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Social Media's Influence on Scatter Gambling at Cagayan State University (CSU) Sanchez Mira Campus

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the influence of social media on students' engagement in scatter gambling and its perceived impacts among Criminology students at Cagayan State University–Sanchez Mira Campus, Philippines, and used the findings as the basis for a proposed intervention program for the College of Criminal Justice Education (CCJE). It examined students lived experiences, interpretations of gambling-related social media content, meanings attached to participation, impacts of engagement, and insights regarding the risks, consequences, and normalization of scatter gambling. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed. Sixteen Criminology students who were active social media users and engaged in scatter gambling were selected through purposive sampling, four from each year level, and were interviewed using an expert-validated semi-structured interview guide. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. The findings revealed that social media served as the primary gateway to scatter gambling through advertisements, influencer promotions, livestreams, shared links, and repeated content, with peers reinforcing its persuasive effect. Participants interpreted such content as emphasizing winning, financial rewards, and excitement, and repeated exposure normalized scatter gambling as an ordinary online activity. Participation carried economic and recreational meanings but resulted in behavioral and psychological, financial, academic, and family-related consequences. Awareness of risks generally developed through financial losses, guilt, and moral reflection; however, awareness alone did not always prevent continued participation, as repeated exposure and the expectation of winning continued to reinforce gambling behavior. Based on the findings, Project S.T.O.P. (social media and Scatter Gambling Threat Orientation and Prevention) was proposed to promote awareness, critical evaluation of gambling content, responsible decision-making, financial literacy, family involvement, and early support for students.

Keywords: *social media, scatter gambling, online gambling, criminology students, phenomenology, gambling prevention*

INTRODUCTION

Gambling has evolved from ancient religious practices into a social and economic activity and, in the digital age, has become increasingly accessible through smartphones and social media. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube have grown beyond communication and entertainment to influence users' behaviors, lifestyles, and financial decisions, and they have also facilitated the spread of online gambling. Scatter gambling refers to online slot games that use scatter symbols to trigger bonuses, free spins, or jackpots, making them highly appealing to players. Although online gambling may legally operate

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under licenses issued by the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR), social media has also enabled unregulated operators to promote gambling widely through advertisements, influencer endorsements, livestreams, winning testimonials, and referral links.

Globally, the World Health Organization (2024) recognizes gambling as a public health concern associated with mental health problems, family conflict, and financial hardship, and the *Lancet Public Health* Commission on gambling has drawn attention to the scale of gambling-related harm and the vulnerability created by the growth of online gambling (Wardle et al., 2024). Addressing these harms supports Sustainable Development Goal 3 on health and well-being and Goal 16 on the protection of vulnerable groups. In the Philippines, online gambling has become a growing concern among youth; between 0.77% and 57.5% of adolescents aged 11 to 21 show some degree of problematic online gambling behavior, and an estimated 0.89% to 1% of this age group experience online gambling disorder (Llego, 2025). Legislative inquiries into youth exposure to gambling promotions on social media (Gatchalian, 2025) and platform action against influencers promoting illegal online gambling (Philippine Star, 2025) further show the national salience of the issue.

The legal context heightens this concern. Presidential Decree No. 1868, as amended by Republic Act No. 9487, prohibits persons below 21 years old, including students enrolled in schools and universities, from participating in gambling or entering gaming establishments, while Republic Act No. 10175, the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012, highlights the responsibility to prevent the dissemination of unlawful online materials. However, gambling-related content is now widely accessible online, allowing students with smartphones to learn how and where to gamble without entering a gaming establishment and creating a legal and social vulnerability that existing restrictions find difficult to address.

In Cagayan, gambling has long been embedded in local culture through card games, cockfighting, and fiesta games, and social media has expanded this exposure by making gambling-related content more visible and easily shared. At Cagayan State University (CSU)–Sanchez Mira Campus, reported cases within the College of Criminal Justice Education (CCJE) showed that some students became deeply involved in scatter gambling, resulting in financial losses, debt, and difficulty meeting school expenses, while many regarded it as a normal leisure activity. This is particularly concerning among Criminology students who, as future law enforcers, are expected to uphold discipline and respect for the law.

Despite extensive research on gambling-related harm, most studies examine general gambling disorders or online gambling as a whole rather than scatter gambling as a distinct activity, and few explain how specific social media mechanisms such as influencer promotions, livestreams, and peer sharing shape students' participation, particularly in developing countries and state universities (Di Censo et al., 2023; Sy et al., 2025). No documented campus-based study had examined this phenomenon among Criminology students at CSU–Sanchez Mira Campus. This study therefore explored (1) how students describe their lived experiences with social media in relation to scatter gambling; (2) how they interpret social media content that promotes or normalizes scatter gambling; (3) the meanings they attach to their participation as influenced by social media; (4) how they describe the impacts of engaging in social media-influenced scatter gambling; (5) the insights or realizations they share regarding its risks, consequences, and normalization; and (6) the program that may be proposed based on the findings. The findings are intended to inform students, parents and guardians, school administrators and guidance counselors, policymakers, and future researchers concerned with youth gambling and digital media.

