

Communication Meanings of Online Slot Gambling

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ABSTRACT

The Meaning of Online Slot Gambling Communication (Cyberphenomenology Study of the Meaning of Online Slot Gambling in the Karangpawitan Garut Community) This study is motivated by the rise of online gambling phenomena, particularly slot games, which are increasingly popular due to the perceived quick gains. However, gambling is considered contrary to legal and religious norms and negatively affects the players. The aim of this research is to explore the meaning of communication in online slot gambling among the people of Karangpawitan, Garut. The study employs a qualitative approach using the cyberphenomenology method, which assumes that Page 2 Revisi Skripsi - Muhammad Dong Haerusalim motives and user experiences are shaped through interactions in online communities. The research focuses on interpreting users' motives and symbolic experiences in the context of social media and digital communication. The results indicate that the main motives are driven by social environment and peer influence. In terms of experience, online gambling causes psychological issues such as anxiety, fear, and antisocial behavior leading to social withdrawal. Keywords: Interpretation, Visualization, Cyberphenomenology

Keywords: Cyberphenomenology, online gambling, interpretation, visualization.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has brought significant changes to society, particularly in terms of easier access to information and entertainment. The internet has become a basic necessity, almost inseparable from the daily activities of modern communities. According to the We Are Social report in 2023, the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 213 million people, or approximately 77% of the total population of 276.4 million. This figure represents a 5.44% increase compared to the previous year. The highest annual growth in the number of internet users over the past decade occurred in January 2016, reaching 50.16%, while the slowest growth was recorded in January 2022, at only 0.5%. The report also found that, on average, Indonesians spend 7 hours and 42 minutes per day using the internet. Additionally, We Are Social reported that as of early 2023, there were still 63.51 million people across the country who remained unconnected to the internet (We Are Social, 2023).

Although the phenomenon of online gambling has been widely discussed in legal, economic, and psychological studies, research in the field of communication science, particularly examining the meaning and symbolic aspects through a digital phenomenological approach, remains limited. Most previous studies tend to view online gambling as a form of social deviance that must be eradicated without attempting to understand how perpetrators shape social reality and self-identity in the digital world.

For example, Suhada's (2021) study, "The Meaning of Online Gambling for Youth in Surabaya," uses a phenomenological approach to uncover the motivations and meanings of

online gambling among adolescents, but is limited to the context of a large city and its target audience. Meanwhile, Ahmad's (2019) study examines the factors and impacts of online gambling from a legal and criminological perspective, without addressing the aspects of online communication and symbolism. In other words, no research has specifically addressed the communication meaning of online slot gambling in the local context of rural or semi-urban communities like Karangpawitan.

This study aims to fill this gap. Using a cyberphenomenological approach, it positions online gamblers as subjects who shape and construct meaning from their activities through symbolic interactions in cyberspace. This also shows that the digital world is not an empty space, but a place where social relations, cultural meanings, and self-identity are continuously negotiated.

Academically, this research contributes to the development of digital communication studies, particularly in studies of deviant communication behavior mediated by technology. This study also provides an important addition to the discourse on symbolic communication, cyberculture, and communication among marginalized communities in online spaces.

Meanwhile, theoretically, this research broadens understanding of the application of digital phenomenology theory, or cyberphenomenology, developed by Bungin (2023), as a new analytical tool for understanding communication dynamics in the digital age. This approach allows researchers to understand the subjective meanings of actors in the context of online interactions that are no longer bound by conventional space and time. By using cyberphenomenology, this research not only dissects the behavioral structure of online gambling perpetrators but also explores the symbolic meanings inherent in these practices.

Furthermore, the results of this study are expected to provide a theoretical foundation for the development of digital communication studies that are more contextual, based on local culture, and relevant to changing times. This is important considering the characteristics of Indonesian society, which is culturally unique yet highly adaptable to technological developments.

