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17

Social casino apps and digital media practices: New paradigms of consumption

César Albarrán-Torres

With the Slots Journey application you'll experience the full scale of uplifted emotions just like a real casino player but at the same time, you won't risk losing a single cent!

– SLOTS JOURNEY, PROMOTIONAL SLOGAN

You are inside a movie theatre and the film has just begun. You feel a vibration in your pocket and a red light flashes on your smartphone. Something is happening. You may be missing out. Watching the latest Hollywood blockbuster, you feel three more vibrations coming from your mobile device. This makes you anxious: it could be an important work-related email, an SMS from a close friend, this weekend's sports scores (you placed a US\$30 bet on an AFL match using Sportsbet's app) or a major news story. It takes considerable willpower not to check your device.

After watching the film, you nervously fumble through your pocket and take out your smartphone. You read the list of notifications, produced by *Zynga Poker*, the app you use to occasionally play poker with some of your Facebook friends. You do not wager with real money, but the excitement is nevertheless present; make-believe gambling also helps you 'kill time' and experience a sense of vertigo.

The successive messages read: '1M Daily Lotto! Win up to 1M in chips!', 'It's your Lucky Day!' and 'Claim \$5,000 free chips!'. You get home and before going to bed you grab your iPhone and play a couple of hands with a 'Poker Buddy' who lives halfway across the world.

This simple vignette (in the vein of McCarthy and Wright 2004) helps illustrate a fundamental shift in the potential place that gambling (*Sportsbet*) and gambling-like practices (*Zynga Poker*) have through the widespread use of social casino apps via mobile devices. These apps are accessed mainly through smartphones, but also tablets and hybrids, all of which could now be considered what Greenfield presciently termed 'everyware', objects with which we interact daily, as 'sites of processing and mediation' (2006, 1).

The continuous availability of digital gambling beyond desktop computers is made possible by the use of apps, which Goggin argues are a 'new cultural platform' that reveals how the 'intersection of mobile technologies and ubiquitous computing is already resulting in profound socio-cultural ramifications' (2011, 149). The consumption of gambling-like products through mobile devices and its associated digital media practices, which I will discuss in this chapter, are some of these 'socio-cultural ramifications'. Social casino apps are a gateway into understanding cultural meanings around risk, money and play, as well as the social relations enacted through mobile media.

Social casino apps simulate gambling and wagering activities such as poker (*Fresh Deck Poker*), slots (*Slotomania*, *Slots Journey*, *DoubleDown*), sports betting (*Betting Billionaire*; see Figure 17.2) and casual wagering among friends (*BragBet*, *YouBetMe*), but with no real money at stake, although some apps encourage the user to pay for bonuses, heightened gaming experiences and credits (Gainsbury et al. 2014), similar to casual games such as *Candy Crush*. In this chapter I offer a brief description and theorization of the consumption of social casino apps and the ways in which it related to digital media practices such as searching and sustaining a public presence (Couldry 2012). By simulating real wagering and establishing procedural connections to social networking sites (SNSs) and video games, social casino apps aid in the normalization of gambling-like procedures, bringing them closer to the realm of casual social gaming. This has wide implications for what we traditionally understand as gambling – a ritual demarcated from the everyday that necessarily involves chance and a payout.

I mobilize the argument that consumption in social casino apps is the acquisition of a gambling or gambling-like experience that may or may not involve the chance to win real money or tangible goods. In this transaction, the user pays with money and/or labour and/or time and/or access to his/her digital social networks and contacts. This economic and political dynamic has

ample political implications. As happens with other types of digital networked media, social casino apps 'capture their users in intensive and extensive networks of enjoyment, production, and surveillance' (Dean 2013, 4).

Albarrán-Torres and Goggin (2014) have termed the use of social casino apps as mobile social gambling, an evolving set of techno-social assemblages and a 'new form of media and cultural practice that fuses gambling (a longstanding social practice), social networking (in both the older pre-Internet and newer online forms) and "social gaming" (the new social media form, popular especially on Facebook), together with the affordances of mobile media devices, networks, applications, and touchscreens' (Albarrán-Torres and Goggin 2014). Mobile social gambling is part of the social gaming sector, which according to research firm ThinkEquity will reach US\$14.6 billion of annual revenue by 2015 (GamblingData 2012). Even though there are no stakes per se in social casino apps, they potentially aid in the expansion and promotion of gambling activities, which poses a set of theoretical and regulatory challenges.