Literature Review

Social Media as a Channel of Gambling Exposure

Social media platforms play a major role in the proliferation of online gambling by making gambling-related content accessible at any time. Monarch (2024) described platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube as marketing tools through which influencer marketing reaches targeted audiences, while Majewski (2024) highlighted that social media increases the visibility of online gambling and that its marketing targets vulnerable sectors such as youth and at-risk gamblers. Technological modernization and increased internet

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accessibility are expected to continue driving the global expansion of online gambling, which is closely linked to its integration with social media (SkyQuest, n.d.).

Research on young people's exposure confirms the central role of these platforms. Di Censo et al. (2023) found that Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok are now major sources of exposure to gambling advertising, with interactive formats such as livestreams and influencer endorsements blurring the line between entertainment and promotion. Labrador et al. (2021) reported that promotional strategies, including celebrity endorsements, bonus offers, and sponsorships, increase the appeal of gambling and normalize it among adolescents and young adults, while James and Bradley (2021) emphasized that social media has become both a promotional and participatory space where operators and users interact.

In the Philippines, the widespread promotion of gambling on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube has prompted legislative investigation because of the lack of effective policies protecting students and minors (Gatchalian, 2025), and PAGCOR has warned of the use of social media for illegal online gambling (ABS-CBN News, 2025). Industry sources similarly describe social media as a major channel for gambling promotion through engaging advertisements, influencer endorsements, and viral content that portray gambling as entertaining and financially rewarding (7Search PPC Content Team, 2025; Casino Compare, 2025).

Gambling Content, Normalization, and Reward Cues

The nature of gambling content encountered online contributes to its acceptance. Drawing on cultivation theory, Vinney (2024) explained that frequent viewing of media content progressively normalizes gambling, making it appear acceptable or appealing. Noble et al. (2022) found that Australian secondary school students' exposure to online gambling advertising was associated with gambling participation and at-risk gambling, and that peer gambling was also strongly associated with these behaviors. Rossi and Nairn (2022) similarly emphasized that social media gambling advertisements are particularly appealing to young audiences because of their engaging formats.

Exposure also operates through psychological reward mechanisms. Repeated exposure to gambling cues such as advertisements and social media posts may stimulate reward anticipation and strengthen gambling habits (Ivanova, 2024), and compulsive gambling is recognized as a behavioral addiction (Mayo Clinic, 2022). Interactivity intensifies these effects: Moravec et al. (2025) reported that engaging with gambling-related posts by liking, sharing, or commenting was associated with greater gambling severity, while Lee and Lee (2025) applied the Pathways Model to show that accessibility and exposure to online gambling content can contribute to problematic gambling through cognitive distortions such as overconfidence and the illusion of control.

Student Engagement in Online Gambling

Gambling is common among students and varies in frequency, financial involvement, and time spent. Starček (2025) reported that 40.9% of Slovenian high school students had gambled for money in the previous year, with early exposure predicting greater gambling intensity and lower academic achievement, while Wardle and Tipping (2023) found that engagement with online casino products was associated with higher problem gambling severity among young adults in Britain. Promotional incentives and loyalty rewards have also been shown to encourage players to wager more money (Challet-Bouju et al., 2020).

Local studies describe gambling engagement as progressive. Sy et al. (2025), in a phenomenological study of student online gamblers in Davao City, found that peers, family, and media shaped gambling behavior and described a progression from initiation to a chasing stage in which students increase their gambling to recover losses. Galap et al. (2025) identified social pressure and the easy accessibility of online gambling platforms as factors contributing to Criminal Justice Education students' participation, while Duria (2025) found that entertainment, the thrill of winning, and financial gain were key motivations reinforced by social media influencers.

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Perceived Effects of Gambling on Students

Gambling has been associated with significant financial, psychological, behavioral, and academic consequences. Amoah-Nuamah et al. (2022) found that university students involved in online gambling experienced depression, sleep difficulties, impaired classroom concentration, and declining academic performance. Birches Health (n.d.) reported that approximately 75% of college students have gambled, with about 6% experiencing gambling-related problems, and Sohn (2023) explained that gambling activates the brain's reward system in ways similar to substance use, making young people particularly vulnerable.

Philippine evidence points to similar harms. Pelew (2025) found a significant association between problem gambling and anxiety among Filipino adults engaged in online gambling, and Galap et al. (2025) reported that gambling negatively affected the well-being and interpersonal relationships of criminal justice students. Media reports have documented debt, financial instability, emotional distress, guilt, and strained family relationships among online gamblers (Jaucian & Lumba, 2025), and lawmakers have warned that gambling places additional financial burdens on students that may affect their academic progress (Ager, 2025).

