (both in rural and urban areas) have been attracted to gambling because they believe that they will gain economically (getting money) and socially (entertainment) [1, 4, 3, 11]. According to a high school gambling fact sheet in the USA, "Approximately 4-5% of youth have a gambling problem and 10-14% are at risk of developing an addiction. Many of the youth gamble occasionally for fun. The study further reports that 60-80% of high school students have ever gambled"[12]. Nigerians are often observed loitering around sports betting shops and outlets attempting to place bets on respective teams. They do so by reviewing odds provided by online bookmakers and studying the past team performances. Local sports radio and television commentaries are including information on the best odds available and how betters should place bets. The most common form of gambling among Nigerians is betting on foreign football games. Slot machines are also becoming popular only that they do not offer diversity and gamblers assert they have less chances of winning as compared to sports betting.

Despite the presence of gambling legislation in Nigeria, it appears that little effort is directed to properly implementing and monitoring compliance; for example, the National Lottery Regulatory Commission (NLRC) has failed to relocate sports betting shops and other gambling facilities away from public places like schools and churches. There are also no proper mechanisms to regulate Internet gambling. Because of this most telecommunication companies are now offering betting services in Nigeria by partnering with gambling firms with promotions and advertising normalizing the activity [11, 7, 3, 4].

The issue of increasing rate and change in patterns of gambling in Nigeria is disturbing. From a political economy approach, it is well known that attitudes, beliefs, motivations and other forms of consciousness do not exist in a vacuum, nor are they mere accidents. They cannot be understood or meaningfully discussed if they are dissociated from these historical conditions. They evolve over a long period in the course of man's interaction with his human and physical environment [13, 14]. The topic for this paper is change in patterns of gambling in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. When dynamism is considered, trends and patterns of events are adequately accounted for. Nigeria has gone through many changes over time – political, economic and social. The country is currently experiencing economic downturn – poverty, high rate of unemployment, change in values, moral laxity, bribery and corruption, greed and quest for wealth and increased rate of crime and criminal activities.

The Emerging Role of ICT in Gambling in Contemporary Makurdi Metropolis

The term "*Information Communication Technology*" (ICT) is an umbrella term that indicates all technologies for the communication of information. It refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. It is similar to Information Technology (IT), but focuses primarily on communication technologies. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication mediums. In the past few decades, information and communication technologies have provided society with a vast array of new communication capabilities. For example, people can communicate in real-time with others in different countries using technologies such as instant messaging, voice over IP (VoIP), and video-conferencing. Social networking websites like Facebook allow users from all over the world to remain in contact and communicate on a regular basis. Modern information and communication technologies have created a "global village," in which people can communicate with others across the world as if they were living next door. For this reason, ICT is often studied in the context of how modern communication technologies affect society [15]. ICT play a number of roles in gambling activities in Makurdi Metropolis including the following:

1. ICT helps in linking and connecting potential gamblers/bettors and gambling firms or gambling agents together by providing a platform for gambling activities without physical contact. In other words, ICT created and serve as a platform where gambling activities as carried out or an avenue for staking of money or something of value with the primary intent of winning money or material goods. This implies that ICT promote and enhance gambling transaction and activities [1, 3, 7, 10, 11, 12]. This covers a wide range of sports betting sites like NairaBet, Bet9ja, AccessBet, MerryBet, etc., lotteries, raffle draws and promos.

2. It encourages socialization and interaction between potential gamblers/bettors and gambling firms or gambling agents. Apart from the primary function of ICT as a means of information and communications, it also doubled as veritable tools for social interaction, cross-fertilization of ideas and fashion as well as initiating and encouraging economic, social and political development. This implies that ICT, function as a strong vehicle for pulling people together from different ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds. This process intensifies and facilitates integration among people and also foster gambling activities. For

instance, with mobile phone or computer and access to the internet one can visit any of the sports betting and online lottery site to bet/wager from the comfort of their home. Today, record has it that there are a lot of betting and lotteries sites and betting shop scattered across the country and many Nigerians own sophisticated mobile phone with internet access and connectivity and thus increase in online gambling [12, 3, 4, 7, 1, 10, 11].