Social casino apps bring gambling-like products closer to the realm of casual social games, which are widely played media all around the world. Social games are a distinct video game genre as they generally operate in social media settings and typically use virtual currencies (Schneider 2012, 711). Titles such as *Candy Crush* (King), *Angry Birds* (Rovio Entertainment), *Words With Friends* (Zynga), *Farmville* (Zynga), *Draw Something* (Omgpop) and *Mafia Wars* (Zynga) are already an integral part of the media consumption habits of millions of mobile media users (Hjorth 2011).¹

As they allow gaming to bleed into other spheres of life, mobile social games have also generated moral panics, with media reports referring to an intensive and potentially addictive use (see, e.g., Dockterman 2013). News stories such as 'This is what Candy Crush does to your brain' establish a direct relation between the intensive quality of their gameplay and the demanding nature of poker machines (Piotrowski 2013). Not surprisingly, the consumption of social casino apps has sparked similar preoccupations, because gambling is generally associated with compulsive consumption, particularly when mediated through ubiquitous screens (as is the case with Electronic Gaming Machines or slots; see Schüll 2012).

Influential video game theorist Ian Bogost claims that as a new platform, gaming apps provide an experience that 'is designed to offer players a potentially toxic brew of guilty pleasure spiced with a kind of extortion' and that by doing so 'they profit by stoking addiction' (Bogost 2014). Bogost's appraisal of gaming apps echoes Schüll's (2012) work on land-based slot machines in Las Vegas in its recognition of a calculated effort to generate and sustain addictive consumption.

What is (was) gambling?

Social casino apps make us reconsider what we think of as ‘gambling’ as well as the practices entailed in its consumption. Gambling is often seen as the epitome of high-intensity and indulgent capitalist consumption (Bjerg 2009; 2011), as it implies a blatantly ludic and for some senseless circulation of money. However, ‘consumption’ is difficult to define when it comes to contemporary forms of mobile social gambling (what I call gamble–play media), an increasingly networked and social experience that escapes previous temporal and spatial constrictions (limited availability of gambling venues, the enclosed spaces of casinos and so on). The difficulty of encapsulating the notion of ‘gambling’ begins when trying to determine what exactly is being consumed through social casino apps, as the user cannot win money and often plays for free.

What the actual good or service in mobile social gambling is should escape the definitions and conceptualizations that have permeated academic and legal notions of gambling. Reith describes gambling as ‘the commoditization of chance’ (1999, 89) and as ‘a ritual which is strictly demarcated from the everyday world around it and within which chance is deliberately courted as a mechanism which governs a redistribution of wealth among players as well as a commercial interest or “house”’ (1999, 1). Harvie Ferguson points out that gambling is ‘simply the exchange of money itself; exchange liberated from the viscous medium of objects’ and that in this process ‘money gains the dignity of Being’ (cited in Reith 1999, 89). Mobile media allows gambling-like activities to enter the flows of the everyday. Social casino apps restructure the redistribution of wealth in quite a different way. Here, ‘wealth’ might not involve money, but a player’s time and social clout. Mobile social gambling challenges traditional definitions of gambling, as ‘gain’ is not always monetary and chance depends on an algorithmic entity known as the random number generator (RNG). These contradictions have sprouted a set of strong reactions from lawmakers, particularly in Australia.

Moral panics: Gam(bl)ing apps

Social casino app manufacturers strive to redefine how and where the consumption of gambling products is carried out and the ways in which it permeates the everyday. They do so by offering platforms (mainly Android, iOS and Facebook apps) in which gamblers/players can participate, mingle and merge their gambling and gaming networks with other spheres, such as their Facebook (see Figure 17.1) and Twitter communities, all of which are easily accessible through mobile devices.

FIGURE 17.1 Screenshot of the social casino app Big Fish Casino. The player is constantly invited to connect via his/her Facebook account. Image captured on the author's Android device on 11 December 2013 at 5:22 a.m.

Social casino apps have appropriated the affordances of social networking, video games and social gaming, a trio of ample and expansive media assemblages. They do so by establishing what DeLanda calls 'relations of exteriority' with other forms of digital media. In relations of exteriority, 'a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different' (2006, 10–11). Mobile social gambling products open up spaces for the insertion of 'component parts' of diverse techno-social assemblages. For example, the play-money version of *PokerStars* provides a platform in which gamblers can converse, sustain an identity and group around common interests or

characteristics such as gender or language. This echoes the affordances of SNSs (such as the possibility to create a profile and keep a record of your actions) and the morphology of what danah boyd calls 'networked publics', which are 'simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice' (2011, 39).

