

Loot Box Addiction

A Study On Loot Boxes and Their Relationship to Gambling

Niko Rönig

Master's Thesis

English

Language and Literature

Faculty of Humanities

University of Oulu

Autumn 2021

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Abstract

In the year 2019 there has been a notable discussion in the gaming community that has revolved largely around the topic of loot boxes and their connections to gambling and gambling addictions. This has led to many governments taking notice of these issues and having begun to plan on proper actions to take, such a bill by the U.S senate or a report on loot boxes and gambling addiction by the UK parliament. Using methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, we shall delve to these governmental discourses, to the issues with loot boxes and what is being planned to be done about them. Furthermore this essay will look into the part that gaming companies have had to play on these issues, why they favor loot boxes so much and how much responsibility they are willing to take? Suffice to say, the companies have not been seen favorably by neither the public nor the authorities.

Key words: Loot boxes, Gambling addiction, UK parliament loot box report, US loot box bill.

Abstrakti

Vuonna 2019 peliyhteisössä on ollut meneillään huomattava keskustelu, joka pyörii lootilaatkoiden (*engl. loot boxes*) ja uhkapeliaddiktio välisten yhteyksien ympärillä. Monet maailman valtiot ovat ottaneet nämä ongelmat huomioon, kuten USA, jonka senaatti suunnittelee parhaillaan uutta lakiesitystä, tai Iso-Britannian edustajainhuone, joka muutamia kuukausia sitten julkaisi raportin liittyen näihin aiheisiin. Käyttäen hyödyksemme kriittisen diskurssianalyysin keinoja pureudumme näihin hallitusten dialogeihin, sekä siihen, miksi lootilaatikot ovat niin suuri ongelma, mitä niiden suhteen aiotaan tehdä, mikä ylipäätään on pelifirmojen osuus tässä kaikessa ja miksi ne ovat suosineet lootilaatikoita niin paljon. Tilanne on johtanut sekä valtaapitävien että pelaajien huomattavaan kritiikin määrään pelialan käytäntöjä kohtaan.

Avainsanat: Lootilaatikot, uhkapeliaddiktio, UK lootilaatikko raportti, US lootilaatikko laki.

1. Introduction

In the recent years, if one follows the gaming community and what is going on in there, one cannot but help to notice how loot boxes have become a very important topic of discussion in the video gaming industry. The term loot box refers to items in (online) video games that player may buy by using real world-money. However, what players receive in exchange of their money is randomized and of uncertain value. In other words, the players do not know what they are ultimately paying for. This phenomenon is exemplified by articles such as *Kotaku's* Ben Kuchera's *Loot boxes are the video game issue of the year* (2017) in which he discusses one of the more notable incidents on loot boxes; *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* published by Electronic Arts in 2017. More specifically, these discussions revolve around the nature of loot boxes and their connections to gambling. They also discuss what is planned by governmental authorities to be done about these connections, one of the examples of the discussion being *The Guardian's* Rob Davies' and Alex Hern's (2019) article *Video game loot boxes should be classed as gambling, says Commons*. While my Bachelors thesis was an historic overview on additional content controversies in video games, which also discusses the *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* incident (Röning, 2019, p. 19-21), the purpose of this thesis is to continue onwards in time to look into timespan from 2017 to 2019. The aim as well is to look into loot boxes, the reasons for their prevalence, their connections to gambling and the myriad of discussion surrounding these issues in media, among official authorities and in the gaming public.

To this end, looking at various media and some governmental sources as well as forum discourse, this study adopts analytical tools from Critical Discourse Analysis developed by Norman Fairclough (2001). In addition to Critical Discourse Analysis, this study makes use of James Paul Gee's (2014) ideas regarding Discourse Analysis in the virtual world and gaming in order to have closer look at the conversations and discussions surrounding the above mentioned topics. With that in mind the questions this thesis shall be exploring, inspired by Fairclough's ideas discussed in detail in section 3, will be:

- 1) What kind of discussions are there regarding the nature of loot boxes and their possible issues?
- 2) What kind of discussions are there regarding the continued use of loot boxes by gaming companies and the reasons behind this?
- 3) What kind of discussions are there regarding questions of ethics with loot boxes?

4) What kind of discussions are there regarding the official responses taken by authorities towards loot boxes?

These questions will be discussed in the analysis section 5, with sections 5.1 to 5.1.2 focusing on the first question by looking into magazine articles, research and Reddit discussions regarding issues people have had with loot boxes. Sections 5.2 to 5.2.2 will focus on the second question by analyzing discussions from magazine articles, Reddit and other relevant publications regarding why loot boxes continue to be so popular among gaming companies. Sections 5.3 to 5.3.2 will be focusing on the third question by looking into articles, Reddit discussion and other relevant sources discussing the ethics of loot boxes. Finally, sections 5.4 to 5.4.2 will be focusing on the fourth question by looking into articles, governmental publications as well as Reddit discussions related to measures taken by authorities of Belgium, the United Kingdoms and the United States of America towards loot boxes.

2. Materials and sources that will be utilized in the thesis

In this our materials will consist of a report called *Immersive and addictive technologies* (UK Parliament, 2019) released in September of 2019 by the parliament of the United Kingdom as well as a bill introduced by Senator Josh Hawley of the United States to regulate pay-to-win microtransaction as well as loot boxes. Aside from those, this thesis will be utilizing various articles from both magazines that focus on gaming industry, such as Ars Technia, Eurogamer, Games Industry, Kotaku, PC Gamer, PCGamesN, and Polygon, as well as magazines that do not concentrate on gaming, such as BBC News, The Guardian and Revenues & Profits. These articles were chosen because they deal with topics relevant to the main focus of this thesis, such as calls for regulation and stories of those who have suffered monetary losses due to loot boxes. In addition to these, we will also be looking into public discourse found in the Reddit discussion forums on the topics discussed in this thesis. For this essay the discussions were chosen from the subreddits [r/AndroidGaming](#), [r/Games](#), [r/news](#), [r/OutOfTheLoop](#), [r/pathofexiler](#), [r/pcgaming](#), [r/StarWarsBattlefront](#), [r/technology](#), [r/truegaming](#) and [r/xboxone](#). The material was collected by utilizing Google to search for discussions on Reddit and then making a choice based on relevance of discussion as well as the amount and quality of comments. YouTube-videos relevant to topics of the thesis will also be used.

3. Methods of analysis

The main method of analysis for this paper, as mentioned, shall be inspired from Norman Fairclough's *Critical Discourse Analysis as a Method in Social Scientific Research*. In his article Fairclough (2001) divides his CDA method to five phases: first, one should "focus upon analyzing a social problem with a semiotic aspect" (p. 125). Second, one should focus on identifying obstacles that prevent said problem from being resolved. This in turn can be accomplished, for example, through analyzing "the network of practices located within", "the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned" as well as "the discourse (the semiosis itself)" (p. 125). Thirdly, one should "consider whether the social order (network of practice) in a sense 'needs' the problem" (p. 125). Fourth, one should "identify possible ways past the obstacles" (p. 125). Fifth, one should "reflect critically on the analysis" (p. 125). Out of these five steps presented by Fairclough here, we shall be taking inspiration from steps one to four: focus on a social problem, identify obstacles, consider the need for the problem and identify possible solutions. I chose to omit the fifth step due to not considering it relevant to the aims of this thesis.

To complement the analysis, we shall turn from Fairclough to James Paul Gee's work *Unified Discourse Analysis: Language, Reality, Virtual Worlds and Video Games*. From there, we shall utilize the following questions: "how things have been said and written", "how they could possibly have been said or written differently" and "what difference it makes that they were said or written the way they were rather than a different way" (Gee, 2014, p. 36-37). For the purposes of this thesis I will be utilizing these questions by looking into choice of words used in discussions and the tone of discussions.

4. Loot boxes: definitions of terms and prior research on the subject

4.1 Definitions of terms loot boxes and gambling

Since loot boxes are a key feature in this thesis, this section will define loot boxes in order to better analyze them as well as go over some prior research done on the link between loot boxes and gambling. First definition for loot boxes we get from the UK report (2019) which defines loot boxes as:

"--items in video games that may be bought for real-world money, but which provide players with a randomized reward of uncertain value. Those rewards will be virtual

items for use in the game, such as tools, outfits and weapons or characters with particular skills, all of which will be of variable benefit within the game” (p.27).

Another definition for loot boxes comes from Brooks’ & Clark (2019) who describe loot boxes as follows: “Loot boxes are virtual goods in video games that produce randomly-generated in-game rewards” (Abstract). They further discuss that loot boxes are “earned via game play, or purchased using in-game currency and/or direct cash transactions” (Section 1.1). They go on to evaluate the uncertainty that players are faced with when purchasing loot boxes:

“—some prizes convey functional advantages in the game while others are purely cosmetic. The common property among loot boxes is the receipt of a virtual item determined by random number generation, where some items are more desirable and/or valuable than others” (Brooks & Clark, 2019, 1.1).

Third description for loot boxes can be found in an article by Zendle’ and Cairns (2019), who elaborate on the nature of chance that players take when purchasing loot boxes:

“Loot boxes all share on common feature: When players purchase one, they do not know what specific thing they will receive in return for their money. For example, players of the first-person shooter *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* can pay real-world money to unlock sealed weapons cases, which have randomized contents. Players do not know what a weapon case’s contents are when they pay to unlock it. It might contain items that are both rare and valuable” (Cairns & Zendle, 2019, p. 2).

While these three definitions echo similar sentiments each, this helps us gather some universal key factors regarding loot boxes: real-life money is involved, the contents are unknown to the buyer as well as completely randomized and that the value of rewards in these loot boxes varies. In many ways, for the player, purchasing a loot box is gamble, a risk they are willing to take.

Furthermore, the definitions of loot boxes given here are of similar nature to a definition of gambling by Deverux (1979, as cited in National Research Council, 1999) who describe gambling as “wagering money or other belongings on chance activities with or events with random or uncertain outcomes” (p. 16). In the next section, in order to further build a base for understanding the topics of this thesis, I will be going over some example of prior research conducted on the connections between lot boxes and gambling.

4.2 Prior research on connections between loot boxes and gambling

Before moving on to discourse analysis of over the research questions posited in section 3, I shall go over prior research done on the connection between loot boxes and gambling. First example comes from Cairns and Zendle's (2019) article on the topic. In their research they recruited gamers of 18 years of age or older and asked about their spending habits with regards to popular without mentioning loot boxes specifically (Cairns & Zendle, 2019, p. 4). Ranking participants into groups of non-gamblers, low-risk gamblers, high-risk gamblers and problem gamblers, his results were that participants that had issues with problem gambling, or were in the low-risk and high-risk groups spent notably more on loot boxes than those who did not have problems with gambling (Cairns & Zendle, 2019, p. 5-9).

Similar conclusions were made by Brooks & Clark (2019) who noted that people with risky gambling habits or beliefs were more vulnerable to loot boxes, risky loot boxes could promote gambling problems and furthermore their participants agreed that loot boxes were similar to betting and gambling and that these perceptions of players marked loot boxes "as a 'gamblified' feature of video games" (p. 33).

Third example comes from a thesis by Latvala (2019) who conducted an online survey to study the motivations of those who spent money on loot boxes (p. 46). According to Latvala's (2019) findings largest motivations for spending money on loot boxes were the feeling of thrill that came with the experience as well as the desire to win valuable items (p. 46). He goes on further and points that these motivations correlate with the motivations of those who gamble (Latvala, 2019, p. 46).

Further research on link between loot boxes and gambling can be found on an article by Zendle, Walasek, Cairns, Meyer & Drummond (2021) where they note their notable similarities between loot boxes and gambling, stating that loot boxes could be seen as "psychologically akin" to gambling (p. 2). They note further that those who spend money on loot boxes are at a greater risk to develop issues with problem gambling and alternatively that those with gambling problems may find loot boxes appealing (Zendle, Walasek, Cairns, Meyer & Drummond, 2021, p. 2-3).