3. Online betting/lottery create direct and indirect jobs and consequently reduce the number of unemployment in the society. Online betting/lottery is a source of livelihood as a lot of gambling firms, shops, agents among others make a living from gambling activities [1, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12]. All these add to the number of people who made their living from gambling activities. By extension and implication therefore, Online betting/lottery as a gambling process and activities play decisive role in reducing the number of crimes and vices notably theft, armed robbing, kidnapping, fraud and prostitution. Online betting/lottery are valuable because it creates a lot of employment opportunities for a large number of people in Nigeria thereby reducing the unemployment rate and its attendant social effect of armed robbery and other crimes.

4. ICT serves as a platform for awareness and information dissemination. ICT is a platform where potential gamblers/bettors, gambling firms and gambling agents are constantly directly or indirectly informed, train and retrain to acquire the necessary skills required to promote the expertise of gambling. Gambling agents inform gambling firms about the social outlook, economic profit, demographic characteristic, concentration and dispersion etc. and thereby assist them in planning their games to attune them to the environment [1, 7, 3, 12, 11, 4, 10].

5. Online betting/lottery serve as a source of revenue generations potential gamblers/bettors, gambling firms, gambling agents and the government. Online betting/lottery is a crucial source of income for several gambling firms, gambling agents and the government in Nigeria. As seen earlier, they employed majority of people, thus raising the level of individuals and government income and standard of living of the common man. The governments derive much revenue in the form of levies and taxes on gambling firms and gambling agents involved in gambling activities [1, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12]. This shows that online betting/lottery prosperity contribute considerably in fostering revenue generation and economic advancement.

Factors Responsible for Changing Patterns of Gambling in Makurdi Metropolis

At this juncture we will identify and discuss the factors responsible for such changes in gambling in Makurdi Metropolis.

1. *Influence of Technology:* A major contributor to the changing patterns of gambling in Makurdi Metropolis is the influence of technology. Over the past four decades, technology has played a key role in providing new forms and means of information and communication for Nigerian population. It has also improved on means of communication available in a big way and has allowed a lot of information to be obtained easily by institutions and individuals [1, 6, 7]. Technology has influenced gambling by improving the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the system. Technology continues to be a catalyst for change in all phase of life, and gambling is no exception. Today's gamblers/bettors are more mobile and more connected than ever before, which means that gamblers/bettors can operate anywhere. Especially in advanced urban centres, the use of computer and technology, the growth of the internet, and the availability of instant voice and data communications have become an integral part of gambling, and gambling and lottery companies maintaining Web pages that provide information on products and how they operate. The advancement and expansion of technology has helped in opening Makurdi Metropolis to the outside world by linking it with major within and outside the country. Consequently, this led to the acceleration of gambling activities in the area. Along with the eruption of gambling shops in Makurdi Metropolis, the technology or ICT made gambling, easier, safer and more attractive than had been the case before now. This encouraged the people to participate in gambling activities with relative ease [1, 3, 16].

2. *Increased in Indigenous Participation:* Another contributor to the changing patterns of gambling Makurdi Metropolis is the increased indigenous participation in gambling activities as a result of population explosion, eruption of betting centres and access to the internet [1, 6, 3]. Unlike when gambling where offline, gambling centres and participants in gambling activities were few; but with population explosion, eruption of betting centres and access to the internet the case is different as more and more persons now participate directly or indirectly in gambling activities [1, 6, 7]. This simply means that increase in population of the people, eruption in sports betting centres and improvement in access to internet led to expansion in active participation of the people in gambling activities. Apart from this, many people in the area see gambling as an opportunity for easy wealth acquisition and accumulation and as such participate in it thereby increasing the number of participants in it.