The structural affordances of 'networked publics' allow social casino companies to encourage communication among gamblers. By doing this, they enhance the inherent social aspects of some gambling practices such as poker and add socializing elements to activities that are relatively individual, such as slot machine playing (see Livingstone 2005). For example, the app *SlotsCrown*, developed by PixaLim Studios and launched in 2013 for Apple's iOS7, 'features Facebook login to connect and play slots with friends via a fun leaderboard that shows your top friends and the current King of *SlotsCrown* in the throne. The Leaderboard uses player's Facebook profile photos to truly personalize the slots gameplay experience' (PixaLim Studios 2013). The Leaderboard, which reminds us of other mobile gaming platforms that incite competition among friends, such as Apple's Game Center, adds an element of competitiveness to an activity that is otherwise a somewhat isolating affair (playing slot machines).

It is important to theorize the consumption practices in digital gambling assemblages because this will allow us to understand the formation of new subjects that are quite different from the passive consumers generally conceptualized by gambling studies (vulnerable populations and problem gamblers prey to games where chance prevails over skill, such as roulette, slot machines, lottery, lotto or bingo, as opposed to poker, whist or backgammon). The theorization of social casino apps will identify new risks and inform academic discussion and policy-making, as new practices emerge and gambling technologies are designed to cater for digital media consumers, some of who have not experienced pre-digital betting.

Policies that try to limit the consumption of particular forms of low-stakes gambling and gaming, such as slot machines and now online platforms and apps, are shaped by the notion that these products are a sort of 'gateway drug' into addiction. The popularity of slot apps, for example, has prompted anti-gambling advocacy groups to speak out (Willingham 2013).

The South Australian government launched the Gambling Is No Game (nogame.com.au) campaign in December 2013. This campaign aimed at warning parents and educators about the risks involving simulated gambling. The official website states: 'An emerging area of serious concern is games that simulate gambling. Increasingly, these games can be played on social media sites, video games that link to the Internet and mobile applications. It's a growing business in a largely unregulated market' (Gambling is No Game

2013). This campaign also seeks to 'add MA15+ classification to games that contain simulated gambling', which would mean that 'it would be illegal to sell games with slot machine or card game mechanics to those under 15' (Byrne 2013). As part of the campaign, billboards were placed in public spaces. These billboards showed a young girl with a tablet device surrounded by gambling items and the slogan 'GAMBLING starts with GAMES'.

The Interactive Games & Entertainment Association (IGEA), which represents the interests of the video game industry, launched a formal complaint. IGEA claimed that the billboard misrepresented the relationship between video games and gambling, and that there is no definite evidence to support the notion that video games lead to problem gambling (IGEA 2013). In parallel, multiple memes were generated ridiculing the billboard (Serrels 2013). Online commentators were equally harsh, with Hopewell, for example, writing that 'if you are an adult gamer, it will probably see you spit out your corn flakes' as 'it demonises games and gamers alike, especially those who encourage their kids to play games' (Hopewell 2013). The billboards were eventually taken down after these efforts (Scurry 2013).

The interlocking of gambling and social media uses, platforms and practices, as well as the strategies through which gambling products are promoted in informational networks, has caused concern in local governments, as is the case in the state of Victoria, Australia. In 2013, the Victorian government launched a satirical ad campaign titled KidBet (<http://kidbet.com.au/>) under the slogan 'They should never go together' (KidBet 2013). In a video ad we can see a young boy promoting a fake sports betting app, in an attempt to emphasize the threat of gambling addiction to savvy but vulnerable young digital media users (Stravopoulos 2013). In the KidBet website, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation states that: 'Community concern is growing over the impact gambling is having on young people, particularly through sport, advertising, online games and social media' (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation 2013). The CEO of the foundation, Serge Sard, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation at the launch of the campaign that the ad 'is deliberately provocative because there appears to be a misplaced complacency around the issue' (Stravopoulos 2013). He also stated: 'There's saturation of free game apps that encourages kids to gamble . . . Social media promotes media activities, and gambling simulation games, that essentially teach kids how to gamble' (Stravopoulos 2013).