According to data from the *Pusat Pelaporan dan Analisis Transaksi Keuangan* (PPATK), between 2017 and 2022, a total of 157 million online gambling transactions were recorded in Indonesia, with a total value reaching IDR 190 trillion. The Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs reported that West Java was identified as the province with the highest number of online gambling offenders, totaling 535,644 individuals with a transaction value of IDR 3.8 trillion. Furthermore, the Head of the Task Force under the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, Hadi Tjahjanto, stated that online gambling has spread across all layers of society, including children. The data shows that 2% of players are under 10 years old, 11% are aged 10–20, 13% are aged 21–30, and 34% are over 50 years old (Databoks, 2023).

The phenomenon of online gambling in Karangpawitan District, Garut, has become increasingly prominent. Groups of individuals, particularly adolescents and adults, are often seen engaging in online gambling activities until late at night. This behavior has led to a range of negative consequences, including emotional disturbances, economic losses, and social

degradation within the community. In fact, youth are expected to serve as agents of change in society, not as participants in activities that erode the potential of human resources.

Several previous studies have examined this phenomenon. Suhada (2017) explored the meaning of online gambling among adolescents in Surabaya, while Fanani and Tritasyah (2023) discussed the factors and impacts of the rising trend of online gambling among young people Saputra (2022) also highlighted the impact of online gambling on adolescents, outlining its social, material, and religious consequences. Meanwhile, Zurohman et al., (2016) examined the effects of the online gambling phenomenon on the weakening of social values among youth. However, both studies were limited to specific age groups and did not investigate the deeper meaning of this gambling activity within a broader community context. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the meaning of online slot gambling in the Karangpawitan community in a more comprehensive manner.

2. METHODS

The research method used is a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. This research was conducted in Karangpawitan District, Garut Regency, West Java. The data were obtained through direct observation, in-depth interviews with four informants who are online slot gambling players, and field documentation. The selection of informants was done purposively based on their experience as active online gamblers. In addition to the main informants, this research also involved three supporting sources from the local government, the police, and a religious figure to enrich the perspective and validate the data. The data analysis technique used in this research is the interactive model from Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Ridder, 2014). To ensure data validity, source triangulation and technique triangulation were used.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Motives Experienced by Online Slot Gambling Users

The first finding in this study indicates that informants were strongly driven to engage in online slot gambling due to a combination of economic needs and social influences within their environment. The four interviewed informants came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, yet exhibited nearly identical motivational patterns.

Informants 1, 2, and 3 interpreted their involvement in online gambling as a consequence of increasing economic pressure, particularly the difficulty of securing employment and the low income associated with informal jobs such as motorcycle taxi drivers and sales workers. They viewed online slot gambling as an alternative means of earning additional income through a method perceived as quick and practical. In their view, the game appeared promising because it required only a small initial deposit but offered the potential for large returns. In this case, online gambling was perceived as a “temporary escape” from the economic difficulties they faced on a daily basis.

In contrast, Informant 4 stated that his motivation for engaging in online gambling was more influenced by exposure to digital social environments. He explained that promotions circulated through instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and posts on social media

played a significant role in shaping his perception. The allure of big winnings from a small capital investment, consistently advertised by online gambling site administrators, constructed the belief that this activity was worth trying. The fact that most of his peers were also involved in such activities further reinforced his perception that the practice was “normal.”

The informants’ interpretations demonstrate that their motives do not exist in isolation but are shaped by both direct social experiences in their surroundings and digital interactions in media spaces. This aligns with the cyberphenomenology perspective, which suggests that the meaning and motives of human actions in digital contexts are formed through interactions occurring in cyberspace. In this case, digital social interactions, such as promotional messages, winning testimonials, and group discussions, serve as the foundation for the decision to participate.

A supporting source from the police, Brigadier Frederik Frendi, emphasized that many residents of Karangpawitan exposed to online gambling are driven by urgent economic needs and the perception that online gambling is a quick way to earn money. He also stressed that aggressive digital media exposure blurs the line between information, promotion, and solicitation, especially for individuals with low digital literacy.

