Digital Footprints of Gambling Addiction: A 21-Year Infodemiological Analysis Using Google Trends

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Abstract. Gambling addiction is a significant public health concern that affects individuals, families, and society at large. Although help-seeking is often hindered by shame and stigma, online platforms provide an important alternative by offering anonymous and accessible support. In this context, online search trends emerge as a valuable data source reflecting public interest in and demand for information on the subject. The aim of this study is to evaluate the digital footprints of gambling addiction through Google Trends. This retrospective infodemiological study was conducted on June 19, 2025 using the Turkish keyword "kumar bağımlılığı" on Google Trends. The filters applied were: Turkey as the region, the period between 2004 and 2025, all categories, and Google Web Search. Data were analyzed under the themes of temporal trends and interest patterns, and search queries were clustered by the researchers. Findings revealed that public interest in gambling addiction increased markedly after 2017. Search trends were categorized into four groups: Basic information seeking, treatment seeking, self-help seeking, and professional support seeking. Among these, "sanal kumar" was the most frequently searched term for general information, "kumar bağımlılığı tedavisi" for treatment seeking, "kumar nasıl bırakılır" for self-help seeking, and "AMATEM for professional support seeking. The results indicate that societal interest in gambling addiction has increased and that searches related to treatment have become increasingly prominent. Public health policies should take these digital trends into account, while future research should investigate the reliability and comprehensibility of online information using diverse study designs.

Keywords: Gambling, Addiction, Google Trends, Infodemiological, Digital.

Introduction

Gambling is defined as wagering money or a valuable asset on the outcome of games or activities whose results are generally based on chance or partly on skill, with the aim of obtaining a certain reward (Adigun, 2020). Gambling takes various forms, such as table games, slot machines, and online gambling (Williams & Williams, 2025). In particular, types of gambling offered through online platforms have made access to gambling easier than ever before (Ashley & Boehlke, 2012). Although gambling may seem like a relaxing form of entertainment for some individuals, for others this behavior may develop into an addiction (Ashley & Boehlke, 2012). Accordingly, the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-11) and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V) define gambling addiction as the persistent continuation of gambling behavior despite significant distress or impairment in functional areas of the individual's life (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2018).

Gambling addiction is a problem whose prevalence is increasing globally (Akat, 2025). According to data from the World Health Organization, it affects approximately 1.2% of the adult population worldwide (World Health Organization, 2024). Another study reports that the rate of gambling addiction among adults is 1.41%, with 15.8% of these adults engaging in online gambling (Tran et al., 2024). In Türkiye, studies on the subject are mostly based on clinical data and small-sample research (Vayısoğlu et al., 2019). The rate of online gambling among adults is reported as 2.22% (Ünal et al., 2022), while among adolescents it ranges between 2.9% (Aricak, 2019) and 12.4% (Aricak, 2019). Moreover, it has been noted that the age of onset for gambling has dropped to as low as nine years (Yeşilay, 2023b). This situation is an indicator that gambling addiction has reached alarming proportions.

Gambling addiction is a serious problem that can negatively affect not only the gambler but also their family and the society in which they live (Wardle et al., 2021). At the individual level, it leads to financial losses and increased health problems (Muggleton et al., 2021), as well as job loss (Muggleton & Stewart, 2021). Furthermore, it can cause suicidal ideation (Wardle et al., 2021; World Health Organization, 2022), and negatively impact psychological well-being and social relationships (Temitope, 2019). Over time, these adverse effects extend to family relationships and can even increase the risk of domestic violence (Wardle et al., 2021). The negative consequences that begin with the individual gradually spread to the societal level, creating a significant public burden (Public Health England, 2023). In fact, in managing this problem, Türkiye has introduced a policy-level change and brought forward a state-based intervention program (the *National Strategy Document and Action Plan for Combating Behavioral Addictions*) for the years 2024–2028 (T.C. Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2024).

Gambling addiction is a disorder that can have serious consequences in individuals' lives (Muggleton et al., 2021; World Health Organization,

2022). This condition may lead people to seek help; however, intense feelings of shame and fear of stigma can significantly hinder the process of obtaining help (Lloyd et al., 2025). In this context, online platforms that offer anonymity and rapid access emerge as an important alternative in the help-seeking process (Loy et al., 2019; Rodda et al., 2017). Globally (StatCounter, 2025a) and in Türkiye (StatCounter, 2025b), the most frequently used online platform for obtaining information is Google (StatCounter, 2025a). Examining individuals' search behaviors on Google provides an important opportunity to reveal the areas where they need support and to develop effective strategies to address these needs. The tool that enables the evaluation of searches conducted on Google is Google Trends (GT).