This campaign is a reaction to a new, and as yet misunderstood, form of consumption of gambling informed by digital media practices. Similarly, in November 2013 the Premier of South Australia, Jay Weatherill, called for new regulations on gambling-like apps. He sought the cooperation of Apple to 'make it an offence to supply gambling apps or games to minors' (AAP 2013).

He was forceful in saying: 'I won't stand back and watch a new generation of gambling addicts emerge' (AAP 2013).

Consuming social casino apps: Risking 'nothing' everyday

In the past forty years our academic understanding of consumers has developed much further than the oversimplifying notions revealed by the Gambling Is No Game and KidBet campaigns. It is important for gambling researchers to keep up with this more nuanced understanding of consumption. As Arvidsson recalls, in the 1970s the Cultural Studies tradition established that consumers 'are not "passive dopes" of mass culture, but that they act, resist and exercise creativity in their consumer practices' (2006, 17). Consumers generate and transform meanings while actively putting these meanings into circulation. He points out that for contemporary thinkers, consumption and the cultures that surround it are the point of entry for dissecting contemporary social relations and current forms of capitalism.

For the past twenty years researchers of consumer cultures, amalgamated under the rubric of Consumer Culture Theory or CCT, have explored 'the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistoric frame of globalization and market capitalism' (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 869). Gamblers have generally been grouped as a single demographic, with studies that target particular groups (by age, socioeconomic status or geographical location) focusing on the dangers that each category faces in terms of potential addiction. Lay and casual gamblers (and gamers), and the dynamics of their consumption, are rarely addressed in academic or journalistic discourse. This gap has wide implications for how social casino app users are understood as subjects and consumers (some researchers of gambling cultures have identified this gap; see Nicoll 2007).

The product mix that delineates his or her own personal or collective taste is certainly a meaning-creating activity that defines how the individual presents herself. Individuals express their identities through choosing what goods to buy or which services to hire or, in the case of mobile media, the mix of apps that run in their device.

Andreas Reckwitz's (2002) definition of practice (cited also by Couldry 2012, 40) is useful in understanding how social media practices, norms and affordances permeate consumption and interaction in social casino apps. Reckwitz (2002) argues that a practice:

. . . is a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (2002, 249)

Mobile social gambling involves bodily activities (clicking, excreting hormones while anxiously waiting for outcomes, carrying a mobile device around), mental activities (calculating the next move in a hand of online poker or the odds in an online slot machine), 'things' such as platforms and devices, a 'background knowledge' on the rules of the game and the nuances of each specific platform and a spectrum of states of emotion that ranges from hope to expectation to perhaps disappointment.

There is a set of *routinized* behaviours that permeate consumption in social casino apps. These behaviours are not only related to the procedures involved in gambling, but also to the creation, grooming and management of a social network related to these activities, as is evident in the opening vignette of this chapter.

In his recent book *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice* (2012), sociologist Nick Couldry tries to answer a sometimes overlooked question: What do people *do* with digital media? This question is key in understanding social casino apps and what users 'consume' when they use them.

Informed by Reckwitz, Couldry (2012) proposes an understanding of media based on practices, on finding patterns in what people *do* with diverse tools for communicative interaction. His focus is on the articulation 'of our media-related practices with other practices into larger combinations (our daily "routine", "schedule", "lifestyle")', as it 'is part of whatever order we find and rely upon in the world' (2012, 33).

There is a need for us to understand how *what we do* with media coexists with our actions in other realms (the domestic, the professional, the religious), other assemblages that are shaped by everyday practice, 'routinized behaviours' such as consumption. This broad generalization calls for an equally wide definition of media. Couldry considers 'media' to be not just traditional media such as radio, press, film or television, but 'all other media platforms, mobile or fixed, through which content of any sort – both institutional and individually produced – is now accessible or transmissible' (2012, 35).

Social casino apps and the techno-social formations that are generated around them by users and companies (forums, social media outlets, satellite smartphone apps and so on) certainly fall under this definition of media. Interactive images, player profiles, institutional and fan-made videos,

FIGURE 17.2 Screenshot from the Facebook app Betting Millionaire. The user is encouraged to share their achievements with their Facebook network of friends. Image captured through the author's Facebook account on 15 December 2013 at 2:29 p.m.

gambling software: all these are accessible and transmissible content. Couldry identifies different practices that online users perform when engaging with contemporary media forms such as Facebook, Twitter, online forums and, I argue, social casino apps. Among these practices we can include: searching and search-enabling, showing and being shown, *presencing*, archiving and commentary.