Final example from this section comes from an article by Rockloff, Russell, Greer, Lole, Hing & Browne (2021) where they note that, based on an online survey they conducted on young people ages 12 to 24, the activities involved with loot boxes, playing games with loot boxes, opening them, buying them and selling them, bring loot boxes close to what they call a "traditional gambling product" and that loot boxes could be seen as a "gambling like experience" (p.6). Also of interest from their article was the conclusion that there is a more notable parallel between loot boxes and

gambling when games containing them were played by women (Rockloff, Russell, Greer, Lole, Hing & Browne, 2021, p.6).

In summary from these examples we can see that in the past couple of years a notable connection between loot boxes and gambling has been proven. To me the most notable points of interest are the proven link between loot boxes and that they may potentially lead to issues with problem gambling (e.g. Cairns & Zendle, 2019) and that issues stemming from loot boxes are very notably psychological in nature. Now that the definitions and prior research have been established, the next sections will move on to the realm of Discourse Analysis as we go over the various topics that were established in section 3.

5. Analysis on loot boxes and gambling

5.1 The problem with loot boxes

This section will go over research as well as news articles that I consider to be relevant material regarding the discussions over issues that people have experienced with loot boxes. In order to do that we turn Fairclough (2001) who as the first step of his CDA method suggests that one should go outside the text and utilize both academic and non-academic sources to get an idea of context for the text (p. 129).

To begin to understand why to some people loot boxes are seen as an issue, let us first look at a few articles regarding the topic. First one is taken from *BBC News*'s Zoe Kleinman's article *'The kids emptied our bank account playing Fifa'*. The article tells the story of one Mr. Carter whose children spent nearly £550 to buy a card pack in the game *Fifa 19* after they had seen their father buy one pack for them, and as Mr. Carter puts it, "[t]hey spent £550 and they still never got their favorite player, Lionel Messi" (Kleinman, 2019).

Another story is taken from *Kotaku*'s article *Meet the 19-year-Old Who Spent Over \$17,000 On Microtransactions* by Ethen Gach. His article narrates the story of a player going to buy the username Kensgold:

"A Reddit user who goes by the name of Kensgold posted an open letter to publisher EA and other developers in the video game industry. "I am 19 and addicted to gambling," he wrote. Kensgold wasn't talking about spending over \$17,000 on in-game purchases over the last several years" (Gach, 2017).

The article continues further:

“At the time Kensgold was a Year 10 student in high school with no car and a part time job at Panera. Of the \$US300 – 400 (\$396-528) paycheck he received every two weeks, he reckons he spent about 90 per cent of it on in-app purchases. His grandparents started to worry and his mum tried to shut off their internet to stop him from playing, but with a smartphone and a 3G connection, circumventing those obstacles was easy” (Gach, 2017).

Further from the article we have this point of interest:

“Kensgold doesn’t play *Smite* or *Counter-Strike GO* any more. After finally talking with his therapist about his spending habits earlier this year, Kensgold made a decision to stop gambling with CS:GO skins and liquidate his collection, put the remaining money back in his bank account, and begin moving down a different path – one in which he tried to keep microtransactions and in-game purchases at arm’s length” (Gach, 2017).

Reading through these two stories I would claim that we can begin to see some of the negative effects that modern day monetization methods may have on players. While the first story may not seem that bad, as the article mentioned that “Mr. Carter, form Hampshire, admits that he did not take full precautions to limit access to his Nintendo account” (Kleinman, 2019), and that it was mostly done by children whom could be argued did not know any better, it still speaks of the woes of the loot boxes that you can spend hundreds of pounds without desired results. However, it is the second story that truly lays base just what an ill effect loot boxes may have: compulsion to spend money, need for family intervention and therapy.

These gambling issues, as said, have been noted by authorities and they have begun to take action. This can be seen in article *Loot boxes a matter of “life or death”* by Sinclair (2019) in *Gamesindustry*:

“—York St. John University researcher Dr. David Zendle, who later led off the day’s discussion from a panel of academics. “There’s one clear message that I want to get across today, and it stands in stark contrast to mostly everything you’ve heard so far,” Zendle said. “The message is this: Spending money on loot boxes is linked to problem gambling. The more money people spend on loot boxes, the more sever their problem gambling is. This isn’t just my research. This is an effect that has been repeated

numerous times across the world by multiple independent labs. This is something the games industry does not engage with.”

Zendle said that problem gambling is “an excessive disorder engagement” beyond the person’s control and has been linked to depression and anxiety, can cause financial distress, destruction of families, and even leads to people taking their own lives”.

Dr. Zendle’s claims certainly resonate with the adversities described in Kenggold’s story. Both texts highlight loss of control, anxiety, financial distress and destruction of families. To elaborate further, I would highlight two points of notable interest: first of, Kenggold’s notable monetary losses in the thousands of dollars (Gach, 2017) as an example of Dr. Zendle’s claim that “the more money they spend on loot boxes, the more severe their problem gambling is” (Sinclair, 2019). Secondly, I would claim that what Dr. Zendle describes problem gambling as “An excessive disorder engagement” and how a person may not have any control over it (Sinclair, 2019) could be considered an apt description of Kenggold’s adversities with gambling and in particular how eventually his family attempted to intervene on his gaming only for him to bypass the measures they had taken (Gach, 2017).

Finally, the following extract is taken from the UK Parliament (2019) report on the challenges of gaming:

“Many games contain features that are highly similar to conventional gambling products, without gambling being the primary aim of the game. However, there are concerns that being exposed to such features from a young age might normalize gambling” (p. 26).

To my mind this comment by the UK committee highlights a few points of interest: that authorities do consider loot boxes in games similar enough to gambling to be concerned and that they might adversely affect children and teens in particular due to the popularity of video games in those demographics and that loot boxes might act as a “gateway drug” to actual gambling. Furthermore, I would note that the UK committees (2019) claim that loot boxes “might normalize gambling” carry a tone of concern, in my interpretation, over possible lack of control over gambling that might develop from loot boxes.

In summary, as we can see here, loot boxes and their connections to gambling have been either noted and/or experienced by various people. Now that we have overarching base foundation

regarding the topic of issues with loot-boxes, let us move on to a deeper analysis of them by utilizing help from Gee's three questions.

5.1.1 Analysis on discussions of the problem with loot boxes

In previous section I went over research articles and news discussing the issues with loot boxes in order highlight some examples of what said issues were like. For this next section I will analyzing the material discussed in section 5.1 with the help of Gee's theories.

News articles focusing upon loot boxes

First of Gee's (2014) questions posits that we should focus on "how things are being said or written" (p. 36). Let us start with the three news articles focusing upon loot boxes. In Gach's (2017) article, we have the following written: "he had indeed spent \$US13500.25 (\$17, 827) in games", "spending money for rewards in his favorite games started when he was only 13", "the smartphone game was notorious for its repetitive grind and pay-to-win microtransactions", "In the winter of 2015, he'd spent around \$US800 (\$1056) in *Kingdoms of Middle-earth purchases*. Over the course of that entire year, thanks to that and other microtransaction-heavy games such as *Clash of Kings* and *Age of Warring Empire*, he spent \$US4116 (\$5435)" and finally "Of the \$US300-400 (\$396-528) paycheck he received every two weeks, he reckons he spent about 90 per cent of it on in-app purchases". Two subject matters rise to the surface when looking at the article and these quotes lifted from there. First is the focus on the monetary amounts that the interviewee spent on games, represented in the total amount of money spent rather than just glossing over the sums. Second is that when discussing the games that the money was spent on the articles emphasizes the loot-box and monetization elements of these games.

In order to understand the significance these focus points, we need to move on to Gee's (2014) second and third questions: "how they could possibly have been said or written differently" and "what difference it makes that they were said or written the way they were rather than a different way" (p.36-37). I would posit that the major difference made to the article could have been made by glossing over the focal points mentioned in the previous paragraph. Had the article been written so, as a presentation of 'facts regarding something that happened' it would have remained rather neutral. However, by focusing on the two points and going in depth to the story of Kenggold the article, while remaining rather neutral in tone, informs its readers regarding the nature of loot-box

and microtransactions filled games and the effects and consequences that they can have upon their players.

Next, let us move on to the article by Kleinman (2019) from, which we can find the following quotes: “Four children spent nearly £550 in three weeks buying player packs”, “They spent £550 and they still never got their favorite player, Lionel Messi” and “A new report issued by the organization Internet Matters found that 26% of the 2,000 parents of four to 16-year-olds it spoke to were concerned about the amount of money their children were spending on in-game purchases”.

Similar to the article by Gach’s article Kleinman also focuses on the exact monetary amounts lost to loot-box mechanics and rather than glossing over them. Furthermore, where Gach’s article focused on the effects and risks loot-boxes can have on adults, Kleinman’s article mentions the risks associated with children.

Furthermore, similar to the answers discussed in Gach article’s section Kleinman’s article could have glossed over the specifics of the incident or instead of focusing on monetary losses and the reasons for said monetary losses he could have instead focused more upon, for example, the part that the neglect by the father of the family: “Mr. Carter, from Hampshire, admits that he did not take full precautions to limit access to his Nintendo account” (Kleinman, 2019).

Finally, similar to Gach’s section, by focusing on the monetary losses and the gambling like issues related to loot-boxes Kleinman’s article, despite its neutral tone, could be claimed to take a stance against gaming monetization and serve to inform its readers of the dangers that loot-boxes and mechanics similar to those possess.

Next, we have the article by Sinclair (2019). From his article I would highlight couple points of interest. First of all, from the quotes “players who get deeply into loot boxes are then more likely to develop problems with real-world gambling, or that people who already have problems with real-world gambling are disproportionately drawn to loot boxes” as well as “[i]t turns out if the seller publishes some list of probabilities and lies about them, the seller can make significantly more money” and “[t]here is a benefit for lying. Since there’s a benefit for lying, there must be regulation around this” (Sinclair, 2019). With this in mind, I would claim that the article serves to highlight a clear tone condemnation towards loot boxes and that they could be claimed to paint a picture to readers that the profitability of loot boxes comes at an expense of peoples health. Secondly the article further damns loot boxes by drawing attention to the fact that this potential health risks could be an especial threat towards children and that this is a concern shared among healthcare professionals (Sinclair, 2019).

Furthermore, in contrast to Gach and Kleinman, Sinclair's article focuses upon the scientific evidence of the research that has been conducted on loot boxes, with focus being on what researches behind these loot boxes had to say on the topic, that being that there is evidence of connections between loot boxes and gambling. In addition to that, instead of monetary harm, while the topic is mentioned, Sinclair's article presents its readers with the issues and risks loot boxes can have on the health and wellbeing on people, both adults and children.

On the other hand, while Gach's and Kleinman's article are shorter they both could be claimed to be a bit more in depth regarding the topic of loot-boxes and their issues, whereas Sinclair's article is more of an overview of researchers opinions and different possible issues with loot-boxes. In other words, while there are some examples of research in Sinclair's article, it could perhaps have gone a bit more in depth. The reasoning for this, I would claim, being that Gach's and Kleinman's article could be claimed to inform their readers by giving a more concrete example of the specific effects loot-boxes and their issues could have on the daily lives of an average consumer, compared to broad strokes uncertainties such as can be seen in the quotes pertaining to Zendle's research.

Further analysis of Cairn & Zendle's thesis

Speaking of which, let us move on to examining Cairn and Zendle's research more closely. From there, we can lift the following quotes for being of interest to this thesis:

“They (loot-boxes) are very widespread in modern video games, and a recent report by the UK Gambling Commission estimated that 31% of children aged 11-16 have opened one [1]. Loot boxes are highly profitable, with some estimates stating that they will generate up to \$30 billion dollars for the video game industry in 2018 alone [2]” (Cairn & Zendle, 2019).

Following that:

“Indeed, some regulators have formally investigated whether loot boxes share enough similarities with forms of gambling, and determined that they should legally be regulated as gambling themselves. Early in 2018 Belgian and Dutch authorities ruled that some loot boxes violated national gambling legislation, and ordered that they be removed from video games” (Cairn & Zendle, 2019).

Finally, regarding the conclusions of their research:

“The results of this study provide further evidence of potentially important relationship between problem gambling and loot box spending. Overall, there was a

significant link between participants' scores on the Problem Gambling Severity Index and their loot box spending... Individuals who did not have gambling problems spent significantly less money on loot boxes than those who were problem gamblers, or at risk of problem gambling" (Cairn & Zendle, 2019).