Beyond individual harms, illegal online gambling platforms have been reported to employ psychological manipulation techniques that encourage compulsive play (AGBRIEF, 2024). Collectively, these studies show that the consequences of gambling extend beyond financial loss to students' psychological well-being, academic performance, and social functioning.

Motivations for Student Gambling

Students gamble for interconnected financial, psychological, social, and recreational reasons. Neighbors et al. (2002) identified money, excitement, and social interaction as primary motivations among college students, together with boredom, curiosity, competition, stress relief, conformity to peers, and recovering previous losses. Amoah-Nuamah et al. (2022) likewise found that university students were motivated by the opportunity to earn quick money, the anonymity of online platforms, and the perception of gambling as entertainment.

In the Philippine context, a survey reported that many Filipinos prefer regulation rather than prohibition of online gambling, reflecting high engagement (Bae, 2025), and online gambling has been described in local media as a form of recreation that may nonetheless progress to compulsive behavior without proper limits (Dumlao-Abadilla, 2025). The convenience of digital payment systems, the promise of quick financial rewards, and the cultural acceptance of gambling further encourage participation (Gatchalian, 2025; Jaucian & Lumba, 2025).

Approaches to Minimizing Gambling-Related Harm

The literature recommends a comprehensive approach to reducing gambling-related harm among students. Moravec et al. (2025) emphasized digital literacy programs that help users recognize the risks of gambling-related online content, while Siricharoen (2024) advocated interdisciplinary educational strategies integrating media literacy, critical thinking, and values education to empower university students against online gambling propaganda. Rossi and Nairn (2022) called for stricter regulation of gambling advertising on social media because of its strong influence on young audiences.

Family and institutional support are also important. León-Jariego et al. (2020) found that perceived family support moderated the effect of gambling advertising on adolescent gambling behavior, and local commentators have stressed the roles of schools, parents, counseling services, and coordinated government and platform action in preventing gambling harm (ABS-CBN News, 2025; Ager, 2025; Philippine Star, 2025). At the policy level, Lamoste and Prasetyawati (2021) examined the relationship of consumer attitudes and government regulations with online gambling behavior in the Philippines, highlighting the role of regulation in shaping responsible behavior.

Overall, the reviewed literature shows that social media increases the visibility, accessibility, and acceptability of online gambling among young people and that gambling produces financial, psychological, academic, and social harms. However, most studies examine online gambling in general rather than scatter

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gambling, rely on quantitative designs, and give limited attention to how students themselves experience and interpret social media-driven gambling in Philippine state universities, which is the gap this study addressed.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which posits that behavior is acquired through observation, imitation, and modeling in a social environment through the processes of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, and that behaviors perceived as rewarding or socially accepted are more likely to be imitated. In the context of this study, students may become aware of scatter gambling through advertisements, influencer promotions, peer-shared content, and livestreams; repeated exposure captures their attention, accessible platforms enable reproduction of observed behavior, and perceived rewards such as financial gain, entertainment, and social recognition reinforce motivation.

The study was further supported by Griffiths' (2005) components model of addiction, which explains how repeated reinforcement and rewarding experiences can develop into habitual and compulsive behavior. Intermittent rewards, such as occasional wins, strengthen the desire to continue gambling despite repeated losses and other negative consequences, which helps explain why some students persist in scatter gambling even after recognizing its harmful effects.

Together, these theories provide a framework for understanding students' engagement in scatter gambling: Social Learning Theory explains how gambling behaviors are acquired through observation and social influence, while Behavioral Addiction Theory explains how repeated reinforcement sustains participation over time. Both perspectives guided the exploration of how social media exposure shapes students' perceptions, participation, and continued engagement, and informed the design of preventive strategies.

Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by an Input–Process–Output (IPO) paradigm within a phenomenological design, as shown in Figure 1. The inputs consisted of the theoretical foundations (Social Learning Theory and Behavioral Addiction Theory), the pertinent legal frameworks (Presidential Decree No. 1868 as amended by Republic Act No. 9487, and Republic Act No. 10175), the students lived experiences, interpretations, meanings, impacts, and realizations regarding scatter gambling as shaped by social media, and the interview guide used in the study.

The process involved the collection, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative data through in-depth interviews and the preparation of the proposed output. The output was a proposed program to address the risks, consequences, and normalization of scatter gambling shaped by social media exposure, grounded in the participants shared meanings and insights, with a feedback loop linking the output back to the inputs and process.

