



EXCESSIVE GAMBLING: PROMOTING AND PROTECTING HEALTH IN A DIGITALISED WORLD

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Declaration of Financial Interests or Relationships

I have no financial interests or relationships to disclose regarding the subject matter of this presentation.



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E INTERNAZIONALI

New forms of gambling: the spread of gambling-like games

Excessive Gambling: Promoting and Protecting Health in
a Digitalised World

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Outline

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and
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Definition and literature review

Definition and literature review

What are gambling-like games (GLGs)?

- **Gambling-like games** are games that contain mechanisms similar to those found in gambling
- **Loot boxes** are items commonly found in video games and mobile applications that provide players with randomized virtual rewards (Xiao *et al.*, 2022; Rockloff *et al.*, 2020)
- These items are usually purchasable with real currency, and the prizes contained within them vary in value and drop rate

Definition and literature review

Example – EA Sport FC

Pacchetto di benvenuto



103-109

1,19 € **0/1**

IL PACCHETTO CONTIENE **ALTRE INFO**

PREMI GARANTITI



FC Points
x50

BONUS



Giocatore TOTS
x1

PREMI POSSIBILI:
Oggetti a solo scopo illustrativo, nessuno di questi è garantito.

NON SCAMBIAB.



NON SCAMBIAB.



NON SCAMBIAB.



NON SCAMBIAB.



PROBABILITÀ PACCHETTO **X**

LE PROBABILITÀ VISUALIZZATE SONO PER SINGOLO PACCHETTO

50 FC Points	100%
Bonus:	
Giocatore GEN 103+	100%
Giocatore GEN 103	50,39%
Giocatore GEN 104	25,2%
Giocatore GEN 105	12,6%
Giocatore GEN 106	6,3%
Giocatore GEN 107	3,15%
Giocatore GEN 108	1,57%
Giocatore GEN 109	<1%

Definition and literature review

Are GLGs and gambling similar?

- **Gambling criteria (Griffiths, 2018):**
 - i. something of financial value is risked
 - ii. the outcome is partially or entirely random
 - iii. redistribution of wealth without any creation of value
 - iv. losses can be avoided simply by not participating
- **Without the possibility of cashing out, the combination of spending and randomness of rewards is not sufficient to equate loot boxes with gambling (UK Gambling Commission, 2017)**
- **According to the Belgian “Research Report on Loot Boxes”, loot boxes purchased with real money may meet the Belgian criteria that define gambling and are therefore prohibited without a specific license (Belgian Gaming Commission, 2018)**

Definition and literature review

Literature review

- Several studies have identified a link between spending on loot boxes and gambling behaviour (Brooks *et al.*, 2019; Zendle *et al.*, 2019; Zendle & Cairns, 2019a; Zendle & Cairns, 2019b; Li *et al.*, 2019)
- The increased accessibility of gambling, according to Blaszczynski and Nower, is a factor related to the growth in the prevalence of problem gambling (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002)



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Research questions and methodology

Research questions and methodology

Research questions

- 1) How widespread are loot boxes among apps in the Google Play Store in Italy?
- 2) In games containing loot boxes, how frequently is information regarding the odds of winning disclosed?
- 3) In games containing loot boxes, are mechanisms in place to restrict access by younger users, such as recommended age classifications?

Research questions and methodology

Research method

- For this research, I drew inspiration from two similar studies conducted in the UK (Zendle et al., 2020) and China (Xiao et al., 2021)
- I downloaded the 60 highest-grossing games in Italy from the Play Store and measured three variables:
 1. Presence of loot boxes purchasable with real money
 2. Presence of information on the odds of loot box prizes
 3. PEGI (Pan-European Game Information) age rating



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Results

Results

Table 1

PEGI	Total number of games (cumulative)	Number of games that feature loot boxes (cumulative)
3+	30	13 of 30 (43%, CI = 0.27-0.60)
7+	40	20 of 40 (50%, CI = 0.35-0.65)
12+	51	31 of 51 (61%, CI = 0.47-0.63)
16+	53	33 of 53 (62%, CI = 0.49-0.64)
18+ and 'I'	60	40 of 60 (66%, CI = 0.54-0.77)

- 66% of the games contain loot boxes. A test for the difference in proportions revealed no statistically significant difference ($p = .33$) compared to the UK (58%), while the percentage was significantly lower ($p < .001$) than that reported in China (91%)
- Among the 51 games rated 3+, 7+, or 12+, 61% includes loot boxes, a percentage closely aligned with the UK finding (58.9%, 56 of 95) and significantly lower ($p < .001$) than the Chinese result (90.5%, 57 of 63)

Results

Table 2

	PEGI					
Does it feature loot boxes?	3+ (%)	7+ (%)	12+ (%)	16+ (%)	18+ (%)	Tot (%)
Yes	13 (32,5%)	7 (17,5%)	11 (27,5%)	2 (5%)	7 (17,5%)	40 (100%)
No	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20 (100%)

77.5% of GLGs are deemed suitable for children of 12 years of age.

The test of difference in proportion reveals that this percentage is not significantly higher ($p = .09$) than the Chinese case, where the percentage was 62.6% (57 of 91), but significantly lower ($p = .009$) than in the UK, where 93% (54 of 58) of such games fell into this age group.

Results

Table 3

Category	Number of application
Generic symbol	18
Symbol and step	9
Specific symbol	5
Automatic	2
Graphic symbol	2

Of the 40 GLGs, 36 report their in-game win probabilities.
Specifically, the table indicates the disclosure format.



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Conclusions

Conclusions

- **Loot boxes may pose risks to young people**, both by potentially familiarizing them with gambling-like mechanics and due to evidence from prior studies suggesting a positive association between loot box use and gambling-related problems
- **This research highlights a lack of specific protections for adolescents**: age ratings do not appear to be influenced by the presence of loot boxes, raising concerns about regulatory oversight
- **This research has limitations**, including the relatively small sample size and the risk of false negatives in identifying games containing loot boxes

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