So, what and how is being said here regarding the topic of loot-boxes. From these quotes, I would note that Cairn and Zendle focus on, as seen in the quote above, proving that there is indeed some connection between loot-boxes and problem gambling as well as the fact that in some countries this issue has been severe enough that the national authorities have had to interfere on the matter. Furthermore, they also emphasize the widespread nature and profitability of loot-boxes.

Moving on, to me it seems that the focus of Cairn and Zendle's research is mostly on grownups with teens and children having little mention. Also, while they discuss the possible negative effects that loot-boxes and problem gambling have on people, they mostly focus on, as mentioned, proving a link between the two. Therefore, to me what is significant and meaningful in Cairn and Zendle's article is proving to the readers of the existence link between loot-boxes and gambling and providing further understanding to the nature and causes of risks involved with the topic on addition to the concrete demonstrations of effects mentioned in the news articles.

In summary, when it comes to the nature of problems with loot-boxes news articles regarding the topic place more focus upon the concrete effects that they may have on the every-day lives of common people, placing emphasis on monetary and health issues. Research regarding the topic on the other and, as seen above, focuses more on the science and the gambling aspect behind loot boxes. But, regardless of where the focus lies, it could be claimed that both news and research regarding loot boxes serve to prove to the public that loot-boxes are not without some severe problems. However, for now we shall move our focus from what researchers and media to the next area of analysis: the gaming public.

5.1.2 Public discourse on problems with loot boxes

Thus far most of the material and discussion on this thesis the focus has been on media and researcher into loot boxes and monetization, however one area of discussion we have yet to analyze is that of the gaming public. To this end, we shall turn to the website Reddit.com which hosts various discussion forums to gauge what the public discourse has to say on these topics. More

specifically, we shall be looking at some of the top rated comments from three different posts on Reddit and analyzing them through Paul Gee's three questions.

These first comments are from post called *Personal experiences with loot box addiction*, which is a personal account given by an user going by screenname u/Jama4137 in regards to loot boxes in the game Call of Duty: Black Ops 3, released in the year 2015 by Treyarch:

“So when Blackops 3 came out it was a time in my life where I was able to dedicate a significant amount of time in my life to gaming. If you don't know anything about how supply drops work in BO3, basically they start off cosmetic and added the new weapons in later. It started with melee weapons but then moved to the guns and other ranged weapons. So naturally there was a pretty decent backlash against this at first, but then Treyarch gave everyone with a season pass a free guaranteed “weapon bribe” and 10 rare supply drops. So everyone forgot.

If I was smart I would have stopped there, but I had a \$25 visa gift card lying around and decided to throw in \$25 of my own money to try and get another gun. I ended up getting a sniper that was a piece of shit at the time. So I stopped there due to disappointment and waited till the next DLC came out, and by that time I think they had added 2-4 ranged weapons in by that time. Since it was the only game that I was playing at the time I justified spending another \$50 just to get...nothing. So because I was pissed I spent another \$100 and got something good enough to settle my rage.

Over next few months I spent \$200-\$300 mostly whenever a flashy sale came out, because the new weapons felt like they were keeping the game fresh for me. Most of the purchases were in small amounts of ~\$20 so I didn't notice it as much as I should have. I actually went back through my Amazon history so this is just a rough estimate from what I could find.

The thing that finally got me stop was when my roommate asked why I was spending money on a game that was going to be dead in a year” (u/Jama4137, 2018).

Now that we have data, let us move on to analyzing this story from the perspective of Gee's three questions, beginning with how does u/Jama4137's account informs us of issues with loot boxes and monetization. First of all, similar to articles discussed in sections 5.1 and 5.1.1 above, u/Jama4127 account focuses on the monetary losses they have suffered due to loot boxes and more specifically, due to the, presumable, randomized nature of loot boxes in question. Second point of notice is the

information that when criticism towards the monetization practices arose, the company handled this by giving certain sect of players in game benefits to, presumably, have them keep playing.

However, if I were to consider u/Jamal4137's statements from a different angle, one matter that strikes out from their account is lack of any history with gambling, however they do allude to having addictive personality, similar to as was described, for example, in Cairn and Zendle's (2019) research. Finally, as was noted in previous paragraph u/Jamal4137 account puts emphasis on the randomized nature of the monetization in Black Ops 3, combined with self-described addictive personality as the primary catalyst of their continued spending on them, which is in line with the accounts discussed on sections 5.1 and 5.1.1.

The next example we have comes from similar personal account on Reddit from post called *Thanks, GGG, for disabling your biggest moneymaker for me* from 2019, posted by u/CadenceLikesVGs, in which they recount their time with the video game Path of Exile, released originally in 2013 by Grinding Gear Games. They tell the following:

“I've been a supporter of Path of Exile since early 2012, when I bought my beta key. I have watched this game evolve from the time it only had two acts, to the juggernaut that it is today, and I am happy to have been here for the journey.

However, I have a bit of a problem. A gambling problem – and playing PoE was one of the ways I was dealing with it. Crafting, and the endgame gave me that thrill of tossing the dice, the anticipation of where they land... And it didn't cost me a dime. It wasn't a *problem* here – there was no consequences to me getting my fix other than never having enough alts and regals. It worked for me, it worked for my wallet.

As least it worked. Until mystery boxes were introduced in early 2015. I could ignore it for a while – I did not have disposable income at the time -, but in 2017, that changed. I had cash to burn. So I started buying supporter packs.

There were always leftover point after getting what I wanted. I bought a box or two – it was the Chaos and Order mystery box. I just wanted to spend my spare points to get something cool. But I got set pieces. So obviously I needed to buy more to complete the set. But I kept getting duplicates. So I needed more boxes. Oh hey, there's more supporter packs I can buy, and get more out of my money. And more duplicates... More boxes. More duplicates. More boxes... When your brain works like mine, *you can't stop*. There is always the little voice of the back of your head that goes “Yeah no

man, you should've quit like 30 boxes ago", but even when you're telling yourself to stop, you're still clicking buy, and you're still opening boxes.

And the cycle continued with (almost) every box, and every supporter pack. I own every supporter pack starting from Legacy – most of the points from those packs were spent on mystery boxes.

I can't do this anymore. It is a problem. I want to keep buying supporter packs, but I can't spend money on PoE, because I know that it's a slippery slope that won't stop until I spent everything, because my brain is fucked up.

...So on lark, I asked the support if they could help me out. Much to my surprise, I got a response fairly quickly: Yes. They can. There was a bit of a back and forth over nine days...but in the end, my ability to purchase loot boxes was disabled entirely, and they have been instructed to not lift this restriction, even if I tell them to, until the mentioned date.

What a *relief* that is. Thank you, GGG, for allowing me to enjoy the game, without exploiting my brain damage" (u/CadenceLikesVGs, 2019).

So how does u/CadenceLikesVGs account exemplify the issues with loot boxes? There is the use of examples from their personal life, e.g. "When your brain works like mine, *you can't stop*" (u/CadenceLikesVGs, 2019), and "I can't do this anymore. It is a problem. I want to keep buying support packs, but I can't spend money on PoE, because I know that it's a slippery slope that won't stop until I spent everything, because my brain is fucked up" (u/CadenceLikesVGs, 2019), which serve to highlight the effect that loot boxes can have on a person. Specifically, from their account we can see that, at least in their case, loot boxes turned into a psychological issue that eventually required them to resort to external aid from the company itself in order to control their spending habits. Furthermore, these accounts are similar to those examples given by Brooks & Clark (2019) as well as Cairns & Zendle (2019) in regards to how those with addictive personalities may have more notable issues with loot boxes due to their similarities to gambling.

However, considering that u/CadenceLikesVGs account mainly focuses upon the mental issues that arose from their loot box addiction, I would claim that one area they could have also focused upon was the more precise amounts of monetary losses they suffered due to loot boxes. Another point that they could have discussed was their contact with Grinding Gear Games in regards to their

issues, in that GGG could have refused to prevent them from buying loot boxes or that they never contacted the company in the first place.

Finally I would note that as was the case in the paragraph above, u/CadenceLikesVGs account is similar to the examples given above by Cairns & Zendle (2019) as well as Brooks & Clark (2019) and serve to highlight that the negative effects of loot boxes on mental state can be severe enough that u/CadenceLikesVGs had to resort to requesting the gaming company to block their ability to spend money. Furthermore, her accounting of the way GGG handled the issue serves to highlight that there are gaming companies out there that are willing to take the issues presented by loot boxes seriously.

For our final example of the public discourse around whether or not there are issues with loot boxes we have the following comments from the subreddit r/Games from a post titled *The ESRB says it doesn't see loot boxes as gambling*. This post was made as a reaction to an article of the same name by Jason Schreir in the magazine *Kotaku*, in which Schreir (2017) informs us that after having received requests to classify loot boxes as gambling, the Entertainment Software Rating Board, ESRB, refused to do so:

“ESRB does not consider loot boxes to be gambling,” said an ESRB spokesperson in an e-mail to Kotaku. “While there’s an element of chance in these mechanics, the player is always guaranteed to receive in-game content (even if the player unfortunately receives something they don’t want). We think of it as similar principle to collectible card games: Sometimes you’ll open a pack and get a brand new holographic card you’ve had your eye on for a while. But other times you’ll end up with a pack of card you already have”.

The following are some of the top rated comments from the Reddit post. First we have a comments made by user u/Kuchenjaeger (2017), which is in regards to then situation of loot boxes in Germany: “Neither does the German “USK” by the way. I emailed them about it a few weeks ago...They say it’s equal to buying those packets that contain random collectible stickers, or buying a ticket at a raffle”. This is then responded to by u/Jim3534 (2017): “How is buying a ticket at a raffle not gambling? You’re paying money for a chance to win something. It sounds like a small scale lottery or betting on a random event. It’s gambling if you bet on a horse race, but not if you bet that your raffle ticket will be pulled?” From these comments, I would note that while u/Kuchenjaeger’s (2017) comment mostly focuses on informing us of the situation in Germany and how the authorities do not

consider loot boxes to be gambling, u/Jim3535's (2017) comment expresses that any activity where customer spends money for a chance to get something should be considered gambling by definition.

Next, we have a comment made by u/Klondeikbar (2017):

“There are plenty of reasons to disagree with the ESRB decision here but the reality is, if you're fine with loot boxes you're going to see this decision as definitive proof that they're fine. If you hate loot boxes, like I do, you've got a fairly long list of reasons that this decision is stupid and they've all been discussed *endlessly* on this sub. I don't really expect this decision to change the discussion at all.

“The spokesperson added that any game with real gambling will always receive “Adults Only” rating, which would be poisonous for big publishers, as most big-box retailers will not sell A-O games in their stores”.

That stand out to me though. The ESRB is still funded by publishers and they're not going to bite the hand that pays all their fees”.

Their comments is then responded to by u/CommanderZx2 (2017):

“It cannot be defined as real gambling unless you are actually gambling real money with the chance to directly win real money in return. Buying a crate where you will always get something, regardless it being good or crap doesn't count.

The fact that you can sometimes sell the item you won does not matter either, otherwise you could say that any arcade game is gambling, because you can sell the physical prize you won”.

From the comments made by u/Klondeikbar and u/CommanderZx2, u/Klondeikbar's (2017) comment exhibits an expression of frustration with the decision made by the ESRB: “If you hate loot boxes, like I do, you've got a fairly long list of reasons that this decision is stupid...” and he goes on further to accuse ESRB of being partial towards gaming publishers. In contrast to this, u/Commander Zx2's (2017) comment is of different view, expressing that since there is a chance to win something and that there is no monetary prize involved there is no gambling.

Then we have a comment made by u/-Megrim- (2017):

“For me, it’s not about the legality of whether loot boxes are gambling or not. It’s not illegal to show violent or certain mature content to a minor, but the ESRB still rates products as appropriate for certain age groups for mature contents.

Loot boxes might not technically fit the legal definition of gambling, but there are aspects of buying and opening loot boxes that are psychologically identical to gambling. This is a predatory marketing scheme that exploits those with addictive personalities and those without monetary responsibility. These practices should be rated by the ESRB differently from normal in-game purchases”.