GT has become a valuable tool for infodemiological research by allowing the analysis of the public's interest in specific health topics over time and across geographical locations (World Health Organization, 2020). In line with the "infodemiology" approach referring to the study of online information patterns using epidemiological methods GT provides health professionals with an important source of data for identifying societal trends, information-seeking behaviors, and potential risk areas (Eysenbach, 2009; Mavragani & Ochoa, 2019), while also offering free access (Woo & Owen, 2019). Widely used in the field of mental health, GT is employed to analyze the public's information-seeking behavior regarding various psychiatric conditions such as substance use disorder, schizophrenia (Sak & Uslu, 2023), and depression (Alibudbud, 2023). However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no national or international study has been identified that evaluates the digital footprints of gambling addiction. The GT study most relevant to the topic focuses on predicting casino revenues (Kim & Malek, 2018). In this regard, identifying digital footprints of gambling addiction in Türkiye can provide a comprehensive framework for understanding online search trends related to gambling addiction. The findings obtained may contribute to policy development processes, guide the creation of community-based health strategies in combating addiction, expand research areas, and serve as a data source for future studies in this field (Mavragani & Ochoa, 2019; World Health Organization, 2020).

In light of this information, the aim of this study is to evaluate the digital footprints of gambling addiction through GT. The research seeks to answer the following questions: (i) How has online search interest regarding gambling addiction in Türkiye changed over time? (ii) What search queries does it include?

METHODS

Research Design

This study is an infodemiological study with a retrospective design. The study conducted by Choi and Varian served as a guide for this infodemiological research (Choi & Varian, 2012).

Google Trends

Google Trends (GT) is an online tool used to analyze the extent of public interest in a specific search term over time and within a particular geographical region. After entering the term into the platform, the user selects the desired time range and region for analysis. Following these steps, GT presents the relative popularity of the selected search term among the public. The data are expressed as scores ranging from 0 to 100. On this scale, a value of 100 indicates that the term reached its highest level of interest within Google searches during the specified period, whereas a value of 0 indicates no interest in that term. In other words, a search term with a high score clearly reflects the public's interest in the topic during that time (Google Trends, 2024; Mavragani & Ochoa, 2019; Nuti et al., 2014).

Research Strategy

In this study, the "Google Trends" tool (https://trends.google.com/trends/) was used. The search was conducted on June 19, 2025. The process began by entering the keyword "kumar bağımlılığı" (gambling addiction) into the search term field. The boundaries of the search were determined in terms of target region, time frame, category, and search domain. Accordingly, the target region was set as "Türkiye," the time frame as "from 2004 to the date of the search," the category as "all categories" (science, people, and society, etc.), and the search domain as "Google Web Search" (excluding image search, Google News search, Google Shopping, etc.). The search was carried out using a single computer and a single Google account. Before the search, the browsing history and cookies of the search engine were cleared.

Data Analysis

Within the scope of the study, GT data were examined under two main headings: temporal trends, and interest trends. (i) Temporal trends: refer to data on the change in the term "gambling addiction" over the years. GT offers time options such as the previous day, the last 30 days, the last 12 months, the last 5 years, etc. In this study, the most comprehensive date range, "2004–present," was selected. (ii) Interest trends: refer to information on what other topics users searched for in the same search session as "gambling addiction." GT offers two options for ranking these results: *top* and *rising*. The *top* option refers to the terms most frequently searched in the same session by users within the selected category in the specified country or region. The *rising* option refers to terms whose search volume increased rapidly within a specific time frame; this increase may be related to the entered keyword or may reflect general trends (Google Trends, 2024). In this section, "relevance" was taken as the ranking criterion. Additionally, the interest trends ranked by relevance were classified by the researchers according to their content, and similar items were grouped into representative categories. Only the available data were

used in this process, and in cases of disagreement regarding the grouping, a consensus decision was reached.

In all stages of the analysis, the data provided by GT were exported in Excel format. Microsoft Excel (2025 version) was used for data organization and visualization.