3. *Introduction of new goods and services:* Other significant contributors are introduction of new goods and services which are more sophisticated and highly unregulated [1, 16, 11]. Most of these goods are foreign, glamorized and associated with

affluence and success. In order to make these goods more attractive, companies sponsor a variety of social events, including advertising, promotion and marketing. They employ both foreign and local models, footballers and musicians to promote these products. In some of these promotions, free drinks, money and other souvenirs are given out to lucky winners. This has serious implications: The new goods and services contributed in no small measure to changes in the gambling as they increased the desire for easy wealth acquisition and accumulation and established a crop of new gambling firms, agents and gamblers due to advancement in technology and access to internet. Some of these goods created and promoted apathy for locally produced/manufactured goods and love for imported ones.³¹ This arguably is one of the reasons why foreign goods has become the most preferred items in Nigeria, despite its effects on agriculture and local industries. Good examples are Nigerians preference for foreign rice, textiles and wine to locally produced/brewed ones.

4. Population and Employment Trends: Another significant contributor to the changing patterns of gambling in the area is the trends of population and employment [15, 1, 6]. Over the years, with the increase in population and gamblers/bettors, the number of gambling firms, websites, agents and sports betting centres has also increased. The upsurge of gambling firms, websites, agents and sports betting centres has taken place because the existing ones were unable to meet the demands of the growing population and gamblers' needs. The steady growth in the population and diversity in gambling activities has increasingly altered gambling and participation. With the fast-growing population and high incidence of unemployment and disguised unemployment in the area, gambling provides employment opportunities to the labour force. The colonial influence introduced wage-earning, white collar job referred to as the formal sector of the economy by the educated active population in the country. This wage-earning, white collar job employs very little percentage of the people in the area like in any other part of Nigeria due to inadequate employment opportunities in the country. Unemployment which is the condition where able-bodied persons who are qualified and willing to accept jobs yet unable to find placement and its twin, underemployment which is the condition of having an underpaid job are the leading factors in the changes. Educated and able-bodied young men and women roamed the streets in search of lucrative and befitting jobs with little or no hope of securing one. Consequently, after an exhaustive search without success, some turned to or found solace in gambling especially gambling agents to keep body and soul together, and to avoid being idle and involving in crimes and other social vices, because it is said that 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop.' Apart from the young educated and able-bodied men and women that are in hundreds of thousands, there are a significant number of widows who lost their husbands as a result of natural death or diseases, ethnic, socio-religious crisis, or accidents. It is revealed by our informants that most of such widows are neither educated nor employed and as such created another category of unemployed seeking for employment in order to provide for themselves and their children and thereby engage in gambling to make ends meet. Also, economic pursuit of the parents and guardians most especially now that both mother and father go out in search of daily bread in order to put food on the table and pay some other bills led to increased job seekers and in turn increased gambling activities which played a vital role in the changes in the gambling sector.

5. The Changing Family System and Values: The Nigerian economic crisis of the 1980s brought a lot of change in family system and values [16, 17, 1]. The era of stay-at-home mother, the single-income source and polygamous family style were altered and women and children participation in economic pursuit increased. Women experienced more freedom and participated more in gambling activities both within and outside their immediate communities. The 1980s and 1990s saw a change in societal mores, traditional family value and perceptions. The tradition which tended to confine women to domestic chores was largely changed. This increased the percentage of Makurdi Metropolis household dependent on two or more wage earners to about 75 percent and about 25 percent on single-wage earner [18, 19]. This show that more women and children became involved within the economic cycle – specifically gambling sector, – and assumed more responsibility and contributed meaningfully to growth and development of the area and the nation at large. These created a gap between the ideal and the obtained, or a standard and class difference, subsequently leading to the emergence of new patterns of economic relations, life styles, and the totality of relationships. This, informants attributed to the changes in Nigerian economy, especially the shift from the traditional agricultural, collectively pursuit economy to an alien, individualistic, competitive, incompatible "foreign" economy. They posited that this shift is fueled by the loss of the age-old value system which tied dignity of labour to wealth and get rich quick syndrome which in turn affected the efficacy and comprehensiveness of the traditional societal values.

The Implications of the Changing Patterns of Gambling in Makurdi Metropolis

The implications of pathological gambling cannot be denied in the present world. It has social, health, economic, psychological and many other implications [6, 7, 16, 17]. In Nigeria, high prevalence and overindulgence in gambling activities has been linked to an increase in crime and social vices (having been in a physical fight, tobacco use, not always driving within the speed limit, sexual risk behavior, etc.) in our communities [6, 7] and this is almost a daily occurrence in most Nigerian higher institutions [7]. In many schools, in Nigeria, cult clashes have been on the increase and youths cruelly maim their rivals with dangerous weapons. This has been linked to the fact that alcohol is hazardously used and overindulgence in gambling activities among Nigerian youths, including undergraduates [6, 7, 20] as drinking joints and sports

betting shops are strategically located in and around schools. There is also increasing violence and suicides cases in many communities linked to intemperate and addictive gambling and many incidences of wife battery and familial violence [16, 17, 6].