From u/-Megrim- (2017) I would note that they claim that the problematic nature of loot boxes stems from the psychological effects they may have on a person and that they need to be rated differently from the norm.

And finally, we have a comment made by u/SSJGSSJToast (2017), who states that “their example makes sense, every time you open one you get something, regardless of rarity. As usual, vote with your wallet. Don’t support loot boxes if you want to see them go away”, which is then responded to by u/HolyDuckTurtle (2017):

“Problem is when most of their revenue is made via small amount of whales, our boycott attempts have a very low effect.

So right now we have a system that is unlikely to be regulated, preys on gambling addictions, encourages developers to deliberately worsen their game, and is damn near impossible to financially protest against.

All we have is internet outrage, which they can probably choose to flat out ignore until we get tired of it and accept it as the norm”.

When it comes to u/SSJGSSJToast (2017) their argument is similar to that of u/Commander Zx2’s in that it is not gambling since the consumer always gets something in return and that best way to counter them is to not buy them. Similarly u/HolyDuckTurtle (2017) focuses upon the problematic nature of loot boxes via their addictive nature and how they gaming companies may utilize this nature for

further monetary gains and their comment carries a notable tone of resignation and perhaps even depression over the fact that this profitability makes protesting against loot boxes a challenge.

On the other hand, I would note that the consensus in the comments in the post focused with problem with loot boxes stemming from loot boxes themselves and how they can affect gamer and the consensus for the most part is that loot boxes need to be the target of regulation. With this in mind, one answer to this question is that the more participants of these conversations could instead focus upon the ways consumers could control themselves, similar to u/SSJGSSToast. Another answer is that the comments that hold less negative views on loot boxes are more critical of them.

Finally I would note that, as was discussed above, by citing various issues loot boxes may have on consumer, most notably the psychological and addictive effects as mentioned by u/-Megrin- and u/HolyDuckTurtle, which once again lead us back to the research done by Brooks & Clark (2019) as well as Cairn & Zendle (2019) on matter, the majority consensus on this post is of the opinion that there are issues with loot boxes and the core of the issues lies specifically with loot boxes themselves and that responsibility for regulating them lies with authorities such as ESRB.

So to summarize section 5.1.2, from personal anecdotes such as those made by u/CadenceLikesVGs (2019) and u/Jama4137 to the discussion in r/Games around the ESRB decision to not regulate loot boxes back in 2017 it could be safely claimed that in places the gaming audience for several years has had negative view in loot boxes, which can be traced back to 2013 as was noted in my Bachelor's thesis (Röning, 2018). As for the issues themselves while they are in similar line to the analysis had in sections 5.1 and 5.1.1 the emphasis on the gaming publics part in section 5.1.2 is more on the psychological and addictive effects that loot boxes may have and monetary losses are discussed more as consequence of said psychological effects. Now that we have discussed whether or not loot boxes are problematic in nature, it is time to move on to the next section and discuss the popularity of loot boxes among gaming companies.

5.2 Why loot boxes are so popular among video game companies

For step two of his CDA model, Fairclough (2001) advises us to identify possible obstacles to the solving of the social issue at hand (p.125). If we set up loot boxes and their links as the social problem we shall be looking at, the question that follows is what, exactly, are our obstacles. To find this out we need only ask ourselves the following question: who actually benefits from loot boxes.

The answer, of course, is the gaming companies that utilize them in their games. With that in mind, this section shall be looking into just why gaming companies favor loot boxes so much.

To answer this, let us first return to the articles regarding the player's spending money on loot boxes. On one instance two kids spent over £500 (Kleinman, 2019) and on another player spent \$17,000 (Gach, 2017). However another way to look at these article is that companies behind those games turned in a profit. A third example for us to look at is *Kotaku's* Cecilia D'Anastasio's (2019) article *Player Spends \$62,000 In Runescape, Reigniting Community Anger Around Microtransactions* which, as the name would suggest, tells the story about a player who spent \$62,000 on the game *Runescape* by the company *Jagex*. Money lost by player or money gained by company?

With these examples in mind we can start form an idea of just why gaming companies might be in favor of loot boxes and/or microtransactions: profits. To further understand just how profitable these loot boxes are to the companies let us turn next to *PCGamesN's* article, which tells us the following:

“FIFA Ultimate Team is reliably one of EA's biggest money makers every year, but you might not realize exactly how much the company's business is affected by the mode. Ultimate Team modes across all EA games last fiscal year made up 28% of the company's total net revenue” (Bailey, 2019A).

That is nearly one third of Electronic Arts profits, a company whose net worth in 2019 amounts to \$22.9 billion (Visnji, 2019).

These notable profits by gaming companies have not been left unnoticed by the authorities. In the UK Parliamentary report (2019) it is noted how the company Jagex also makes one-third of its profit from microtransactions (p.24). The UK report (2019) also noted Electronic Arts profits in regards to loot boxes from the year 2016, when the company made roughly half of its \$1.3 billion revenue from them (p. 28). Also, the UK report (2019) notes that “Loot box mechanics are integral to major games companies' revenues and evidence that they facilitate profiting from problem gamblers should be of serious concern to the industry” (p. 30) and furthermore that in the year 2018 over 40% of the revenue from the games that were released in the area of Europe came from transactions within games (p. 45).

From these examples we can see that gaming companies would have more that strong incentive to keep the loot boxes a staple in the industry. A good example of this incentive comes to us from the year 2018, when the Belgian Gaming Commission declared loot boxes to meet the country's criteria

for game of chance (Kyle Orland, 2018). Electronic Art's response to this declaration was to at first remain defiant over the decision, even risking court proceedings (Rebekah Valentine, 2018) but eventually the abided by the ruling made by Belgian authorities (Haydn Taylor, 2019).

In summary, one of the biggest obstacles with regards to answering the issues loot boxes have brought is the simple fact that they are very profitable form of monetization to the companies and as can be seen in the Belgian case, they are not very keen on giving up on their practices.

5.2.1 Analysis of Loot Box Popularity

This section will be going over the material discussed in section 5.2 more deeply by once again utilizing Gee's questions. To begin with, while we already covered Gach's and Kleinman's articles once already in the section 5.1.1 with the assistance of Gee's questions, this was in regards to the problem with loot boxes. However, in this section we shall briefly return to the two in regards to the profitability of loot boxes.

In Gach article (2017), as seen in the quotes in section 5.1.1 there is emphasis on the monetary sums spend on the game, which amounted up to \$17,000 and similar focus was placed upon the monetary amounts in Kleinman's (2019) article. So what is being said here and how? Simply put, taking into account the emphasis on money as well as the fact that these articles are from the timespan of two years we could argue that loot boxes are rather profitable to gaming companies. However, as mentioned in section 5.1.1, the argument could be made that if the articles were to focus less on the monetary amount that consumers spend on loot boxes, this could be argued to lead to less awareness of the cost of loot boxes and in turn lead to less criticism towards them.

However Gach's and Kleinman's articles are not the only ones using the numbers to highlight the profitability of loot boxes. Aside from the information regarding the "member of the public whose adult son built up considerable debts, reported to be in excess of £50,000 [\$62,000], through spending on microtransactions in British company Jagex's online game RuneScape" (D'Anastasio, 2019), from the article by D'Anastasio we can highlight the following quotes:

"Jagex said it makes a third of its revenue from the 10 percent of its players who spend money on microtransactions. In April, Jagex announced their highest revenues ever with \$115 million made in 2018. Jagex's CEO described it as the "fourth successive year of significant growth" (D'Anastasio, 2019).

Next quote:

“One player told Kotaku that he’s what game companies would consider a “whale,” a term for players who spend a lot on microtransactions. “When I got older and a job, I started to buy these microtransactions myself, I’d say I’ve spent over £500 on *RuneScape’s* microtransactions alone” (D’Anastasio, 2019).

So what is being said in these quotes? From first one, as the case was in the examples before, the article uses the monetary values to highlight the profit that gaming companies make from loot boxes. However, what is also highlighted in these quotes is that said profits appear to come from a small percentage of the players of the games.

On the other hand I would note that, as before, were the articles to omit mention of the profits the audience would be left without knowledge of the scale of the microtransaction business in the gaming industry. However, it could be argued that in important addition in regards to the discourse surrounding the profitability of the loot boxes from D’Anastasio’s (2019) article is the fact that a significant portion of profit from loot boxes comes from a limited group of people. Considering the discussion regarding the additivity of loot boxes in sections 5.1 and 5.1.1 this information could be said to come across as very damning towards gaming companies, considering also that the second quotes could be argued to imply a certain level of awareness on part of the gaming companies. With that, let us move on to analyzing the public discourse in regards to why loot boxes are so popular among gaming companies.

5.2.2 Public discourse in regards to popularity of loot boxes

For this section, I shall be analyzing some of the top rated responses from Reddit discussion forums regarding the profitability of loot boxes. First examples of this come from a post made by user *u/obamacare_mishra* to the subreddit *r/OutOfTheLoop* in 2019 titled *As a casual gamer, what’s a Loot Box and what’s the deal with EA calling them “surprise boxes” and the ethical connotation about the same*. First we have response from *u/SolDarkHunter* (2019):

“Answer: loot boxes are a mechanic in which you purchase a “grab bag” of game items and/or unlockables. You don’t know what’s in it until you open it, and you can’t open it without buying it.

Usually you can technically use in-game currency to buy these boxes... but it’s a *lot* faster to use real money. And often companies will put out “premium” loot boxes that can only be purchased with real money, and have much better rewards.

Naturally, companies have noticed that this is a damned *goldmine* for getting money out of players... some games are funded entirely by loot box sales. However, there has been backlash against this practice both by players who hate the random mechanic and “pay-to-win” nature of these games, and by parents who consider this a form of gambling (in most countries, legally speaking it isn’t *technically* gambling, but some are updating their laws about that).

EA is trying to dodge the issue by relabeling them “surprise boxes” and it isn’t working. People are angry at them for trying that”.

When it comes to u/SolDarkHunter’s comment, I would claim that the most notable part of their comments is in the third paragraph where they note that loot boxes are “a damned goldmine for getting money out of players” (u/SolDarkHunter, 2019), putting emphasis on the profitability of the loot boxes for the company, similar to what was discussed in section 5.2.1. Second matter of notice from u/SolDarkHunter’s (2019) comment is the mention of how with loot boxes it is “a lot faster to use real life money” and how premium loot boxes “have much better rewards”, which helps with explaining some of the incentive why players might want to spend actual money on loot boxes.

In response to the comment made by u/SolDarkHunter we have a comment made by u/FountainsOfFluids (2019):

“In regards to the pay-to-win: I believe some companies only put out cosmetic items in their loot boxes, while others include player upgrades such as better weapons, armor, and abilities.

So a spoiled rich kid might dump hundreds of dollars into loot boxes in order to get the best gear in the game, providing them with a significant advantage over players who have not spent extra money on them”.

With u/FountainsOfFluids (2019) comment the emphasis is once again on the nature of loot boxes and how they encourage spending money in order to gain advantage in whichever game they are associated with, as well as the sheer potential quantity of “hundreds of dollars” spent by players on loot boxes.

Next, we have comment made by u/CrnlButtcheeks (2019):

“Answer, they’re trying to push back against loot boxes being gambling outlets available to minors, which is illegal.

They're desperately trying to clinging at straws to try and keep them from outlawing loot boxes because that's a huge source of income for them.

EDIT: Also, a loot box is an item that can be purchased with real money or in-game currency. They essentially work like a slot machine where you have a chance to get highly coveted items that are (typically) only available from said loot boxes. This causes people with gambling problems or dump loads of cash into a game to get that "rush" of receiving items that are very rare to get".

I would claim that when it comes to u/CrnlButtcheeks (2019) comment, the most notable part is their claim that EA is "desperately clinging at straws to try and keep them from outlawing loot boxes because that's a huge source of income for them". This statement is similar to the previous comments discussed in this section, as well as in section 5.2.1, the emphasis is once again on the profitability of the loot boxes. Futhermore, u/CrnlButtcheeks (2019) comment, to me, exhibits a tone of condemnation towards the similarities between loot boxes and gambling as well as the ethically dubious profit gaming companies make from them.