Ethical Considerations

This study did not involve any direct intervention with human or animal subjects. As the research was conducted using secondary and publicly available data, neither ethics committee approval nor institutional permission was required.

RESULTS

The yearly search queries for the term "kumar bağımlılığı" (gambling addiction) on Google are presented in Figure 1. Accordingly, while the search term "kumar bağımlılığı" showed a stable trend from 2004 to 2014 except for the spike in 2007 it has exhibited a marked, fluctuating upward trend since 2017 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Search scores by year
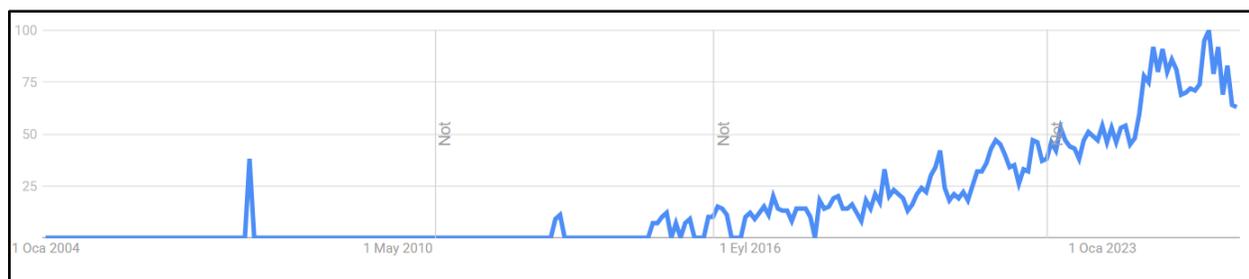
The search queries for the term "kumar bağımlılığı (gambling addiction)" on Google were clustered into four categories: basic information seeking, treatment seeking, self-help seeking, and professional support seeking. In the basic information seeking category, interest focused on sanal kumar (online gambling) (26 points), kumar nedir (what is gambling) (14 points), and other addictions (online gambling addiction, alcohol addiction, betting addiction, smoking addiction). The highest interest was concentrated in the treatment seeking cluster, with kumar bağımlılığı tedavisi (gambling addiction treatment) (100 points) and kumar tedavisi (gambling treatment) (90 points). The self-help seeking category was represented by queries such as kumar bağımlılığı nasıl bırakılır (how to quit gambling addiction) (7 points) and kumar hikayeleri (gambling stories) (6 points), with interest scores ranging between 6 and 7 points. Finally, the professional support seeking category focused on institutions where individuals could receive professional help, led by AMATEM (Alkol ve Madde Bağımlılığı Tedavi ve Eğitim Merkezi/Alcohol and Substance

Addiction Treatment and Training Center) (11 points) and Yeşilay (9 points) (Table 1).

Table 1: Queries related to gambling addiction

Sorgu alanları	Puan
Basic information seeking	
Sanal kumar	26
Kumar nedir	14
Bağımlılık	12
Sanal kumar bağımlılığı	10
Alkol bağımlılığı	9
Bahis bağımlılığı	7
Sigara bağımlılığı	5
Sigara	5
Treatment seeking	
Kumar bağımlığı tedavisi	100
Kumar tedavisi	90
Sanal kumar bağımlılığı tedavisi	8
Self-help seeking	
Kumar nasıl bırakılır	7
Kumar bağımlılığı nasıl bırakılır	6
Kumar hikayeleri	6
Professional support seeking	
AMATEM	11
Yeşilay	9
Psikiyatri	8
Kumar bağımlılığı tedavi merkezleri	5

DISCUSSION

According to this study, which presents the 21-year digital trajectory of the term "gambling addiction," its popularity remained largely stable until 2017 except for the spike observed in 2007 after which it gradually increased. The 2007 spike may have been influenced by the 2006 prohibition of non-state online gambling in the country (T.C. Resmî Gazete, 2006), potentially prompting individuals to seek information on this topic. In addition, the gradual yet fluctuating rise observed from 2017 onward may be explained by the increase in gambling addiction rates at the national level (Türkiye Yeşilay Cemiyeti, 2023) alongside the global increase (Akat,

2025) the rise in screen time and mobile phone use during the pandemic period (Chemnad et al., 2022), the proliferation of online gambling websites, and the effective implementation of advertising activities targeting these sites (Browne et al., 2019). Additionally, insufficient regulation of these advertisements is another factor contributing to this increase (Deshpande et al., 2022). In this context, it becomes essential for individuals to be aware of and control their screen time, and for health professionals to carry out public awareness activities on this issue (Chemnad et al., 2022). Furthermore, strengthening the technological infrastructure to ensure advertisement regulation, integrating artificial intelligence, and planning practices that enhance transparency in advertising data could contribute to the management of gambling addiction (Deshpande et al., 2022).