Besides playing, social casino app users engage in these practices by (1) choosing among a myriad of options in Apple's App Store, Google's Play Store and Facebook's apps catalogue (searching); (2) allowing their profile to be searchable for other players (search-enabling); (3) showing and being shown via their social media profiles; (4) creating and grooming an identity (presencing or sustaining a public presence); (5) archiving their gambling history; and (6) by providing commentary about the game dynamics in social media outlets related to the apps (Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and so on).

This logic provides for an interesting negotiation between user agency driven by enjoyment and industry calculation motivated by profit. Although

gamblers/gamers are autonomous agents that can and do engage in creative forms of play, their behaviours are also ultimately limited by what the digital environment allows them to do. In gambling-like platforms there is a monetary stake (even if it is 'fake'), so there is a strict set of rules and restrictions imposed by the house.

In digital gambling and other forms of mediated entertainment, *consumption is action in the form of routinized behaviour*, but not quite the submissive reception of content by the 'passive dopes of mass culture'. Consumption is an endeavour in which consumer goods and cultural products are used as a resource in the formulation of identities and forms of sociability. Nevertheless, virtual environments such as social casino apps, are 'collectively produced realities, but this collective production process is in turn guided, restrained and empowered, in short, governed, by the restrictions and possibilities offered by the environment' (Arvidsson 2006, 108; see also Boellstorff 2008). There is a degree of freedom of action and consumption, but that openness is coerced by the boundaries set by the service provider – ultimately a capitalist entity whose ultimate *raison d'être* is to generate profit by whatever means possible that could be understood in terms of what Jodi Dean calls 'communicative capitalism', an economic system which relies 'on the exploitation of communications' rather than on the exploitation of labour (Dean 2013, 4).

This sense of apparent freedom and benefit in social casino apps is exacerbated by one of the fundamental dynamics of online casinos and social casino apps: bonuses. Clarke (2003) uses casinos to exemplify contemporary forms of capitalist consumption, in which perks accompany the acquisition of a good or service. This has a relevant relationship to the dynamics and logic on which mobile social gambling platforms are constructed. Clarke argues: 'Evidently, the customers perceive benefits from the nominally free drinks their gambling subsidizes: they get both "free" drinks *and* the chance to win fabulous amounts of money' (2003, 11). He adds: 'What is most significant about this system, however, is the way in which it seems capable of conjuring up an increased "total amount of benefit" – for both consumers and casino operators – simply by diverting the system of supplying drinks through the supplementary detour of games of chance' (2003, 11). Being able to conjure an increased amount of 'total happiness' is, in his view, why 'the casino system provides a near-perfect analogy for the consumer society' (2003, 12).

In online casinos, for instance, these perks include loyalty and new membership bonuses, as well as exclusive content and entry into tournaments. In most desktop and mobile apps that simulate wagering, connecting to social networks, socializing with friends through games and the joy of 'winning' are included in these perks. Social casino apps provide entertainment *and* the chance to interconnect your gaming and social networks. Digital media

practices related to social casino apps are directly connected to the provision of these perks, which include bonuses and gifts (see Figure 17.3).

These digital media dynamics acquire a new political and economic dimension given the recent efforts from the gambling industry towards including real-life benefits derived from wins in virtual gambling, which pushes the limits of gaming into the realm of gambling even further. The app *myVegas*, developed by PlayStudios, allows players to cash-in their winnings in selected establishments in Las Vegas for prizes that range from free meals to tickets for shows or swimming with dolphins (Chapman, 2013). Partners include Wolfgang Puck and House of Blues, as well as The Mirage, Mandalay Bay and the Excalibur casinos. The gameplay itself is simple and repetitive, but the allure may lay in the fact that '[in] theory, the game is free to play forever, and players could fund an entire holiday in Las Vegas just from pressing that green button' (Street 2013).

Some of the slots available in *myVegas* are extensions of the casino and its partners' branding strategies, with titles such as *New York New York*, *Excalibur* and *Mirage*, all adorned with cartoonish designs that echo popular social gaming titles such as *Farmville* or *Angry Birds*. The app constantly invites you to add Facebook friends to the player roster, frequently offering bonus credits.