Following that comes a comment made by u/rebooy_the_PC (2019) in response to u/CrnlButtcheeks's comment:

"Just to add to the part of this answer to help explain the point that it's "a huge source of income" for EA, we're talking in the billions.

For example, in their quarterly report for FY19, they reported (under Prepared Remarks) that their "Live services net bookings were a record \$2.41 billion, up 10 percentage points year on year" and mentioned that their Ultimate Team program was a "stable source of net bookings, growing 5% year on year".

EA's Ultimate Team is a program that involves their sports games like FIFA and Madden. It also uses loot box mechanics. According to this article about legislation concerning loot boxes, it "made about £850 million in 2018 from Ultimate Team across all its sports games, accounting for 21 per cent of the firm's net revenue, with the vast majority of that coming from Fifa games".

When it comes to u/reboot_the_PC (2019) comment I would claim that the most notable section is their notices of the profitability of loot boxes in the sums of "record \$2.41 billion" and "£850 million". In their comment the popularity of the loot boxes, at least on the gaming industry side, is explained once again with their profitability.

However, I would also like to note that while all of the example comments place emphasis on the profitability of loot boxes, only u/reboot_the_PC (2019) gives exact numbers as to just how profitable loot boxes are, so with that in mind it could be argued that had more of the commenters given more specific monetary amounts it could have placed further emphasis on why gaming industry favors loot boxes. Also, while some users such as u/SolDarkHunter (2019) and u/CrnlButtcheeks (2019) mention the gambling aspect of the loot boxes they do not go into further detail of this side of the issue, which could have arguably given further explanation to why players might be inclined to spent money on loot boxes, besides the supposed advantage they give in game.

Finally, as was noted numerous times in the previous paragraphs, most commenters focused upon *profitability* as the single most notable explanation for the popularity of loot boxes. This emphasis on profitability is in similar vein to the media articles, such as Gach (2017) and D’Anastasio (2019), discussed in the section 5.2.1.

In sections 5.1, 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 we identified there to be issues related to the gambling like nature of loot boxes and in this section, our purpose was to analyze what obstacles there are to handling these issues, as was advised by Fairclough (2001, p. 125) and when looking through sections of 5.2, 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 it could be argued that the most significant obstacle, at least from the gaming industry’s side, is the sheer profitability of loot boxes. This can be seen in the discourse by media, such as D’Anastasio’s (2019) article as well as examples of public discourse, such as comments made to the post made by u/obamacare_mishra (2019). On the side of the players, as can be seen in the comments of the post made by u/obamacare_mishra (2019) a notable explanation for their popularity is the sense of advantage they give to the player. However, as was stated previously, it could be argued that the more significant side of the issues rests at the lap of the gaming industry and this in turn raises several issues with ethicality in regards to profiting of a practice that has been proven to have negative aspects associated with it. Let us move on to our next section, where we shall discuss the ethicality of loot boxes and whether or not there is a need at all for such discourse to begin with.

5.3 For and against loot boxes and the responsibility of companies

For the third step in our thesis Fairclough (2001) advices us to ask whether or not social order ‘needs’ this problem (p. 125). For the purposes of our thesis our question in regards to this shall be whether or not there is any benefit at all to having these discussions of the issues that come with loot boxes. To answer that question, this section shall be looking more into what is being said not

only for and against loot boxes but also what is being said about the companies as well as the concept of responsibility.

In the category of what is being said against loot boxes we have already mentioned some points, but in order to recap: first of all we have articles such as the ones written by Gach (2017), D'Anastasio (2019) and Kleinman (2019) that tell us stories of players spending up to thousands of pounds/dollars on loot boxes and microtransactions, which can be in turn caused by the second point that can be made against loot boxes and that is the issue of gambling. From the research done by experts such as Cairns & Zendle (2019, p. 5-9) and Brooks & Clark (2019, p. 33) we have the information that those people who have problems with gambling related issues end up spending more money on loot boxes.

That leads to us to the question of what the stance of the gaming companies is on these matters. The following examples come to us from the UK Parliamentary report (2019):

“We put some of these concerns to Kerry Hopkins from Electronic Arts, who responded that the way they have implemented this mechanic in FIFA “is quite ethical and quite fun”. Yet this is noticeably out of step with the attitude of many of the gamers who contacted us following our evidence session, including those who vehemently rejected her characterization of packs not as loot boxes but as “surprise mechanics”. One gamer called the company’s testimony to us “a bare face lie”, and another told us that the company has heavily marketed and referred to their systems as ‘loot boxes’ for several years and [...] the mechanics of the system are exactly the same no matter what they choose to call it” (p. 28-29).

From this quote I would note that the UK representatives participating in these discussions seem to hold a degree of skepticism towards the claims made by the Electronic Arts representatives which is further amplified by the negative commentary they have heard from players (UK Parliament, 2019). I would argue further that by placing, seemingly, more emphasis on the statements of players the UK parliament could be seen as already holding a negative view towards the practices of gaming companies. Based on this a further argument could be made that the comments received from gamers then serve as to give further credibility to their stance.

On the matter of responsibility by gaming companies we have this excerpt from the UK Parliamentary report (2019), in which was noted that:

“The introduction of internet-connected games has significantly improved the design and gameplay of games. Developers can better understand their users and their behavior when playing a game. However, it also allows designers to build better compulsion loops into their games to make them more addictive. If a publishers is working on a freemium model, then it directly benefits them to try and keep the player on the platform for as long as possible. They can also use user data to maximize and target in-game purchases, or vary gameplay to correspond to the likelihood of a consumer making a purchase. The issue is compounded if the user is playing on a mobile device, which can provide notifications that give the company more opportunities to pull the user back into a game (p. 35).

From this section I would note that UK authorities exhibit here an awareness of the topics discussed in sections 5.2 to 5.2.2, namely just how profitable loot boxes are. Furthermore I would note that they display an awareness of the fact that due to said profitability there is an incentive for gaming companies to come up with ways to retain players on their games. These in turn, I would argue, could further the negative view that authorities have on loot boxes.

Also regarding the topic of gaming companies and responsibility we have the following statements:

“--representatives of games companies appearing before Parliament for the first time told us that they do not consider it either possible, or their responsibility, to define what counts as normal or excessive engagement with their games, which could help them to intervene to protect players from the potential harms of excessive play. Canon Pence, Epic Games’s General Counsel, told us that he does not consider it the company’s “primary responsibility to determine how much individual players should play *Fortnite*” because engagement “varies from person to person and it varies from time to time, even, on a person-by-person basis”. Similarly, Shaun Campbell, UK Country Manager of Electronic Arts observed that harmful levels of play are “what feels out of balance for the individual” (UK parliament, 2019, p.13-14).

When it comes to this statement I would draw attention to what the gaming companies are saying. From the statement above I would note a rather clear refusal on the part of gaming companies to take any responsibility when it comes to possible issues with problem gaming. One reason for this could be argued to be a possible risk of negatively affecting the profitability of loot boxes. Furthermore, such disregard for responsibility could certainly be argued to make whatever impression authorities have on loot boxes even more negative.

The next statement is regards to parenting controls:

“Games companies repeatedly stressed the significance of parental responsibility in prompting responsible gaming. For example, Epic Games’s Director of Marketing, Matthew Weissinger, told us: Parents can monitor play time through things like our weekly play usage report and then take advantage of some of these parental controls around screen time, access and purchasing access, in order to make decision based on how they would like either their child or somebody else who they share an account with to play the game” (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 14-15).

I would argue that this statement exemplifies further the reluctance of gaming companies to take responsibility on their part for the regulation of problematic gaming. More specifically, their claim seems to be that by implementing parental control into their games they have done all that they could possibly do and the rest is up to the parents of young players and that there are no possible further actions for them to take.

Then we have the following statements regarding player spending:

“The games companies we spoke to were generally reluctant to accept that they might have a role or responsibility to intervene proactively if a player’s spending fell outside of normal patterns. Moreover, they said that it would be too difficult to determine what level of spending might be harmful. Alex Dale, senior vice president of Kin, the makers of *Candy Crush Saga*, told us that while it used to alert when they reached a certain spending threshold, it had stopped doing so because of players feedback. He told us: we would send an e-mail out when a players’ spend was \$250 in a week for the first time. It was an e-mail that said, “We notice you are enjoying the game a lot at the moment. Are you sure you are happy with this?” [...] We got back. “I wouldn’t spend the money if I didn’t have it” and things like, “I’m fine, please leave me alone”. We felt it was too intrusive so we stopped doing that” (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 25).

Here we can see the UK authorities explicitly state what I noted on the previous statements regarding the willingness to accept responsibility for regulating possibly problematic gaming habits, such as excessive spending and in fact they claim that players themselves have no problem with their monetization practices (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 25). This, however, is notably contradicted by the by previously cited statements from the UK committee on how they received negative comments from players regarding loot boxes (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 28-29). Overall, when it comes to the discussion had in the UK committee hearing, I would claim that they did not have

favorable impression of loot boxes and related monetization practices and that the behavior of gaming company representatives in the meeting did not turn said impressions into more positive direction.

Our next examples regarding attitudes of gaming companies to loot boxes come from a video called *Turning Players Into Payers*. In the video Sterling (2017) discusses a system created by the company Scientific Revenue for mobile games, which is introduced by the company as follows:

“Mobile games are a massive business but competition is fierce and the cost to acquire new players keeps going up. To have any chance of turning players into payers game developers need to get their in-app purchase right. To have boost revenue you need deep insights into your players and the ability to customize prices for each. What if you could deliver the right price at the right time for the right buyer? We deliver dynamic pricing that increases conversion, reduces churn and boosts the lifetime revenue of your app. Our plugin easily integrates into your game and common game development environments where it captures hundreds of data points that inform purchase decisions. With predictive analytics and machine learning our dynamic pricing engine analyses pricing signals, segment’s players in real time and automatically delivers targeted prices. With better insights at your fingertips you can keep improving engagement and retention. Now nothing stands between you and monetization” (3:42 – 4:37).

From this statement I would highlight that Scientific Revenue seems to be well aware of the fact that in order to profit from in game monetization systems they need to make them appealing to players. The meaningful part here is that such mentality could be seen as an implied acknowledgment of their systems being designed purposefully addictive. This in turn, I would argue, seems to imply a lack of care or ignorance of the possible issues this could cause in players with addictive personalities.

Sterling (2017) summarizes further:

“---that introductory video pretty much explains how you, the players, are being observed and studied by a piece of software. Learning what it can about your income, when you, how you play, where you play, even what type of phone you have to better know how hit you with in-app purchases. Essentially Scientific Revenue is a stealth predator that mobile games have been integrating into their product so that it may hide in the bushes and wait to pounce when you’re at your most susceptible” (4:52 – 5:21).

Sterling's (2017) statement here, to me, serves as a clearly worded explanation of the possible issues when it comes to the privacy of players as well as the ethics of monetizing games by "spying" on data of gamers and their playing habits. Also, I would argue that the statement above serves as a further example of the acknowledgment on the part of gaming industry that their monetization practices are addictive by deliberate design.

For further information on the attitudes of gaming companies, we have a presentation made by two companies by the name of ACI Universal Payments and Newzoo, which was published under the name *What Turns Players Into Payers – Understanding The Gaming Payments Experience*. In Bosman's and McDonald's (2018) presentation we can find the following:

"In 2018, the global games market will reach \$137.9 billion and by 2021, mobile gaming alone will be a \$100 billion market. While the potential revenue opportunity for games has never been higher, the free-to-play model and abundance of game choices have given gamers the power to choose where, how, and when they spend their money. Games get one chance to engage, delight, and convert their players.

Understanding the nuances in gamer's paying habits, experiences, and preferences, and how they differ across demographic groups helps publishers craft top-quality and custom experience for their most treasured gamers (p. 3).

Similar to Sterling's (2017) video on the monetization philosophy of games, I would argue that Bodman's and McDonald's (2018) statements highlight an acknowledgement of the fact that in order to turn a profit from loot boxes they need to be designed to be as appealing, or as addictive, as possible. So to summarize, on the part of the gaming companies there seems to be a clear acknowledgement that design of loot boxes needs to be addictive, but no acknowledgment of the possible issues or consequences that could arise from this. Their focus is solely on the profits.