However, in recent years, positive factors may also have contributed to the increase in searches for the term of interest. Educational and awareness-raising initiatives carried out within universities (Gümüşhane Üniversitesi Bağımlılıkla Mücadele Koordinatörlüğü, 2025; Tekirdağ Namık Kemal Üniversitesi, 2025), local governments (Gemlik Rehberlik ve Araştırma Merkezi, 2025; T.C. Antalya Valiliği, 2020), and the national action plan (T.C. Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2024) can be given as examples. In summary, the increase in searches may have been driven either by the intention to manage the process of gambling addiction or to acquire information about it. Nevertheless, this research design does not provide direct information on users' motivations for searching the term "gambling addiction." In this regard, it is recommended to employ qualitative research designs to gain a deeper understanding of users' search motivations. Such studies could contribute to obtaining more comprehensive and user-focused data on gambling addiction.

Within the scope of this study, the areas concurrently queried by individuals searching for the term "kumar bağımlılığı" (gambling addiction) were also evaluated. Accordingly, it was determined that the searches fell into four categories: basic information seeking, treatment seeking, self-help seeking, and professional support seeking. Examining the first category, basic information seeking, it was found that topics such as "kumar nedir (what is gambling,)" "sanal kumar bağımlılığı (online gambling addiction,)" and "bahis bağımlılığı (betting addiction)" were also queried. This indicates that individuals are seeking not only general information about gambling addiction but also basic information regarding its online form online gambling addiction and betting on sports events. The popularity of the "online gambling addiction" query may be due to the fact that access to online gambling is currently very easy (Loy et al., 2019) and increasingly preferred (Aricak, 2019). Furthermore, the normalization of betting activities through their association with sports may have led individuals to perceive betting as an ordinary activity (Türkiye Sağlık Politikaları Enstitüsü, 2025). Additionally, users' queries on "smoking addiction" and "alcohol addiction" are consistent with and supportive of the literature

demonstrating that other types of addictions can co-occur with gambling addiction (Sharma & Weinstein, 2025). By its very nature, GT data cannot determine whether these queries were made by individuals with gambling addiction or simply by curious users; however, the results highlight the importance of strengthening the public health approach to gambling addiction and developing multidisciplinary support mechanisms. Moreover, implementing early diagnosis and awareness initiatives in addiction prevention could be beneficial at both the individual and societal levels (Yeşilay, 2023a). In addition, planning studies that reveal the dynamics of complex types of addictions and effective intervention strategies may provide supportive input for national-level programs to combat gambling addiction.

An examination of the study results reveals that the term "gambling addiction treatment" ranked as the most popular search query with the highest score, indicating that users are actively seeking treatment in this regard. Similarly, the frequent search for the term "online gambling addiction treatment" suggests that individuals are looking for solutions not only for traditional gambling addiction but also for forms of gambling played on online platforms. Such searches may have been conducted not only by individuals struggling with addiction but also by their families. It has been reported that families involved in the process of coping with addiction experience self-blame, emotional distress, and financial crises. They may have sought more information about gambling addiction as a way to cope with these challenges (Adfam, 2022). Furthermore, considering that the internet is now a frequently preferred source for health-related information (Bilgin et al., 2019), questions arise such as: Are the websites used to obtain information about gambling addiction reliable? Is the information provided understandable to everyone? To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study addressing this issue has been identified in the literature. This highlights the need to examine the reliability and readability levels of relevant websites and to investigate the public's ability to distinguish reliable information from unreliable sources. Moreover, enhancing the clarity of content on the sources accessed by users is recommended as an effective and sustainable approach in combating addiction.

