



The Future of Gaming in Africa: A Regulatory Perspective

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Abstract

The gaming industry in Africa is witnessing significant growth. The traditional views on gambling are equally positively mutating. The industry is no longer viewed as evil now; many Jurisdictions are now experiencing the many benefits that gambling is ushering. The improvement in technology and access to internet and technological gadgets is causing a spiral in gambling activities. The youthful age group is the major demographic that is undertaking those gambling activities. The study which used a judgmental and convenience sampling amassed responses from diversity of settings. The findings revealed that gambling is now so rampant as many players have a misapprehension that lives can be changed overnight through gambling. In view of the many responsible gambling challenges being faced it is critical to adopt digital solutions to bolster monitoring and supervision. The challenge with the boundarylessness of the industry however, also comes uncontrolled gambling harm, which is the reason why some people frown at gambling.

Keywords: Gaming, Regulatory Perspective, Future of Gaming, Gambling Harm.

Introduction

The gambling industry in Africa has witnessed substantial growth and evolution in recent years. Gone are the days when economies used to demonise and criminalize gambling activities. The view that gambling is evil are fast disappearing, and all and sundry are embracing the view that it is a lucrative industry (Glozah *et al*, 2023) ^[3]. Many economies are now riding on the shoulders of gambling. The industry is now immensely contributing to the lives of the citizenry in a great way. With this trend the future of the industry is bright.

Africa is undoubtedly experiencing, technological growth. This growth has ripple effects on the status and levels of gambling. More people are now able to access gambling. The geographical limitations going forward will no longer be an issue. Citizens, due to technology will now be able to access gambling games or place bets from wherever they are and at whatever time. The challenge with the boundarylessness of the industry however, also comes uncontrolled gambling harm, which is the reason why some people frown at gambling.

The major driver for gambling in Africa has been the high unemployment levels. (Syvertsen, 2024). Many players are no longer taking gambling as leisure but a livelihood. For those in employment, some are looking at gambling as an opportunity to supplement their incomes. According to Amutade (2018) ^[1], even for those in formal employment the urge to win something from gambling is high, so for this

reason many individuals are getting lost into excessive gambling with some getting to points of no recovery.

The Status of gambling, however, needs to be regulated by effective policies. The manner in which the legal framework is designed or crafted should be such that it balances individual interests and the national interests. The national interests in gambling is such that the laws and regulations promote safe gambling and player safety.

The focus for gambling today is to ensure that it is sustainable. The sustainability is a function of continued years of patronage. The players need to be protected from excessive harm so that they do not overdo it. To that end Ssewanyana and Bitanihirwe (2018) ^[7] acknowledge that while gambling industry is considered to be beneficial to economies through employment creation and taxes, it unfortunately has the other side, which is gambling addiction.

The excesses of everything are not encouraged, and gambling is no exception. Going into the future, the Regulators must adopt aggressive interventions that ensure that gamblers learn to exercise restraint. They should never allow their passion to override reason. Once this happens, they will inevitably find themselves in a vicious cycle of excessive gambling.

Excessive gambling has serious consequences. These include but not limited to:-

- Engaging in other addictions
- Gender based violence
- Theft of trust property
- Mental health

Governments in Africa have now discovered that gambling is a steady contributor of their revenue streams. This equally dovetails into the thinking of Thomas Jefferson, the Third President of the United States of America who asserted that gambling was a painless way of levying the willing. Those who patronize gambling sites are not coaxed. They do so through their volition.

Governments are also likely to face a health burden arising from gambling addiction. Resultantly, the operators who are the main beneficiaries of the gambling activities should be encouraged at law to provide rehabilitation to victims of gambling. It needs no contestation that the operators should shoulder the burden, borrowing from the '*Polluter pays Principle*' the operators should never look at this problem as a burden. Since they are the ones who would have contributed to the harm, through the provision of addiction foaming games.

Africa will have to adopt a dialoguing culture so that gambling as a public health concern is confronted head on. This will help to create a responsible gambling citizenry in Africa, with all components within the gambling ecosystem '*playing ball*'. This is what is required if gambling should be a sustainable industry going into the future. Engrained within all and sundry will be the culture of responsible gambling so as to curtail participating in gambling in a manner that is detriment to personal or household finances.

Going into the future, Africa has a role to promote the safety of the underage. These must not be exposed to gambling. Gambling should come later in life. Exposing the children early to the gambling activities will harm them. The young persons should be allowed to develop fully into responsible and focused citizens before they are exposed to gambling because of its addictive tendencies. The regulatory and enforcement capacities should tighten all the loose ends that may allow the underage to filter into the games prematurely. Although gambling is positioned as a legitimate recreational and leisure activity within the Sub-Saharan Africa, there is widespread recognition among healthcare professionals and policy makers that gambling has the capacity to become dysfunctional in a minority.

Online gambling in Africa has been driven by increasing digitization, expanding use of mobile devices and high internet penetration. The availability of payment options has also contributed to this increase. While online gambling is still not sanctioned within Zimbabwe, it is now widely embraced in many parts of Africa. This reality has created and continues to create a dynamic gambling landscape.

The effects of Covid-19 spurred individuals to other options of survival. The physical presence of a brick and motor betting outlets is no longer a priority now. This is the future of gambling in Africa. All players will no longer have to look for physical locations of gambling outlets.

Going forward the Regulations must ensure that interventions meant to deal with gambling addiction are effectively followed through. Without deliberate efforts a nation can grow to become a nation of gamblers (Amutabi, 2018) which is not a healthy situation. Players must constantly be encouraged not to engage in gambling overdrive. They have to know when to stop, which is a function of discipline. This will guarantee that family resources are not abused or misused in order to satisfy the gambling appetite. This crave for the game and possibility of winning should be on a 'tight leash'. If it is accorded a free reign the consequences may be severe/devastating.