For our final example on the gaming companies' attitudes towards loot boxes we shall return to the case of Belgium and loot boxes. As was mentioned by Orland (2018a) loot boxes were categorized under gambling by Belgian law. However as can be seen in this excerpt from a follow up by Orland (2018b) this was met with some resistance:

"In the months since Belgian Gaming Commission determined that certain video games loot boxes constituted illegal gambling, publishers like Blizzard, Valve, and Take-Two have removed loot boxes from their games in the country. Electronic Arts,

though, has yet to remove the randomized items from its recent FIFA games, a decision which seems poised to set up a court fight.

Machine-translated reports from Belgium's *Niwsblad* and *Metro* newspapers suggest that Belgian gaming commission has now referred the matter to the country's public prosecutor's office, which is conducting an investigation into it.

Any such prosecution would then go before a judge, which may be a legal battle EA is looking for. In a May conference call, EA CFO Andrew Wilson stated the company's position that the loot boxes in FIFA are not a form of gambling. That's "firstly because players always receive a specified number of items in each pack, and secondly we don't provide or authorize any way to cash out or sell items or virtual currency or real money".

From this statement (Orland, 2018b) I would note that Belgian authorities consider it to be a responsibility of companies to regulate loot boxes in their games. Furthermore, similar to their attitude in the discussions that were had in the UK Parliament (2019, p. 13-14) gaming companies are unwilling to accept any responsibility, to the extent that they are willing to go to court (Orland, 2018b).

For another example of how the decision by Belgium was met by gaming companies we have this information from an article by Taylor (2018):

"Electronic Arts, whose game FIFA 18 is in violation of the law, said that the BGC has not been in contact or directly shared its report findings. The publishers added that it would "welcome the dialogue with ministers Geens" and denied that any of its games could be considered gambling.

"We strongly believe that our games are developed and implemented ethically and lawfully around the world, and take these responsibilities very seriously," a spokesperson told *GameIndustry.biz*.

"We care deeply that our players are having a fun and fair experience in all our games, and take great care to ensure each game is marketed responsibly, including in compliance with regional ratings standards".

From this statement I would note the attempts of Electronic Arts to downplay the gambling like aspects of loot boxes (Taylor, 2018). I would consider this, paired with Orland's (2018) article on Belgium's case above, to be yet another example of the unwillingness of gaming companies to take

responsibility for loot boxes or regulate them in any way. I would argue further that this due to the notable profitability of loot boxes.

In summary, from the example discussed in this section 5.3 I would claim that gaming companies are willing to resort to many methods when it comes to defending their practices, from downplay of the severity of issues related to loot boxes to lying and outright denial of responsibility, which is, I would argue, due to the profitability of loot boxes, as was discussed in sections 5.2 to 5.2.2. Such actions could be argued to lead to severe ethical issues, especially if we take into account the issues caused by loot boxes discussed in sections 5.1 to 5.1.2. I would argue further that this issue of ethics has not gone unnoticed by national authorities discussing these issues.

Now that we have gathered data on the attitudes and opinions regarding loot boxes as well as how much responsibility gaming companies should have in regards to them, we shall move on to analyzing these examples through Gee's three questions.

5.3.1 Analysis on the companies and loot boxes

For this section I will be going over the material from section 5.3 with the help of Gee's questions for the sake of deeper analysis. For starters, the first subject I will be analyzing are the statements made in the UK Parliamentary report, and what is being said in it. From the examples given we can see the following: the company's response, EA in this case, seems to be to downplay the effects of the loot boxes and present them as harmless fun, which goes against what we have discussed thus far and, as stated above, against what the committee has been hearing (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 28-29). EA furthermore goes on to claim that loot boxes are, in their opinion, "ethical" (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 28).

Also, as can be seen from the examples mentioned above, gaming companies could have been said to be reluctant to take responsibility for the actions of individual players and emphasize that responsibility should be more on said players for their actions and, in the case of young children, parents should be taking on more care in regards to the gaming habits of their children (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 14-15, 25, 28-29). The gaming companies go further on to claim that they cannot be expected to be the ones responsible to determine what level on engagement (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 14) or what level of monetary spending could be considered to be healthy (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 25).

Furthermore, in the UK Parliamentary report (2019) in regards to the responsibility of parents it is noted that “parental control can be easily subverted when “most young people playing video games know more about their computers than their parents do”” (p. 15). In addition to that, of note is that the Parliamentary report also takes in to account the attitudes of the gaming public in regards to the attitude of gaming companies as can be seen in the mention of the gamers who call out the companies statements (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 28-29).

From example mentioned above I would note that there seems to be a strong tone of disapproval from the UK authorities towards the statements made by the gaming companies, this is exemplified by the statements made in regards to parental controls in EA games (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 15). Based on the previous examples, gaming companies, and EA in particular, are downplaying the effects of loot-boxes on people and putting emphasis on the systems they have already in place as the parental control that have been mentioned; in fact, there could be claimed to be a tone of desperation to be allowed to keep utilizing loot boxes in their games.

However, I would also note that the gaming companies could have taken more responsibility in regards to the possible effects that loot-boxes may have on the gaming public, however as we noted in section 5.2 and 5.2.1 loot boxes are quite profitable to the gaming companies, a fact also noted by Parliamentary report (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 35).

Moving on to Sterling’s (2017) video, looking at the examples mentioned above the statements made by Scientific Revenue regarding their system, they seem to consider it quite good (3:42 – 4:37). This is perhaps best exemplified by notable focus on the Scientific Revenues part purely on the profitability with no mention of any the negative effect monetization may have on people not to mention there seems to be lack of discussion on their part on the ethics of tracking the data of the people whose phones contain games with the Scientific Revenues system.

As for their part Sterling (2017) outright condemns the system made by Scientific Revenue claiming that what the company has made is essentially spyware on the mobile device of their customers (4:52 – 5:21). Of note here is Sterling’s focus on the ethicality of the system by mentioning the fact that the players whose phones and games contain the game are seemingly completely unaware of the fact that the program is there in the first place (Sterling, 2017, 4:52 – 5:21).

On the other hand I would also note that, on the Scientific Revenues part, as was noted above, there could be more focus on possible negative aspects on the system as well as the ethicality of it all. For

Sterling's part the case would be *vice-versa*; with focus the possible positive sides of the system made by Scientific Revenue.

Finally, for Scientific Revenues part, as has been mentioned before the gaming industry on the side of companies focus primarily on the profit side of loot boxes and monetization, so it makes sense that they focus on the profitability and positive aspects of their system. For Sterling's part that they focus the negative aspects of the system is in line with example in sections 5.1 and 5.1.1 in regards to the how media has taken focus on emphasizing the problematic sides of loot boxes and monetization to inform the public of them since as can be seen in the examples from the UK report gaming industry seems reluctant to do so.

As for the presentation by Bosman and McDonald as noted above they also focus on the profitability of monetization by presenting possible monetary sums to be made from players (Bosman & McDonald, 2018, p. 3). Their focus I also upon the following highlights: "Mobile has the most players but the smallest share of players", "Enjoyment is key motivator to spend money in game", "Paying gamers can be engaged through competitive elements and rewards" and "(Younger) pc/console gamers are driving the transition to digital" (Bosman & McDonald, 2018, p. 11). Furthermore: "German gamers most interested in seamless experience", "(American) gamers are warming to cryptocurrencies" and "PayPal dominates preference and use in every country" (Bosman & McDonald, 2018, p. 24), as well as: "Payment fraud is a top concern for gamers and a continuing barrier to payment", "Loyalty/Reward programs for in-game spending improves payment experience", "Older gamers are less concerned about security than younger gamers" and "German gamers are not negatively affected by security measures" (Bosman & McDonald, 2018, p. 33).

As can be seen, not only do they focus on the monetary but they further emphasize the profitability of gaming monetization by going in to how to most efficiently maximize said profitability. Also of notice is the overall optimistic tone of the presentation in regards to possible obstacles to monetization, such as security concerns (Bosman & McDonald, 2018, p. 33) and that the only negative aspects when it comes to monetization is from the perspective of gaming industry, exemplified by the above mentioned concern that fraud concerns are a "barrier to payment" (Bosman & McDonald, 2018, p. 33).

So with this in mind it could be argued that the most significant change that could be made to the presentation is to focus upon the negative aspects of monetization from the perspective of players, such as excessive spending. I would also claim that the argument could be made that the

presentation further exemplifies the focus gaming industry has on pure profitability that could be made from players, and as was with Sterling's video, a discussion could be raised in regards to ethicality of it all.

Finally, we move onto the case of Belgium and our first order of business is to determine how the attitudes of gaming companies are presented in the examples. Whereas other news articles regarding gaming companies, loot boxes and monetization with monetary sums, the articles by Orland (2018b) and Taylor (2018) place focus upon the negative reaction that gaming companies have had towards the Belgian law, and as was with the UK report (2019, p. 28-29) the company Electronic arts is placed in spotlight in Orland's (2018b) article. Furthermore, in his article Orland (2018b) focuses on EA's willingness to go to court over their ability to use loot boxes in their games and profit from it. In addition to that, similar to the parliamentary report Orland's (2018b) articles gives an example of the attitude on EA's part that their loot boxes are not gambling and that they are completely ethical, similar to their attitudes in the UK report (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 28). Taylor's (2018) examples hold similar attitudes, namely that EA considers their games to be "implemented ethically and lawfully". However Taylor's (2018) article also differs from Orland's in that it also gives a voice to authorities:

"Minister of Justice Koen Geens, who commission the investigation following the fallout over battlefront II loot box controversy last year, said in a statement today that mixing games is "dangerous for mental health".

"We have already taken numerous measures to protect both minors and adults against the influence of, among other things, gambling advertising," he added. "That is why we must also ensure that children and adults are no confronted with games of chance when they are looking for fun in a video game."

If we need to take one thing of note from the matters focused upon in Taylor's article, then it would be that from the above mentioned quote we can see that at least in Belgium authorities very aware and concerned over the negative aspects of loot boxes, some of which were covered in sections 5.1 and 5.1.1, such as mental health issues. Another thing of can be found from the very beginning of Taylor's (2018) article:

"Following five-month investigation into Star Wars Battlefront II, FIFA 18, Overwatch, and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, the BGC found that only Battlefront II did not directly contravene Belgian gambling legislation".

What is of interest here is that by focusing on the fact that a game made by EA, namely FIFA 18, is among the games that break the law and taking into account statements made by EA spokesperson also found in the article, it presents a contradiction in the actions of EA.

I would also claim that one significant change regarding the articles would be for both of them regarding the Belgium case to omit the statements made by EA, as well as omit mentions of the resistance that EA and gaming industry had towards the legislation by Belgian authorities. However by focusing on the resistance by the gaming industry towards these laws and depicting the contradictions between EA's actions and words these articles serve to inform the public of the nature of gaming industry how apparently the profitability gained from loot boxes is of such importance that they are willing to challenge laws of another country to keep them at their games.

To summarize, the purpose of this section was to study whether or not there is any need for discourse in the first place regarding the issues with loot boxes and monetization. As we look back on the examples analyzed here, a few details are of note: firstly, as can be seen in the UK report (2019) as well as the articles by Orland (2018b) and Taylor (2018) as far as the gaming industry is concerned the issues with loot boxes are not as severe as claimed and that they are not related to gambling. However, as can also be seen exemplified in the UK report and the two articles there could be claimed to exist an amount of contradiction and denial in regards to the topic on behalf of the gaming companies, as well as desire to downplay the amount of responsibility they have regards to the these matters, as exemplified in the following quote:

“Having struggled to get clear answers and useful information from companies across the games industry in particular, we hope that our inquiry and this report serve to focus all in this industry—particularly large, multinational companies whose games are played all over the world—on their responsibilities to protect their players from potential harms and to observe the relevant legal and regulatory frameworks in all countries their products reach” (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 61)

Secondly, when looking at gaming industry's internal discussions in regards to loot boxes and profitability, such as exemplified by Sterling's (2017) video and the presentation by Bosman & McDonald (2018) the focus seems to be purely on the profitability and what positive there is for the gaming industry to gain, with no discussion on any negative aspects towards players, which leads to the third point, that it could be argued based on Sterling's video, the two articles by Orland and Taylor and the UK report that “responsibility” in regards to any negative aspects of the topic has fallen upon media and authorities since for gaming companies themselves having these discussion

would affect their profits. With these points in mind it could be argued that at the time it was felt there was cause for discussion, especially in regards to ethics and responsibility of the gaming companies when it comes to loot boxes. Next, let us move on to analyze what the gaming publics had to say in regards to loot boxes and ethics.