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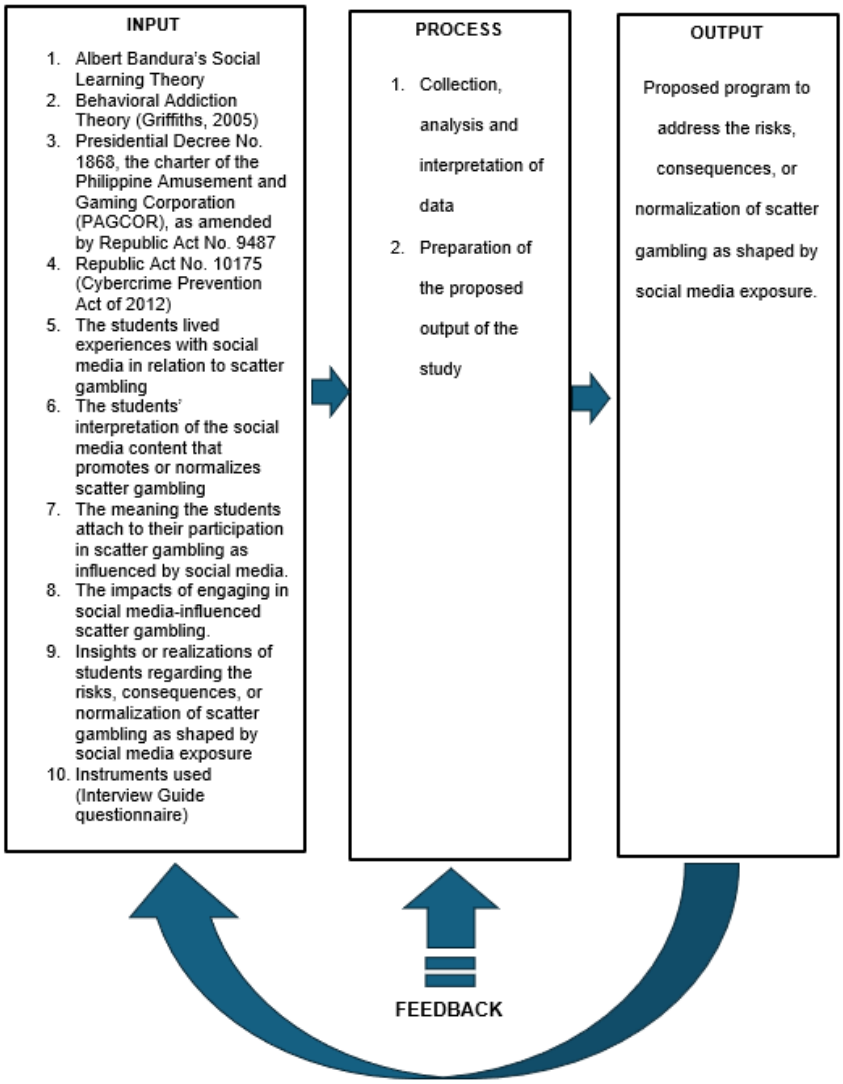


Figure 1. *Conceptual Paradigm of the Study*

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a phenomenological design to explore the influence of social media on scatter gambling among Criminology students. The design was appropriate because the study sought to understand and describe the lived experiences, interpretations, and meanings that students attached to social media exposure related to scatter gambling, allowing participants to express their personal experiences, perspectives, and reflections in depth.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Cagayan State University–Sanchez Mira Campus in the Municipality of Sanchez Mira, Cagayan Valley, Philippines, one of the nine satellite campuses of Cagayan State University, which offers the Bachelor of Science in Criminology under the CCJE. The campus was selected because of the observed

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presence of scatter gambling among Criminology students, which had affected their financial and academic performance, and because the researcher's affiliation with the institution facilitated coordination with campus authorities and access to participants.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The population consisted of 590 Criminology students enrolled in the CCJE during the second semester of School Year 2025–2026. Through purposive sampling, 16 students were selected, four from each year level (Table 1). Inclusion criteria required that participants be officially enrolled in the CCJE of CSU–Sanchez Mira Campus, be of legal age, be active users of at least one social media platform, and be actively engaged in scatter gambling. Criminology students from other campuses or institutions, students from other colleges, students not involved in scatter gambling, and minors were excluded.

Table 1. *Participants of the Study*

Year Level	Number of Participants
First Year	4
Second Year	4
Third Year	4
Fourth Year	4
Total	16

Note. Participants were selected through purposive sampling from 590 Criminology students enrolled in the second semester of School Year 2025–2026.