Amutabi (2018) reports that the poor households actually gamble more than the affluent. This thus presents gambling as a necessity and not an undertaking for entertainment, leisure or fun. The players walk into a gaming facility determined to win. When they lose, they continue to play – chasing their losses. This is not good for the players, going forward, if Africa should have a sustainable industry.

Monitoring mechanisms that pick up the player frequency of play and amount played should be put in place. This will help to keep gambling within acceptable levels. It needs no contestation that within many jurisdictions, there is no doubt that gambling has established itself as a prominent or formidable force in the development agenda. The contributions coming with gambling are many and varied. They are all written on the wall, and going forward more employment is likely to be created, which will also translate into increased revenues.

For some, gambling is a serious disease that needs care. The future thus demands that such perceptions are addressed so that gambling is seen more from the positive standpoint.

That almost every person owns a cell phone complicates the contemplated measures to control excessive gambling. Going forward, the Regulation should have measures that sense the biodata of players so that the underage or excluded persons are identified. Online gambling is now being observed within many jurisdictions. This has the potential to kill the brick-and-mortar gambling operations. Going forward, Regulators should engage the ICT Regulators so that they monitor this space with a view of blocking and or penalising anyone who operates within such spaces without a licence.

Efforts should be pursued to encourage people to work, since gambling has the tendency of encouraging people to be lazy. They believe that they can turn their fortunes over night after placing a few bets. The future should encourage citizens to work and take gambling as a leisure activity. The players will also be spending more time playing online, since there is no control of access times.

The Regulators going into the future should guard against companies that bait citizens into excessive gambling through misleading adverts. All adverts allowed must not mislead unsuspecting citizens. They should never promise 'heaven on earth' while there is so much literature in the West, there is little literature in Africa. Going forward, if gambling in Africa should be sustainable, there is every reason to ensure that literature on the subject is generated and transmitted to all communities. Some of the behaviours by players are reflective of the lack of knowledge on gambling.

Methodology

This study reviewed various papers and legal frameworks on gambling. The papers reviewed had cross cutting themes, ranging from online gambling, gambling harm and the efficacy of legal frameworks.

The study also used case studies to gain insights into what has happened in various jurisdictions. Some regulators, players and policy makers were also interviewed on the status of the legal frameworks and the status of gambling within their gambling spaces. The judgemental and convenience sampling were used for this study to target the key persons who were sufficiently grounded on gambling and those easily accessible. The study also used secondary sources such as newspaper reports, other electronic media sources and listening to naturally occurring talk. Case studies were also used in this study.

A case study is an investigation of a particular or unique case or cases on a particular phenomenon. The approach seeks to answer key questions related to an identified phenomena or item of interest.

The study also upheld ethical considerations. The information received from policy makers, players and regulators was not twisted to drive towards a particular agenda. The identity of the respondents was also protected while the information shared was not shared with unauthorised persons and neither was it used for any other reason other than this study. The study did not employ unacceptable methods of securing data from respondents.

Status of Gambling in Africa

It needs no contestation that the youths in Africa constitute the active gamblers in Africa. Some of them are actually of school going age. Their engaging in gambling causes them to abandon school or work. This has serious consequences in their lives (Ahaibw, 2018).

However, what needs to be understood is the fact that issues to do with problem gambling do not only affect the LDCs. Research has it that many developed countries also experience gambling problems (Meyer, *et al*, 2009). In their submissions, Meyer *et al* (2009) say, the gamblers need help just as drug addicts do. In this vein Jacobs (2000) has actually documented the extent of addiction among adolescents in North America.

Gambling has seen to be growing. The extent is actually expected to even escalate to astronomical levels due to the growth in the internet users and availability of mobile phone technologies. The increase in the acceptance of sport, particularly soccer as the prime source of entertainment.

Findings

Data collected revealed that many people across all age groups are now attracted to gambling. This is largely so since everyone wants to have some money in their pockets. The respondents who were interviewed revealed that even those ones who the law does not allow to play have interest in playing. Respondent R01 had this to say:

Hey, who does not need money.

We all do hence the motivation to try my luck.

True, I will not always win, and neither will I always lose.

*What needs to be understood is that you win some day and
Also lose on some days.*

Asked further to explain how much an average gambler spends on gambling, Respondent R01 said,

*This ranges from a few dollars when times are difficult
To big moneys when stars are shining bright.*

Issues related to the misapprehension that one can change their lifestyle overnight are prevalent among the youth. For this reason, they place bets of whatever amount they can lay their hands upon. When they lose, they can then continue to place even more bets in the hope that 'the tables will turn.'

The research also revealed that going into the future, there is going to be more gambling from the rural setting just as it is in the urban setting due to availability of mobile phones and the internet services. More players are expected in the future to be accessing online gambling platforms. The control on who actually accesses these websites would be affected.

Consequently, the underage and problem gamblers will access the sites uncontrolled or undeterred.

The study also revealed that there is also a lot of baiting on unsuspecting players to hook them into excessive gambling through misleading adverts. The influencers on the adverts present an impression that winning is easy.

Recommendations

- There is need for more deliberate interventions to monitor and supervise all gambling activities.
- Engagement with ICT regulators will help to flash out unlicensed online operations.
- Artificial Intelligence needs to be embraced.
- Penalties for unlicensed operators should be prohibitive.
- Operators should be levied to sustain the rehabilitation of gambling harm victims.

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