5.3.2 Public discourse on ethics of loot boxes

This section shall be looking into comments from three Reddit discussion posts that I deemed relevant to the topic of ethicality of loot boxes. First off we have post from the subreddit *r/AndroidGaming* titled *The ethical problem of loot boxes in gaming*, which was started as a reaction to an article in the magazine Kotaku by Heather Alexandra titled *Loot Boxes Are Designed To Exploit Us*. In the article Alexandra (2017) goes into the nature of loot boxes, discusses the gambling like aspect of them and takes a strong stance on them being addictive and unethical, stating that “they exist largely to exploit players and create addicts”.

Next, we have some of the comments from the Reddit post, starting with a comment by *u/TheWorldLiterally* (2018) where they state that “as much I dislike loot boxes, the Android developers are much worse about player manipulation and they don’t even attempt to hide it”. In response to this we have a comments from a now deleted user, to whom we will refer to as *u/[deleted]* from now on. In their comment they state the following:

“I think this is why mobile gaming isn’t taken very seriously. The amount of cancerous in app purchases and loot boxes is overwhelming. No one really wants to support it, but almost every popular mobile game does it. No one seems to care all that much. It’s why I personally think mobile gaming can’t advance much further until this is addressed. Companies are taking advantage of their audience, and it really sucks” (*u/[deleted]*, 2018).

From the comment made by *u/TheWorldLiterally* (2018), I would claim that the most notable part is the tone of condemnation towards the practice of loot boxes: “much worse about player manipulation and they don’t even attempt to hide it” (*u/TheWorldLiterally*, 2018). Similar tone of condemnation can be found in the response by *u/[deleted]* (2018), especially in their condemnation of what they describe as gaming companies taking advantage of susceptible gamers. In both of their comments there is notable negative connotation associated with loot boxes that could be argued to

be similar to Sterling's (2017) remarks in regards to the company Scientific Revenue as noted in sections 5.3 and 5.3.1 and how open gaming companies are about the manipulation of players.

Following that, we then have a comment by u/Dopeword which at the time of writing was at -30 downvotes. In their comment they state the following:

“If loot boxes make kids addicted to spending money on games, guns kill people. Yes, loot boxes can be used unethically to take advantage of people. But loot box mechanics is not to blame. There is nothing wrong with spreading out your progression like this. What if your loot box system only uses in game currency?”
(u/Dopeword, 2018).

Their comment is then responded to by u/FTG65 (2018) who state that “there are ways to make them somewhat better, such as pointing out exactly your chances at acquiring an item from the loot box, as it's already required by law at some countries”.

From u/Dopeword comment, the most notable point is their claim that the issue of loot boxes is more on the player side of things rather with loot boxes themselves, as can be seen in their remark that “if loot boxes make kids addicted to spending money on games, guns kill people” (u/Dopeword, 2018). Furthermore, while u/Dopeword (2018) does acknowledge the possibility of unethical practices with loot boxes, it is downplayed. Also of note is that their comment is notably downvoted to negative, so it could be claimed that attitudes similar to his are in the minority when it comes to discussion of ethics in loot boxes. This is reflected in the response by u/FTG65 (2018) who claims that there are ways to improve the ethicality of loot boxes.

On the other hand, there is a notable overall vagueness in the tone condemnation in the comments by u/TheWorldLiterally and u/[deleted] in that had they gone into further detail of just how the loot box practices are unethical, such as their how, exactly, does their addictive nature work and what negative effects, such as monetary losses, they might have. They also could have suggested ways of making loot boxes more ethical. Moving on to the comment made by u/Dopeword, there could have been more specifics on why the issue of loot boxes is on the gamer side and not on the mechanics side. As for the comment made by u/FTG65, while they do offer some ideas for solving the ethicality of loot boxes, they do not go into specifics on how to accomplish this.

Finally, taking into account the negative reception towards u/Dopeword's views as well as the negative view that can be seen comments by u/TheWorldLiterally and u/[deleted] it could be argued that the gamers do indeed have issues with the way loot boxes and furthermore it could be argued

that there is some desire to see these issues addressed, as can be seen in u/FTG65's (2018) suggestion on how to improve the ethicality of loot boxes or in the remarks made by u/[deleted] (2018) that "no one seems to care that much. It's why I personally think mobile gaming can't advance much further until this is addressed".

Next we have posts from two different subreddit which are titled *EA: They're not loot boxes, they're "surprise mechanics," and they're "quite ethical"*, which both were made as a response to an article of the same name from PCGames^N. In the article Bailey (2019B) reports on the statements made by "Kerry Hopkins, EA's VP of legal and government affairs" during questioning by the UK Parliament, where she claimed that the loot boxes used in the games published by EA were ethical in nature.

Beginning with the responses made to the post in the subreddit r/technology: "It's not kidnapping, it's surprise adoption and it's quite ethical" (u/Thing9009, 2019), "It's not stealing, it's surprise acquisition and it's quite ethical" (u/27Rench27). When it comes to these comments made by u/Thing9009 and u/27Rench27, there is a notable mocking tone in their comments, taking Hopkins' statements in regards to loot boxes and mocking them by replacing loot boxes with crimes and downplaying them similar of how Hopkin's refers to loot boxes as "surprise mechanics" (Bailey, 2019B).

Following these we a comment made by u/NostalgiaSchmaltz (2019), where they state that "...it's like they're TRYING to get everyone to hate them", which is then responded to by another user who's account has also been deleted, referred as u/[deleted2] from here on: "For over a decade now. They don't care about customers. They figured out that customers will just continue to take their bullshit and still give them money" (u/[deleted2], 2019).

I would claim that when it comes to the comments made by u/NostalgiaSchmaltz and u/[deleted2], their choice of words, such as "trying to get everyone to hate them" (u/NostalgiaSchamltz, 2019) as well as "consumers will just continue to take their bullshit" (u/[deleted2], 2019) not only hold a mocking tone similar to one in the comments made by u/Thing9009 and u/27Rench27 but also hold a very negative, almost cynical, tone and view towards the views expressed by Hopkins in the article (Bailey, 2019B).

Then we have the following comment by u/tomkatt (2019) in which they state that "you don't pay extra for mechanics. Game mechanics are intrinsically part of the game. Hence why they're game mechanics. This is horse shit". This is then responded to by u/ready-ignite (2019) who states that

“EA is the cigarette company peddling addictive vices to children and pretending that’s somehow ok because they wrapped it in colorful child-friendly packaging”.

I would note that in the comments made by u/tomkatt (2019) and u/ready-ignite (2019), they continue the trend of expressing negative views towards the statements made in the article (Bailey, 2019B). In u/tomkatt’s (2019) case this can be seen in the following choice of words: “this is horse shit”, and furthermore their remarks in regards to the nature of game mechanics could be argued to carry a tone of condemnation towards the unethality of loot box practices as described in Hopkins’s statements in the article (Bailey, 2019). As for u/ready-ignite (2019) they express their negative views towards the practices by comparing Electronic Arts with a drug dealer and loot boxes to narcotics “wrapped [it] in colorful child-friendly packaging”.

Finally we have a comment made by u/bearlick (2019) which states ““No microtransactions” my arse”. Their comment is then responded to by the following:

“As spokesperson of EA, I would like to assure our audience that there will be no “microtransactions” in our next gaming blockbuster.

On a completely unrelated note, I’m happy to introduce our new, state-of-the art game monetization technology, “smallpurchases”!” (u/pengytheduckwin, 2019).

Starting with u/bearlick (2019), their comment of ““No microtransaction” my arse” carries with a negative tone similar to what has been expressed by previous commenters on the Reddit post. As for u/pengytheduckwin (2019) their comment’s tone is of similar mocking nature as previous comments, e.g. u/Thing9009 (2019), claiming that EA’s statements in regards to their loot box practices are lies and that they have no intention of actually doing anything about it.

However, I would also note that while there is notable negative and mocking tone in the comments, they mostly focus on surface level mockery of the statements made by Hopkins’s in the article (Bailey, 2019) without giving further explanation for the reasons for the negative tone, such as going into detail in regards to the aspects of loot boxes that they consider to be negative. An example of this can be seen in u/ready-ignites (2019) comment, where they compare loot boxes to narcotics but do not give any further detail in regards to the addictive nature of loot boxes, such as were discussed in the sections 5.1, 5.1.1 and 5.1.2. Furthermore, while there is also some cynicism in regards to the statements made in the article (Bailey, 2019) in regards to EA’s loot box practices, as can be seen in the comments of u/[deleted2] (2019) and u/ready-ignite (2019) they do not offer any ideas or comments on any possible methods of how to counter these practices.

Finally, as was noted many times previously, there is a notable tone of negativity towards Hopkin's statements (Bailey, 2019), with the commenters take a dim view towards loot boxes and viewing them as problematic in nature. When taking this negativity into account and combining it with the notable mockery towards the statements made by EA (Bailey, 2019) it could be claimed that not only do commenters considered there to be an issue of ethics when it comes to loot boxes but also that gaming companies, in this case EA, have no actual intention of addressing the issue in any meaningful way on their end.

Moving on to our third and final post, the following comments come from one made in subreddit r/Games which were, as stated previously, also made response to Bailey's (2019) article. Starting with comment made by u/Guardianpigeon (2019), who states that "They know most of the politicians hearing their case will understand exactly 0% of this kind of stuff so they are free to lie as much as they want". This is then responded to by the following comment by u/Hullu (2019):

"It goes both ways with those things. I listened to a pretty big chunk of that hearing and they were pretty dodgy with some answers (mostly epic) but a lot of questions was dumb as fuck too. They really need more experts that specialize in specific fields when hosting those hearings or helping them understand what is going on".

I would claim that when it comes to comments made by u/Guardianpigeon (2019) and u/Hullu (2019), one notable aspect of their comments is the tone of negativity similar to that expressed by the commenters in the post in r/technology, which in this case is expressed as cynical view towards the capability of politicians to take action towards handling of loot boxes, as can be seen in the following example: "They really need more experts that specialize in specific fields when hosting those hearings or helping them understand what is going on" (u/Hullu, 2019).

Then we have the following comment by u/Hyroero (2019):

"Very ethical, very cool. Seriously what a weird way to try and spin things, I sure do love spending money on a chance to get potential digital items. Reminds me of pachinko in Japan "technically not being gambling and thus getting around the laws there".

From the comment by u/Hyroero (2019) the tone of mockery and negativity towards the loot box practices of gaming companies continues: "Very ethical, very cool". Furthermore, their negativity is also expressed by claims of gaming companies attempting to try avoiding the issues addressed in the UK hearing when they state "what a weird way to try and spin things".

Following that, we have to following comment from u/GodofDumbness (2019) which goes:

“Surprize mechanics sound like some shitty children’s horror game. “Our FIFA Ultimate Team and our packs – is actually quite ethical and quite fun, quite enjoyable to people”. I’m sure it’s also rage inducing. But EA won’t be brining that up”.

This is the responded to by u/OrangeJuisceAssassin (2019) who says that they’re “glad they’re telling me what’s ethical and not me telling them...”.

When it comes to the comments of u/GodOfDumbness (2019) and u/OrangeJuisceAssassin (2019), from them we can find further examples of both tone negativity: ‘I’m sure it’s also rage inducing’, as well as tone of mockery: “Glad they’re telling me what’s ethical”.

For our last example from the post, we have the following comment made by u/Khanstant (2019):

“Gambling isn’t legal in my state, but I wonder if I could open a Surprise business. Very ethical, you see what I’ll do is make games where you pay money and there’s a chance for surprise where you win something. Don’t worry, I still own whatever they win, it’s just for fun. I also have this cool idea where before charging anyone for the games, I let em get a taste first, get into the habit of playing and seeing how fun it is to get surprises.