Research Instrument

The primary data-gathering tool was a researcher-designed semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions on students lived experiences with social media in relation to scatter gambling, their interpretations of social media content that promotes or normalizes it, the meanings they attach to their participation, the perceived impacts of their engagement, and their insights regarding its risks and consequences. The contents of the guide were informed by Philippine laws and policies on student protection and gambling. To ensure validity, the guide was reviewed by a panel composed of the CCJE Dean, who holds a PhD in Criminology; the officer-in-charge of the Sanchez Mira police station; and a school guidance counselor, who evaluated the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the questions with the study objectives. Their feedback was incorporated in refining the guide.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was secured through letters to the Campus Executive Officer of CSU–Sanchez Mira and the CCJE Dean. Selected Criminology students with experience in scatter gambling were invited to participate, and interviews were conducted personally by the researcher according to participants' availability. During the interviews, the researcher clarified questions when necessary and encouraged participants to describe their experiences, perceptions, and insights in detail. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and were transcribed and organized for analysis. Responses given in Ilocano or Filipino are presented with English translations. No surveys, key informant interviews, or focus group discussions were conducted.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts; (2) generation of initial codes for significant statements on social media exposure, participation, and perceived effects; (3) searching for themes by grouping related codes; (4) reviewing themes to ensure that they represented the data and research objectives; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report with rich descriptions and direct quotations. The resulting themes served as the basis for the proposed program.

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Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical standards to protect participants' rights, privacy, and well-being. An informed consent form explaining the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of participation was discussed with and verbally explained to participants, who were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Only students of legal age participated. Interviews were audio-recorded only with consent, responses were kept confidential and used solely for the study, and recordings and transcripts were securely stored. Participants are identified by codes (P1 to P16), and interviews were scheduled so as not to disrupt academic activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis yielded twelve themes organized according to the first five research questions, as summarized in Table 2. Each theme is discussed below with representative participant accounts.

Table 2. *Summary of Themes by Research Question*

Research Question	Focus	Themes
1. Lived experiences with social media	Initial exposure to scatter gambling	Social media as the primary gateway to scatter gambling; Peer- and platform-mediated initial introduction to scatter gambling
	Development of interest or curiosity	Social media content stimulated curiosity and initial interest; Peer influence reinforced social media's persuasive effect
2. Interpretation of social media content	Types of content commonly seen	Selected winning narratives shaped positive perceptions; Influencer-driven promotional and referral strategies encouraged participation
	How content made gambling appear acceptable	Perceived financial rewards and excitement made scatter gambling appealing; Repeated exposure normalized scatter gambling as an ordinary online activity
3. Meanings attached to participation	Personal explanation of involvement	Scatter gambling as a financial supplement; Scatter gambling as leisure and entertainment
	Beliefs about winning, luck, or success	Social media reinforced the belief that scatter gambling leads to financial success; Winning experiences reinforced continued participation
4. Impacts of engagement	Behavior, emotions, finances, daily activities	Behavioral and psychological consequences; Financial strain and economic consequences
	Relationships, studies, or work	Academic disruption due to gambling engagement; Strained family relationships and secrecy
5. Insights and realizations	Recognition of risks and consequences	Financial losses triggered awareness of gambling risks; Feelings of guilt and moral reflection fostered risk awareness
	Change in views over time	Gambling experiences transformed positive perceptions into awareness of harm; Repeated exposure reinforced continued gambling despite awareness of the risks

Note. Themes were derived through thematic analysis of interviews with 16 participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

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Lived Experiences with Social Media in Relation to Scatter Gambling

Social media as the primary gateway to scatter gambling

Participants' initial awareness of scatter gambling did not arise from intentionally searching for gambling platforms but from routine use of social media. While scrolling through Facebook, watching Reels, viewing livestreams, browsing TikTok, or following influencers, they unexpectedly encountered gambling content. P5 recalled, "I first became familiar with scatter gambling through Facebook Live. I was just scrolling through Facebook when I came across someone livestreaming while playing scatter," and P3 shared, "I only tried it because I kept seeing many posts on Facebook and TikTok… because of the vloggers I followed, who promoted scatter gambling." This finding is consistent with Di Censo et al. (2023), who identified Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok as major sources of young people's exposure to gambling advertisements, livestreams, and influencer promotions, and with Labrador et al. (2021) and Majewski (2024), who emphasized that social media and advertising increase young people's familiarity with gambling.

Peer- and platform-mediated initial introduction

For other participants, initial introduction resulted from the combined influence of social media and interpersonal relationships. P6 explained, "I saw my friends winning while they were playing at their house, and that attracted me. I asked them to send me the link," while P12 noted that after repeatedly seeing winners on Facebook, "when the link was shared with me through Messenger, I registered after about a week of watching. It was actually my cousin who shared the link." Social media created awareness, whereas peers and relatives provided social validation and direct access. This supports Sy et al. (2025), who found that friends, family, and media shape students' gambling behavior, and Gatchalian (2025), who noted that students may be introduced to gambling when friends share links.