In light of the findings obtained, users' support-seeking behaviors regarding gambling addiction were examined from different perspectives. The first of these is "self-help seeking." In this category, users were found to have conducted searches such as "how to quit gambling." This may be explained by an awareness of the addictive behavior, indicating that individuals have developed some insight and have taken the first steps toward change (Forsström et al., 2025). At this stage, individuals may realize that they are not alone, and thus tend to turn to social support systems, share their feelings, or consider seeking professional help (Forsström et al., 2025). Another possibility is that the search was conducted by individuals not directly affected by addiction but wishing to

gain knowledge on the topic. Information-seeking behaviors in this group may stem from various reasons, such as increased public awareness, media influence, academic interest, or professional necessity (T.C. Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2024). In particular, addiction-related content frequently encountered on digital platforms (Browne et al., 2019) may trigger individuals' curiosity and prompt them to conduct further research. Another query falling under the self-help seeking category is "gambling stories." Such searches may aim both to learn lessons from stories of addiction and to find motivation from the experiences of individuals who have successfully managed their addiction. In the literature, storytelling is known to strengthen individuals' coping skills (Alawafi et al., 2021). In this context, individuals may, through the stories they read, witness the destructive effects of gambling on people, draw lessons from these experiences, or gain the courage to initiate change in their own lives by drawing inspiration from the stories of those who have undergone positive transformation (Alawafi et al., 2021; Nuske & Hing, 2013).

It was determined that users were not only engaged in self-help seeking but also in requesting professional support. The frequent searches for the names of professional institutions such as "AMATEM" and "Yeşilay" may indicate that addiction is a problem too difficult to resolve through individual efforts alone and that individuals are in need of professional assistance (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Furthermore, considering that public-based information activities have a positive impact on individuals (Elder et al., 2004), the appearance of these reputable institutions' names in search queries is a promising finding. It suggests that public service announcements, awareness campaigns, and treatment services are achieving their goal of raising social awareness (Türkiye Yeşilay Cemiyeti, 2025). At this point, expanding the preventive and therapeutic activities of institutions such as AMATEM and Yeşilay to the regional level for all age groups is of great importance. In addition, increasing the availability of informative content tailored to individuals' needs by public institutions and universities can be considered an effective strategy in addiction prevention and public health services.

Strengths and Limitations

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this is the first study at both national and international levels to evaluate digital search trends related to gambling addiction. This strengthens the originality and innovative nature of the study and allows the findings to make a significant contribution to the literature.

This research has certain limitations. First, it can be said that the findings are temporally limited. The study data are based solely on internet searches conducted in Türkiye between 2004 and 2025. It should be noted that similar analyses conducted in different countries or during different time periods could yield different results. Therefore, it is recommended that the research be repeated with geographically and temporally broader

samples. The second limitation is that the data only include users of the Google search engine. Examining similar queries on other search engines could provide more comprehensive and diversified insights into user behaviors. Third, no information was available regarding the identities or demographic characteristics of the individuals conducting the searches. Therefore, it is not possible to determine with certainty whether the queries were made by individuals diagnosed with addiction, their family members, or people simply curious about the topic. This makes it difficult to conduct assessments targeting specific groups. The fourth limitation is the lack of knowledge regarding users' motivations for searching. Therefore, within the scope of the third and fourth limitations, it is recommended to conduct studies with different research designs (e.g., descriptive, qualitative, prospective) to examine the information needs and search motivations of individuals diagnosed with gambling addiction, their close social networks, or the general population. The final limitation is that this study only examined searches containing the term "gambling addiction." Therefore, it is suggested that similar studies be conducted to include search terms potentially related to gambling addiction, such as "online gambling addiction."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the digital footprints generated through the search term "kumar bağımlılığı" (gambling addiction) in the online environment. Since 2017, this growing interest has encompassed not only gambling addiction but also other types of addictions, such as online gambling and smoking addiction. It is recommended to establish regulatory mechanisms to ensure that online information sources provide content that is both readable and reliable. Furthermore, it is suggested that public health policies, as well as future qualitative or mixed-method research, be planned by taking digital footprints into consideration.

Statement of Competing Interests

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Ethics Approval

This study did not involve any direct intervention with human or animal subjects. As the research was conducted using secondary and publicly available data, neither ethics committee approval nor institutional permission was required.

Relative Contributions

All authors (YM and EU) collaborated on the work. All authors approved the final version.

Research Promotion

The aim of this study is to evaluate the digital footprints of gambling addiction through Google Trends. Search trends were categorized into four groups: Basic information seeking, treatment seeking, self-help seeking, and professional support seeking. The results indicate that societal interest in gambling addiction has increased and that searches related to treatment have become increasingly prominent.

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