# Online gambling and broken lives

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Popular vlogger Becoming Filipino’s viral post lamenting how a jeepney driver blew his meager earnings on online gambling while plying his route has spread like wildfire, and in 48 hours from posting has been seen by 25 million Filipinos … and counting.

That Kyle Jennermann’s post has so far elicited 7,600 passionate comments and shared close to 87,000 times by social media users who share his feeling of trepidation clearly demonstrate how these concerns over the dangers of uncontrolled betting through online channels are widely shared and growing in intensity.

These concerns mainly centered on the ease at which online gambling—which first flourished during the pandemic—is accessed through mobile phones with seemingly too few or weak guardrails to keep out those who should not be anywhere near gambling floors, whether physical or digital, from minors to the inveterate gamblers.

Also deeply concerning is how Filipinos seem unaware of how addicting—and therefore dangerous— these online gambling “games” can be as they can easily suck players into potentially severe financial losses. And these are piled on top of how spiraling into pathological addiction will also impact their families and loved ones who have to suffer through the debilitating disease with them, leading to the possible irreparable breakdown in relationships and the family.

## Elusive jackpot

The temptations are everywhere, from the flashy billboards featuring all sorts of celebrities to the pop-up ads on mobile phones as well as digital payment gateways showcasing how easy it is to lure mobile phone users to make a seemingly innocent bet that can easily accumulate in the desire to hit the tantalizing but elusive jackpot.

Gambling has always been fraught with danger, as players can end up irrationally chasing the high from beating the house. But changing venues from the actual casinos to the ubiquitous mobile device magnifies the risks as the bets can be made anytime, anywhere and away from the watchful eyes of family and friends.

Indeed, mobile phones have become virtual casinos, making the poor especially vulnerable as they are lured by the promise to “play big and win big” and driven by quiet desperation and illusion that Lady Luck will be kind enough to transform the little that they have into a big payoff.

The increasing ease of access and popularity of these online games offered by some of the country’s largest gaming corporations explain why revenues from e-casinos have already surpassed the take from physical casinos, based on data from regulator Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. (Pagcor)

## Traditional casinos

Pagcor data showed that at the end of the first quarter of 2025, gross gaming revenues (GGR)—defined as the revenues that gambling companies generate from people placing bets—surged by 27.44 percent year-on-year to P104.12 billion. Pagcor chair and CEO Alejandro H. Tengco said the surge marked a “critical turning point” in the gaming sector as for the first time, revenues from electronic gaming surpassed the take from traditional casinos at the end of March. “The e-games and e-bingo segment made history by becoming the industry’s top revenue driver for the first time, contributing P51.39 billion or 49.36 percent of the total first quarter GGR,” said Tengco.

Tengco attributes the remarkable revenue growth to the change in consumer behavior, thus the shift toward “digital, on-demand gaming experiences, accelerated by greater access to mobile technology.” With such a windfall from online games and the continuing demand for more and a bigger online gaming experience, the government understandably will resist shutting down e-games.

## Responsible gaming

But the Marcos administration as well as the other stakeholders such as the digital payment gateways, casino operators, and Pagcor must do more to strengthen regulatory oversight so that online gaming will remain just forms of entertainment and not easy gateways to broken lives.

Common sense regulations include more heavy advertising on the part of Pagcor to inform the public about responsible gaming, that it does come with risks that can nevertheless be mitigated through greater awareness of the potential pitfalls. Digital payment platforms, meanwhile, can look for ways for the users to opt out of the mobile games to reduce exposure to these gaming apps. They can also consider removing these games from the platform altogether or transfer them to another app so that the platform can be limited to more traditional financial transactions such as bills payments or deposits and withdrawals.

At the very least, methods must be employed to prevent users from using credit offered by digital platforms to make their bets to limit the potential financial harm. Responsible gaming should not be a mere slogan; it is in the best interest of vulnerable Filipinos that the government takes this responsibility to heart and make it harder, not easier, to be lured into these digital forms of gambling disguised as “entertainment.”