Social media content stimulated curiosity and initial interest

Repeated encounters with videos showcasing large winnings, influencer endorsements, bonuses, and cashback offer gradually turned curiosity into a desire to try. P1 stated, "Almost everything I saw on Facebook showed people winning, so I also tried it, hoping that I would win as well," and P8 recalled promotions offering "a free ₱500 bonus" on the first deposit and cashback. These accounts align with Challet-Bouju et al. (2020), who found that bonuses and incentives encourage gambling, and with Social Learning Theory, in which observed rewards motivate imitation (Bandura, 1977).

Peer influence reinforced social media's persuasive effect

Classmates and friends strengthened interest by validating what participants saw online through shared links, demonstrations, and personal winning experiences. P2 shared, "I only watched my classmates play, and I saw that their small bets, such as ₱5, could win large amounts… so I asked my classmate to send me the link." This is consistent with Noble et al. (2022), who found that peer gambling was strongly associated with adolescents' gambling, and with Neighbors et al. (2002), who identified social connection and conformity as motivations for college students' gambling.

Interpretation of Social Media Content that Promotes or Normalizes Scatter Gambling

Selected winning narratives shaped positive perceptions

Participants observed that the content they encountered primarily portrayed large winnings while giving little attention to losses. P1 stated, "Those advertisements make gambling appealing to people because they show large winnings," and P2 observed, "The vloggers promote scatter gambling by showing only its positive results; therefore, I see it as intentional advertising." This selective emphasis is consistent with Rossi and Nairn (2022), who noted the strong appeal of gambling advertising to young people, and with Vinney (2024), who explained that frequent exposure makes gambling appear acceptable and appealing.

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Influencer-driven promotional and referral strategies encouraged participation

Participants recognized many posts as deliberate marketing by influencers and content creators who earned from referral links. P3 explained, "The vloggers I followed used to post funny content… Eventually, they became promoters of scatter gambling. The vloggers promote it by sharing links because they receive commissions," and P6 added, "If you endorse a link, you can be paid a large amount of money for promoting it." This supports Monarch (2024) and Majewski (2024) on influencer marketing and targeted promotion, and Di Censo et al. (2023), who found that influencer endorsements and livestreams blur entertainment and promotion.

Perceived financial rewards and excitement made scatter gambling appealing

Content emphasizing quick returns and the thrill of winning fostered the belief that winning was attainable. P2 explained simply, "Because I saw ₱5 turn into ₱5,000." This finding corresponds with Neighbors et al. (2002) and Amoah-Nuamah et al. (2022), who identified money, excitement, and entertainment as students' motivations for gambling, and with Duria (2025), who identified the thrill of winning and financial gain as motivations among Filipino gamblers.

Repeated exposure normalized scatter gambling as an ordinary online activity

Continuous exposure made scatter gambling appear common and acceptable, diminishing perceptions of it as prohibited. P7 described it as "just normal, like other online games, but it can be addictive," while P8 remarked, "Many people are already playing scatter gambling, and it seems as though it is no longer illegal." This normalization effect is consistent with Vinney (2024), Noble et al. (2022), and Duria (2025), although some participants maintained critical views despite repeated exposure.

Meanings Attached to Participation in Scatter Gambling

Scatter gambling as a financial supplement

Many participants attached an economic meaning to their participation, viewing it as a means of augmenting allowances, supporting family members, or financing small businesses. P2 stated, "My engagement in scatter gambling is mainly about money, particularly to have additional allowance," and P3 shared, "I use the money I earn for my e-loading business." This reflects Amoah-Nuamah et al. (2022) on the perceived ease of making quick money, but also aligns with warnings that gambling may lead to debt and financial instability (Jaucian & Lumba, 2025).

Scatter gambling as leisure and entertainment

Participants also described gambling as a way to relieve stress, pass time, and enjoy themselves with friends. P6 said, "I only play sometimes, especially when I have nothing to do in the afternoon, when I am bored, or when I am with my friends," while P4 admitted, "I play scatter gambling to relieve stress, but I also become stressed when I lose." These accounts are consistent with Neighbors et al. (2002) and Duria (2025) on boredom, entertainment, and excitement as motivations, although perceiving gambling as harmless entertainment may minimize awareness of its consequences.

Social media reinforced the belief that scatter gambling leads to financial success

The consistent portrayal of winners strengthened participants' expectation that gambling was a realistic way to multiply money. P1 stated, "Almost everything I see on Facebook shows people winning. If you take a big risk, you can also win a large amount," and P5 reflected, "I play because I think, 'What if I win…?' I did not think about the possible consequence of becoming addicted to it." This is consistent with Lee and Lee (2025), who found that repeated exposure contributes to cognitive distortions such as overconfidence and the illusion of control.

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Winning experiences reinforced continued participation

Personal wins strengthened motivation to continue despite later losses. P10 recalled, "My biggest win was ₱60,000, but I eventually lost it as well," while P14 explained, "There is excitement that makes you really want to continue. When you lose, you feel like you want to recover your losses." This pattern reflects Griffiths' (2005) account of intermittent reinforcement and the chasing stage described by Sy et al. (2025).

