

Live in Your World, Pay in Ours: Turning Players into Payers in the Online Gaming Space

Category: TED-Style Presentation

Abstract Body

I first got into video gaming at age 6, starting with the Nancy Drew series where players could interview suspects, solve puzzles, and in the end solve the mystery. Before long, gaming became a favourite hobby of mine. In 2018, I met my fiancé who introduced me to arguably one of the most popular genres of video games, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing games (MMORPGs) such as World of Warcraft and Final Fantasy XIV. Before long, I was hooked. I levelled my characters to max level, "grinded" to get cool gear to outfit my character with and met new friends along the way who were also immersed in the game. As enjoyable as this new genre was, I started seeing the dark side of online gaming. The grinds were becoming longer and led to less interesting rewards. The desirable rewards were instead relegated to online storefronts that required real-life currency, and game mechanics were increasingly encouraging players to spend more money to keep playing. MMOs are social activities by nature, and when individuals are asked to give up gaming, they also give up their sense of self and accomplishment. When game rewards are locked behind gambling-like mechanics such as "loot boxes" that provide random rewards in exchange for "premium" in-game currency that requires real money to purchase, it makes me feel less like a player, and more like a payer. I started feeling like I was no longer seen by the game publisher as someone who enjoys the game, but instead as an engagement metric. I see articles written all the time that ask why individuals keep playing these kinds of games and why they pay for rewards that require real money. The answer, in my opinion, is rather simple. The games are designed to keep people playing and paying. I believe more regulation is needed in video gaming to protect consumers and acknowledge the impact these mechanics have on individuals and the link between video game immersion and loot box spending with Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD). There are no widely available standards to help individuals regulate their video gaming and in-game spending. Now a doctoral psychology student, my experiences as an avid gamer have informed my research which will focus on developing lower-risk guidelines and a harm-reduction approach to gaming. There is a need for greater awareness and understanding. It is not just a game.

Key Words

- Advocacy
- Behavioural Addictions
- Future

- Mutual Help/Peer Support/Lived Experience
- Prevention/Harm Reduction

Learning Objective # 1

Attendees will gain an understanding of the kinds of mechanisms popular video games employ to keep players immersed in the game world, and the impact those mechanisms have on a video gamer.

Learning Objective # 2

Attendees will learn about the importance of viewing Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) as a public health issue, and how the presenter's present research seeks to address this gap.

Reference # 1

Norwegian Consumer Council. (2022). Insert coin: How the gaming industry exploits consumers using loot boxes. <https://storage02.forbrukerradet.no/media/2022/05/2022-05-31-insert-coin-publish.pdf>

Reference # 2

Raneri, P. C., Montag, C., Rozgonjuk, D., Satel, J., & Pontes, H. M. (2022). The role of microtransactions in Internet Gaming Disorder and Gambling Disorder: A preregistered systematic review. *Addictive Behaviors Reports*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.abrep.2022.100415>

Lead Author

Ms. Amy MacQuarrie

MA/Ph.D. Experimental Psychology Student | University of New Brunswick Saint John