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Video game rewards akin to gambling

Video game 'loot boxes' are psychologically akin to gambling, especially for adolescent gamers, new University of Tasmania research has revealed.

Published today in [Nature Human Behaviour](#), the research found that while recently introduced digital containers of randomised rewards known as 'loot boxes' offered players a competitive advantage, they also reinforced gambling behaviour.

This was particularly the case for adolescents who had poorer impulse control than adults, potentially making them more vulnerable to learned gambling mechanics and behaviours.

Produced by University of Tasmania Senior Lecturer in Psychology Dr Jim Sauer and Dr Aaron Drummond from Massey University School of Psychology in New Zealand, the research examined the similarities between the structural and psychological features of loot boxes and gambling in 22 video games released between 2016 and 2017.

"On face value, loot boxes present some striking similarities to real-world gambling," Dr Sauer said.

"Players often purchase loot boxes for money and receive rewards of varying value based on chance."

Games that allowed players to sell or 'cash-out' their virtual winnings were identified as particularly problematic.

"Allowing players to trade virtual items creates clear opportunities for them to convert those items to real currency via independent sites," Dr Sauer said.

"These games appear to meet both the psychological and legal definitions of gambling."

While the research recognised that whether particular loot boxes should be made illegal was a matter of individual country law, it did recommend that restricted access to people of legal gambling age be applied by ratings agencies and

gambling regulatory bodies to games that allowed players to 'cash out' their virtual rewards.

It was also recommended that ratings agencies should adopt additional parental advisory information detailing loot-box mechanics in video games, to help consumers and parents make better-informed decisions.

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