Though moderate gambling may not significantly increase crime or bankruptcy but instead significantly increases per-capita spending, income, and employment [21, 22, 23]. The impacts of gambling can be group into two forms i.e., economic (increased government revenue, increased public services, moderate regulating costs and positive or negative impacts on gambling businesses) and social (increased gambling, crime, social inequality and increased negative attitude towards gambling) [12]. Given Nigeria's economy and the high rates of unemployment and poverty, it would be informative to investigate the similarities and differences in gambling impacts compared to developed western countries. For example, our respondents suggested that gambling improves the overall socio-economic health of the community and provides benefits at the individual and socio-economic levels. There is no doubt that gambling beyond personally affordable levels results in a multitude of harms at individual, familial and societal strata. These include mental health (affective disorders, substance abuse, stress-related symptoms), marital/family dysfunction (conflict, separation/divorce, domestic violence), finances (debts), employment and productivity (absenteeism, loss of employment), and legal (criminal offences) [6, 7, 16, 2, 17]. There may be cultural differences in terms of being more vulnerable to begin gambling and to develop problem or pathological gambling, and that familial/genetic, sociological, and individual factors play a role in the development and maintenance of problem gambling [2].

There is increased gambling among the women. Such a high gambling rate among women may be attributed to availability of gambling opportunities and the changing family system and values. The initial small percentage of female gambling may be as a result of the orientation of most African cultural settings where most women hold the "back seat" and are sometimes not allowed to participate in "manly activities". Women in Africa especially in rural settings are barred from some manly activities and gambling is not exceptional. Gambling by its nature is perceived as an unethical activity especially in strong traditional and religious communities. Given the general social perception that gambling is bad, some women may therefore shy away from gambling because of perceived isolation and victimization from society [24, 25, 1]. That the vast bulk of participants are in the under 40-age bracket is consistent with the high levels of unemployment among the women and youth who constitute approximately 75% of the entire Nigerian population. High levels of unemployment among Nigerians and the availability of cheap smart phones on the market explain the high proportion of participants gambling with a daily or twice weekly frequency.

Another major implication of the changing patterns of gambling is incessant quest for wealth due to high rate of unemployment, poverty and pathological gambling. This is because to be poor is to be powerless. It also means being despised and looked down upon. It means being treated unfairly. Most significantly, it means lacking things that translate into good physical and mental health. This has led to increased crime rate and other social vices yearly in Nigeria [26] and may continue because gamblers are advised to gamble responsibly by the gambling firms rather than to abstain. Nigeria presently ranks tops among African countries with the highest number of gamblers related to online gambling [27] and this may continue due to lack of policy to check the vices associated with gambling and Nigerians gullibility to gambling and lottery schemes. Most gambling and lottery schemes are not regulated and the firms are increasingly campaigning for moderate gambling among gamblers, while at the same time promote their product on and offline to the public who easily fall prey due to incessant quest for wealth and gullibility.

Conclusion

This paper has described a number of changes in the patterns of gambling Benue State with particular focus on the role of ICT. Among other things, evidence has been presented for the role of ICT in the changing patterns of gambling, factors responsible for the changes and implications. Intensive longitudinal field studies of economic, social and demographic changing patterns of gambling in a variety of cultural milieus are necessary, however, if we are to understand fully the implications of changing gambling conditions. The need for comparative research-albeit time consuming and inconvenient-requires particular emphasis. We need to know what strategies communities, government, households and individuals play and pursue following changes in gambling in their area in comparison to other areas. Such research is vital to a deeper knowledge of the changes in gambling, factors responsible and implications for developmental processes. Only then can we begin to appreciate the real contribution of ICT to our socio-economic development. ■



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