The MGM casino, one of the biggest in the Las Vegas Strip, originally launched MyVegas in June 2012. Initially, users could play with virtual money

FIGURE 17.3 Screenshot from the Facebook app Game House. The user is encouraged to connect to Facebook in order to access perks such as bonuses and gifts. Image captured on the author's Android device on 10 December 2013 at 5:18 p.m.

to win virtual prizes alone. These corporate strategies are an effort of the traditional gambling industry to prolong the punter's relationship with the casino and to bring the casino into the online social life of gamblers/gamers . . . literally making them carry the casino around in their pockets.

Prior to the initial launch of *myVegas* in 2012, one year before the cash-in capabilities were activated, Tom Mikulich, MGM Resorts Senior Vice President of Business Development, said: 'Through myVegas, we can tighten our emotional connection between our brands and our customers . . . That's what we mean by convergence' (cited in Stutz 2012). This perpetual 'emotional connection' is associated with values such as commitment and belonging and allows the casino to be a ubiquitous presence in the gambler's life, further expanding the reach of its loyalty programs, facilitating 'perks' on a continuous, perhaps everyday basis.

The conversion of in-play credits to real-life benefits significantly challenges preconceptions of what social casino apps entitles the player to. Other online casinos are following suit. CaesarsCasino.com is one of the first casinos launched after the US state of New Jersey legalized online gambling in 2013. As you play roulette, video poker, blackjack or slots online, you accumulate rewards that can be used in land-based venues: 'Play the games you love and reap the rewards at nearly 40 resorts and casinos around the world' (CaesarsCasino.com 2013).

Conclusion: When social gaming and gambling markets collide

The paradigms of consumption of social casino apps, framed by more general digital media practices, have caught the attention of both the social gaming and the traditional gambling industries. In its *Australia Gaming and Leisure* report (2013), Nomura Equity Research identified that the social gambling market far exceeds 'real money' online gambling in terms of number of users, 170 million users per month versus 50 million users per month. However, there is also a mammoth discrepancy in terms of revenue: social gambling generates US\$2 billion per month, while online gambling produces US\$36 billion. Nomura Equity Research foresees an inevitable convergence between real money and social gambling, as 'ongoing industry consolidation is blurring traditional distinctions between land and online-based gambling operators and social game developers' (Nomura Equity Research 2013, 18).

This consolidation has involved key industry players such as IGT, which bought Double Down Interactive; WMS, which launched Lucky Cruise Social

Casino, a social casino that operates on Facebook; and EGM giant Aristocrat, which acquired Product Madness, a top five operator of slot games on Facebook, with more than 500,000 daily active users. In a further crossover between the entertainment and gambling industries Endemol, a Dutch media company best known for developing successful TV concepts such as *Big Brother* and *Deal or No Deal* has invested over US\$10 million in social casino company Plumbee (Barraclough 2013). Endemol intends to brand social casino apps with its successful transnational concepts. Aristocrat's CEO, Jamie Odell, explains in regards to social casino apps:

If you take the player base, which through Facebook is clearly millions, and the games take in, let's say, 30 cents per player per day, the math becomes quite easy. I would be very disappointed if it's not a major profit stream for us—I'm talking tens of millions of dollars in the next two-to-three years, and one of our largest streams of profit longer term. (Cited in Kelly 2013)

In similar acquisitions that point to the integration of the gaming, gambling and entertainment industries, social casino developers such as Bee Cave Games have moved into real money gambling, adding elements of multiplayer gaming proper to other media forms, such as multiplayer online role-playing games (RPGs). As Grubb explains: 'When players enter a slots game, it will match them with up to four other live gamers. The success of those people will then spill over into the other player's game, so that everyone feels more connected' (Grubb 2013).

This calculated effort by the gambling and gaming industries is testament of the generation of new markets and consumption practices, and of a palpable investment in new technologies that accommodate the digital media practices that users (both gamblers and non-gamblers) are habituated to.

Social casino apps establish new communicative configurations among gamblers/gamers and between users and companies. What users look for is not a 'big win' but fun; what companies rely upon is not compulsive play, but compulsive communication.

Notes

- 1 Natasha Dow Schüll writes about the interrelation between the rise of digital media and gambling: 'The growing consumer familiarity with screen-based interaction that accompanied the rise of the personal computer and electronically-mediated entertainment such as video games further facilitated the cultural normalization of screen gambling' (Schüll 2012, 5).

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