Impacts of Engaging in Social Media-Influenced Scatter Gambling

Behavioral and psychological consequences

Participants described difficulty stopping, persistent urges, sleep disruption, and guilt. P1 shared, "I stay up late playing, sometimes until 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. When I win, I want to win even more, and when I lose, I feel the urge to recover my losses," and P7 said, "Instead of studying, I end up playing scatter gambling and staying up late." These findings correspond with Amoah-Nuamah et al. (2022), who reported sleep difficulties and impaired concentration among student gamblers, and with Griffiths' (2005) model, in which both winning and losing reinforce continued engagement.

Financial strain and economic consequences

Rather than providing additional income as initially perceived, gambling depleted allowances, savings, and earnings and led to borrowing. P5 explained, "Before I started gambling, I could save around ₱500 each week, but now I no longer can because I spend it all on gambling," while P9 shared, "There were even times when I had to borrow ₱500 or ₱1,000 from my classmates because of my gambling," and P8 reported going hungry after losses. These outcomes are consistent with reports of debt and financial instability among online gamblers (Jaucian & Lumba, 2025) and with the chasing behavior described by Sy et al. (2025).

Academic disruption

Gambling consumed time and attention intended for studying, completing requirements, and preparing for examinations. P4 admitted, "I am unable to review my lessons because I spend my time playing scatter gambling. I play during vacant periods at school and even during class by using the autoplay feature." This aligns with Starček (2025), who linked gambling involvement with lower academic achievement, and with Amoah-Nuamah et al. (2022), who reported impaired classroom concentration among student gamblers.

Strained family relationships and secrecy

Many participants concealed their gambling from parents, which weakened trust and communication. P15 explained, "My parents do not know that I gamble because I only play at night. They think that I am simply playing online games," and P9 stated, "I hide my gambling from my parents, which has affected my relationship with my family." This finding underscores the protective role of family communication and support identified by León-Jariego et al. (2020).

Insights and Realizations Regarding Risks, Consequences, and Normalization

Financial losses triggered awareness of gambling risks

Participants generally recognized the risks of scatter gambling only after substantial losses. P1 recalled, "I realized that gambling was not good the first time I spent all of my allowance on it," and P10 shared, "I realized that I had become addicted because I kept trying to recover my losses even when I no longer had money to repay my loans." This is consistent with Jaucian and Lumba (2025) and Ager (2025), who documented the depletion of resources intended for education and essential needs, and highlights the importance of preventive education before losses occur.

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Feelings of guilt and moral reflection fostered risk awareness

Some participants developed awareness by evaluating gambling against their values, religious beliefs, and responsibilities. P3 stated, "I also want to stop because gambling is prohibited by our religion. I feel guilty whenever I engage in it," and P4 added, "I also feel guilty because the money I gambled came from my parents." This supports Jaucian and Lumba (2025), who reported guilt and helplessness among individuals with gambling problems.

Gambling experiences transformed positive perceptions into awareness of harm

Continued participation led many to regret their involvement and adopt a more critical view. P13 reflected, "You should not do everything you see online because it may lead to harm. I regret clicking on that link," and P5 noted that "my losses outweigh [my winnings] … I believe the school should do something about it." This is consistent with Duria (2025), who reported stress, frustration, and financial difficulty among gamblers despite initial excitement.

Repeated exposure reinforced continued gambling despite awareness of the risks

Awareness alone was often insufficient to stop participation. P4 admitted, "I believe I have reached the level of addiction because I gamble several times a day. To me, scatter gambling is just like any other game on my phone," and P16 reflected, "I probably would not have become a gambler if I had not repeatedly seen gambling content on Facebook. It had a significant influence on me." This finding aligns with Vinney (2024), Ivanova (2024), and Lee and Lee (2025) on how repeated exposure sustains normalization, reward anticipation, and cognitive distortions, and underscores the need for interventions that address not only knowledge of risks but also the persistent influence of online exposure.

Proposed Program: Project S.T.O.P.

Based on the findings, Project S.T.O.P. (social media and Scatter Gambling Threat Orientation and Prevention) was proposed for the CCJE. Its objective is to strengthen the awareness, critical thinking, self-regulation, financial responsibility, and psychosocial resilience of Criminology students against social media influences that may contribute to scatter gambling, while providing preventive education, healthy alternatives, and appropriate support services. Target participants include Criminology students, parents and guardians, faculty members, guidance personnel, student leaders, and partner agencies. The program matrix is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Program Matrix of Project S.T.O.P. (social media and Scatter Gambling Threat Orientation and Prevention)*