Therefore, the motive behind online slot gambling involvement in Karangpawitan society is the result of a complex interaction between economic hardship and social influence, both in real life and in digital media spaces. The meaning attached to this activity is shaped not only by material needs but also by the narratives constructed within digital communities that justify and even normalize gambling behavior.

3.2 Experiences of Online Slot Gambling Users

The findings of this study reveal that the experiences of users engaging in online slot gambling affect not only financial aspects but also extend to psychological, social, and personal relational dimensions in their daily lives. The four informants described a range of experiences that reflect a dynamic interplay between hope, pressure, and consequences, both in social interactions and in their private spheres.

Informants 1 and 3 explained that one of the most dominant experiences was a sense of dependence and addiction to the game. They reported that the curiosity to win often pushed them to continue playing despite previous losses. Winning brought instant satisfaction and renewed motivation to play, while losing triggered feelings of disappointment, anxiety, and fear of further loss. Over time, this pattern led to emotional disturbances such as fear, restlessness, and even a loss of control over gambling habits.

Different experiences were shared by Informants 2 and 4, who emphasized that gambling had disrupted their social relationships. Both admitted to withdrawing from social interactions out of fear that others would discover their gambling habits. This led to feelings of low self-confidence, shame, and a tendency toward social withdrawal. Informant 2 stated that he became more sensitive to how others perceived him and grew increasingly suspicious of people around him. Informant 4 confessed that he began isolating himself due to discomfort in social situations.

In addition, the social impact extended to the domestic and professional spheres. Informant 3 admitted that his gambling activities led to conflict with his partner because household funds were often diverted to gambling deposits. He also became less motivated to work, believing that gambling offered quicker returns. Meanwhile, Informant 2 reported losing his job due to decreased focus and lack of responsibility caused by excessive gambling. However, Informant 1 claimed he was able to maintain a balance between work and gambling by strictly separating time for both. Nevertheless, he implicitly acknowledged the financial and emotional risks involved in his gambling behavior.

From an internal motivational perspective, some informants also viewed online gambling as an escape from everyday life stressors. Under economic pressure, gambling was seen as a way to "get money quickly" without waiting for the results of hard work. Although the outcomes were not always as expected, the possibility of hitting a big win generated false hopes that strengthened the desire to continue playing. This was further reinforced by social media promotion patterns that created illusions of success and manipulated risk perceptions.

A supporting source from the Garut Regency Office of Communication and Information, Ahmad Harsim, emphasized that advances in technology and social media have intensified public addiction to online gambling. He stated that individuals with low digital literacy are particularly vulnerable to persuasive ads and links promising large wins in a short time. Another supporting source, Ustad Masduki, noted that the negative impact of online gambling goes beyond material losses to include spiritual and moral damage. He highlighted that gambling habits can disrupt family relationships, erode religious faith, and alienate individuals from positive social values.

Overall, the experiences of online gambling users in Karangpawitan form a pattern that is largely destructive, both psychologically and socially. This practice disrupts emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, and even work productivity. From a cyberphenomenological perspective, these experiences cannot be separated from the role of cyberspace as a medium that shapes perception, meaning, and individual action. Gambling behavior is not merely the result of rational decision-making but rather a social construction built within a digital environment that continuously reinforces narratives of opportunity, luck, and instant solutions to life problems.

4. CONCLUSION

The research results show that the motives of online gambling users are strongly influenced by their social environment and interactions with friends, who encourage and encourage them to gamble. Other driving factors include economic needs, such as low income, high unemployment, high prices for basic necessities, and the difficulty of finding work. Promotion of online gambling on social media, which offers easy money with little capital, also contributes to people's addiction.

Experiences of online gambling users indicate psychological impacts such as anxiety, fear, and antisocial behavior due to fear of being caught. Online gambling can also lead to job loss due to lack of focus. Although gambling is addictive and has negative impacts, it is difficult

to eradicate due to websites that frequently change their appearance and infiltrate government agency addresses, as well as the continued prevalence of promotions on social media.

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