Objective	Activities	Persons Involved	Estimated Budget	Time Frame	Expected Outcome
Increase students' awareness of how social media content, influencers, and peer influence may contribute to scatter gambling.	Seminars and digital literacy workshops on gambling content, influencer promotions, peer influence, winning narratives, and the risks of scatter gambling.	CCJE students and faculty, Guidance Office, PNP resource speakers, ICT personnel	₱3,000 (snacks, certificates, materials)	July 3, 2026	Increased awareness and improved ability to critically evaluate gambling-related content on social media.
Strengthen students' self-discipline and responsible decision-making.	Values formation and self-discipline activities on responsible choices, personal values, ethical behavior, and resisting continued gambling despite awareness of its risks.	Criminology students and faculty, guidance counselors, values education resource persons	₱2,000 (snacks, certificates, materials)	August 7, 2026 and March 5, 2027	Strengthened self-discipline, ethical awareness, and responsible decision-making.

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Objective	Activities	Persons Involved	Estimated Budget	Time Frame	Expected Outcome
Promote financial responsibility and awareness of gambling-related financial risks.	Financial literacy and budgeting seminars on gambling losses, money management, savings, and proper use of allowances.	Criminology students, financial literacy resource persons, faculty members	₱2,000 (snacks, certificates, materials)	September 25, 2026 and March 26, 2027	Improved financial awareness, budgeting skills, and responsible management of personal resources.
Strengthen family awareness and communication regarding gambling-related concerns.	Parent orientation and awareness forums on social media exposure, gambling risks, secrecy, family communication, and supportive approaches.	Parents and guardians, Guidance Office, faculty members	₱1,000 (miscellaneous, information materials)	July 10, 2026	Increased parental awareness and improved communication and support between parents and students.
Promote healthy coping mechanisms and meaningful alternatives to gambling.	Sports, recreational, stress-management, and peer-support activities as healthy alternatives for managing boredom, stress, and emotional difficulties.	Criminology students, student organizations, College Student Council, Guidance Office	₱1,000 (miscellaneous, activity materials)	Every last Friday of the month	Increased access to healthy coping strategies and positive alternatives to gambling.
Provide early support and intervention for students experiencing gambling-related concerns.	Counseling, referral, and support services for gambling-related financial, psychological, behavioral, academic, or family concerns.	Guidance Office, CCJE faculty, Student Affairs and Services	No additional budget required	As needed	Improved access to counseling, referral, and appropriate support services.

Note. Implementing offices include the CCJE, Guidance Office, Office of Student Affairs and Services, College Student Council and student organizations, Parents and Guardians Association, relevant university offices, and appropriate government and community partners.

Each component responds directly to the themes identified: digital literacy addresses social media as a gateway and the normalization of gambling; values formation addresses continued gambling despite awareness of risk; financial literacy addresses gambling as a perceived financial supplement and its resulting financial strain; parent forums address secrecy and strained family relationships; recreational and peer-support activities address gambling as leisure and stress relief; and counseling and referral address behavioral and psychological consequences. This multi-component approach is consistent with recommendations for digital literacy, interdisciplinary education, and family and institutional support (León-Jariego et al., 2020; Moravec et al., 2025; Siricharoen, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Social media plays a significant role in Criminology students' involvement in scatter gambling by providing continuous exposure to advertisements, influencer promotions, shared links, and peer-related content that facilitates progression from awareness to participation. Students' perceptions are shaped by how gambling is presented online as entertaining, rewarding, and normal, and they attach economic, recreational, and success-oriented meanings to their participation. Social media-influenced scatter gambling has multidimensional consequences that extend beyond financial loss to students' behavioral and psychological well-being, academic responsibilities, and family relationships.

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Awareness of gambling-related risks often develops only through personal experiences of financial loss, guilt, and moral reflection, and such awareness alone may not prevent continued participation when repeated exposure and the expectation of winning continue to reinforce gambling. The normalization of scatter gambling through social media may therefore delay recognition of its risks. As a qualitative study of 16 participants in one campus, the findings are context-specific; nonetheless, they provide a grounded basis for Project S.T.O.P. as a campus-based intervention framework that responds to social media influence, normalization, financial and psychological risks, family concerns, and the need for early prevention and support.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The College of Criminal Justice Education may adopt Project S.T.O.P. as an awareness and prevention program to address the influence of social media on scatter gambling among Criminology students.
2. The administration of CSU–Sanchez Mira Campus may strengthen awareness campaigns and seminars on the harmful effects of social media-influenced scatter gambling among students.
3. Faculty members and guidance counselors may conduct regular orientations, counseling sessions, and appropriate monitoring activities to identify and assist students vulnerable to gambling-related behaviors and consequences.
4. The campus may strengthen digital literacy and responsible social media use programs to help students critically evaluate scatter gambling-related online content and resist harmful online influences.
5. Future researchers may conduct related studies involving larger populations, other academic programs or campuses, and quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to further examine the influence of social media on scatter gambling and to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programs.

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