If people can’t afford to play my surprise games, then I’ll do this cool thing where I let them play for a little while as long as they be good kids and come in every day and let the paying customers beat them at the game. This is really fun stuff and is nothing like a casino, so I should be good, right?”.

Their comment is the responded to by u/azhatabeula (2019) who say “that sounds very ethical of you.

From u/Khanstant’s (2019) comment, if look at statements such as “Don’t worry, I still own whatever they win, it’s just for fun” and “this is all really fun stuff and is nothing like casino, so I should be good, right?” we can see more examples of the mockery directed towards the claims of the gaming companies statements in regards to ethicality of loot boxes. Furthermore u/Khanstant’s (2019) use of sarcasm draws attention to how loot boxes work by addicting players to them, which harkens back to what was discussed in sections 5.1, 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 in regards to the nature of loot boxes. As for u/azhtabeula’s (2019) response, it serves to add to the mockery directed towards gaming industry in the comment made by u/Khanstant by going along with its sarcasm.

I would also not that since the example comments chosen primarily focus on surface level reactions and mockery, they do not go into great amount of detail when it comes to any claims stated in them. Examples of this are u/Guardianpigeon's (2019) and u/Hullu's (2019) claims in regards actions of politicians and u/Hyroero's (2019) claim in regards to pachinko. Furthermore the comments could have discussed the part of the gaming public plays in these affairs, in addition to the focus on part of the politicians and gaming companies.

Finally and most notably, I would claim that the comments in the post serve as further examples that highlight the negative views that the gaming public has towards loot boxes. Furthermore, they also give as examples of the frustration of the players with the government at their seeming inability to act in order to handle issues with loot boxes. The comments also highlight that players primarily hold gaming companies such as Electronic Arts responsible for the issues that stem from loot boxes.

So to further summarize the section of 5.3.1 as far gaming public is concerned there are indeed ethical issues when it comes to loot boxes, with notable concern over the use of loot boxes to make a profit by exploiting those with gambling related issues (e.g. u/TheWordLiterally, 2018; u/[deleted], 2018) as well as outright denial by gaming companies to acknowledge these issues (e.g. u/Thing9009, 2019; u/27Rench27, 2019) to desire to see actions taken by authorities to tackle the issues with loot boxes since gaming companies are unwilling to do so (e.g. u/Guardianpigeon, 2019; u/Hullu, 2019). Thus, the views of the gaming public are in accordance with some of the opinions expressed by media that were discussed in the section 5.3.1 (e.g. Sterling, 2017). Moving on, in the next section we shall be looking into some of the responses by various national authorities towards loot boxes.

5.4 What has been done regarding loot boxes

For my fourth and final step that I will take from Fairclough (2001) is that I shall be utilizing, he instructs us to identify possible solutions to the societal issue we have on hand (p. 125). In the context of my thesis, in this section I shall discuss some examples of what discussion were had during the time period in regards to regulation of loot boxes.

Firstly, let me return to a topic previously discussed in this thesis, and that is the Belgian gambling law. While I have already discussed what reactions there were towards it, I have yet to mention the actual legislative actions that could have been taken towards those who broke the law. From the article written by Taylor (2018) we have the following information:

“Violation of gambling laws is a criminal offence and Electronic Arts, Valve, and Activision Blizzard could each face a €800,000 fine if the offending loot boxes are not removed. There is also scope for a five-year prison sentence but, these punishments can be doubled when minors are involved.

However, unlike the recent decision from the Netherlands Gaming Authority, there is no hard deadline on when the game operators must comply with the law”.

From this quotes I would note that based on the monetary punishments and the harsh sounding prison sentenced should minors be involved, the Belgian authorities take the possible issues of loot boxes quite seriously. However, despite the harsh promises they do not place as much severity on actually enforcing these decision, as can be seen in their willingness to give gaming companies leeway on compliance towards these new regulations.

Next, we have the UK Parliament’s report from 2019 and from some choice sections selected from it, I would note that, firstly, the UK Parliament did seem to, at the time, take the possible issues that could be a consequence from loot boxes quite seriously: “identify the key questions that need to be addressed and develop a strategy to support high-quality, independent research into the long-term effects of gaming” (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 61), and that they did seem to think that there were similarities between loot boxes and gambling: “...should immediately establish a scientific working group to collate the latest evidence relating to the effects of gambling-like mechanics in games. The group should produce an evidence-based review of the effects of gambling-like game mechanics, including loot boxes and other emerging trends” (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 62). Secondly, the Parliament did seem consider that part of the responsibility laid at the hands of gaming companies, as can be seen in their demands towards gaming companies to share data (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 61). Finally, the actions measures recommended are primarily focused on the protection of children (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 62).

Aside from the Belgian case and the UK Parliamentary report, there was another notable legislative action in regards to loot boxes. In the May of 2019, Senator Josh Hawley of the United States Republican Party introduced a bill “to regulate certain pay-to-win microtransactions and sales of loot boxes in interactive digital entertainment products, and for other purposes”

From the measures proposed by Senator Hawley I would note that the main concern seems to be on what damage could be caused to minors via loot boxes (e.g. Senate Bill 1629, 2019, section a-1-A, a-1-B, a-2-A, a-2-B). Also of interest is the demand that gaming companies should focus have some level of awareness over the age of their players (Senate Bill 1629, 2019, section b-2-B). These

concerns over involvement of minors and demands for gaming companies to be an active part of the solution are similar to recommended measures of UK Parliamentary report above (e.g. UK Parliament, 2019, p. 61-62). In summary, I would claim that the most notable point of interest in all three cases is the emphasis on the protection of minors from adverse effects.

Now that we have gathered some example data in regards to what plans there were in motion in order to regulate loot boxes, let us move on to analyzing these example with the help Paul Gee's three questions.

5.4.1. Analysis on what was done in regards to loot boxes

In this section I will be analyzing on the type of language that the three examples above of governmental intervention towards loot boxes focused upon, once again taking inspiration from Gee's questions. First we the case of Belgium and as can be seen from Taylor's (2018) article the focus in Belgium was on monetary punishment towards gaming companies and that from the information regarding removal deadlines of loot boxes it would appear Belgian authorities intended to count on the co-operation and compliance of the gaming companies.

I would also like to note that had the article omitted the monetary amounts and other punitive actions from being mentioned it could be argued that remaining impression could have been that Belgium intends to take a lax approach towards the gaming companies. Therefore, I would claim that the significance of the article regarding the intended punishments combined with the mentions of concerns by Belgian authorities (Taylor, 2018) is that the public is informed that Belgian authorities seem to take the issues with loot boxes seriously and that they held the gaming companies responsible as well towards taking action to resolving these issues.

Next we have the proposed plan of action by the UK Parliamentary report. Whereas Belgium's focus was on determining loot-boxes to be gambling and protection of children and grow ups alike from loot box related issues, as well as their proposed plan of action at the time was to impose monetary sanctions upon those who would break these laws (Orland, 2018a; Taylor, 2018), the UK report focuses upon more on furthering knowledge, which can be seen exemplified in the following statements from the UK Parliament report (2019): "The Department should immediately update its areas of research interest to include gaming disorder..." (p. 61), "The Government should also require games companies to share aggregated player data with researcher and to contribute financially to independent research through a levy administered by an impartial body" (p. 61) and

“—the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport should immediately establish a scientific working group to collate the latest evidence relating to the effects of gambling-like mechanics in games” (p. 62).

In addition to this similar to Belgium the UK report expresses concern over the effects that loot boxes and suggested for them to be classified as gambling similar to Belgium: “We believe that any gambling-related harms associated with gaming should be recognized under the online harms framework” (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 62), “We consider loot boxes that can be bought with real-world money and do not reveal their contents in advance to be games of chance player for money’s worth” (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 62). The UK report (2019) also further expresses their concern in regards to loot boxes and monetization by putting emphasis on the potential harm to children: “We recommend that loot boxes that contain the element of chance should not be sold to children playing games...” (p. 62). This emphasis on the risk towards children is more notable than in the case of Belgium, where a broader concern was expressed when it came to those affected (Taylor, 2018).

If I were to look these discussions from a different angle, considering the previously mentioned details from the report, one answer would be that they agree on what the gaming companies claim in regards to the amount of responsibility they have when it comes to loot boxes (e.g. UK Parliament, 2019, p. 14), as well as gone along with the claims by EA that their monetization practice are ethical (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 28-29). Another potential answer is that instead of focusing upon understanding the effects of loot boxes (e.g. UK Parliament, 2019, p. 62), they could have taken similar approach to Belgium and recommended financial sanctions upon the gaming companies.

Finally, the most I would note as a point of importance that if we call back to what we discussed in sections 5.1.1, 5.2.1 and 5.3.1, due to the profitability of loot boxes gaming companies have a notable interest in maintaining loot boxes in their games, an interest which could be argued comes with the expense of the players of said games. To add to that, as was argued in section 5.3.1 most of the internal discourse among gaming industry tends to ignore any negative effects loot boxes may have on the gaming public, and as such initiative to have a discussion of said negative effects falls upon entities outside gaming companies. Therefore, it could be argued that having entities such as UK Parliament that have the authority and capability to take action in regards to loot boxes take a negative stance towards them (e.g. UK Parliament, 2019, p. 61-62), this could be argued to signal not only to the public that concerns over negative effects of loot boxes and monetization are being heard and taken into account seriously but also to the gaming companies that the negativity towards loot boxes is not limited to normal players and that they cannot continue the monetization of their

games without taking into account what effects they have on players and that they must take responsibility for what they do with their games (e.g. UK Parliament, 2019, p. 61-62).

Thirdly and finally, let us move on to analyzing the United States Bill 1629 towards the regulation of loot boxes, and as was the case with the Belgian case and the UK Report, the Bill continues to express negative viewpoints towards loot boxes from the perspective of legislative authorities. The first question is: how was this expressed? Let us first take look at the following quotes from the bill 1629 (2019): “It is unlawful for a game publisher to publish— (A) a minor-oriented game that includes pay-to-win microtransactions or loot-boxes; or...” (Section 1.), “A violation of this Act shall be treated as a violation of a rule defining an unfair or deceptive act or practice prescribed under section 18(a)(1)(B) of the Federal Trade Commission Act” (Section 3.) and

“In any case in which the attorney general of a State has reason to believe that interest of the residents of that State has been threatened or adversely affected by the engagement of any person in practice that violates this Act, the State, as *parens patriae*, may bring a civil action on behalf of the residents of the State in appropriate State court...” (Section 4.).

As we can see from these quotes, not only does the bill propose outright forbidding loot boxes to be sold for minors, it also suggested that any gaming companies that were found in violation should be immediately taken to court, which rather more direct and strongly worded response to Belgium which was willing to give gaming companies time to remove loot boxes (Taylor, 2018) and UK whom focused more on research and understanding the effects of loot boxes and any actions to be taken were worded as recommendations (UK Parliament, 2019, p. 61-62). Also of note here is that where Belgium (Taylor, 2018) and even UK Report (e.g. UK Parliament, 2019, p. 61) focused on what groups could be affected by loot boxes, bill 1629 specifically focuses on preventing loot boxes from affecting minors, as can be seen in the quote from Sections. 1 and 3.

However, as was noted above, the bill focuses on protection of minors, as well as placed the responsibility in regard to loot boxes on gaming companies, similar to the UK Report. As such, some differences of action that could be argued that the bill could have taken are that the bill demands more responsibility from, for example, parents when it came to minors and loot boxes, or the bill could have, instead of outright demanding banning of loot boxes, to instead focus on demanding more transparency from gaming companies in regards to loot boxes, for example, disclosure of odds on a loot box, but otherwise permitted loot boxes to remain and not considered them to be gambling.

Finally, I would note that as was argued with Belgium and UK, the tone towards loot boxes in the bill as well strict demands in their regulation signals that some authorities in the US were aware of the issues with loot boxes, that they are considered to gambling by other parties outside of gaming public (e.g. S. 1629, 2019, Section. 2) with authority to take action and that action was intended to be taken so that gaming companies could not continue with monetization without taking responsibility and if they did not there would be consequences.

So to summarize this section, in regards to what actions were intended to be taken in regards to loot box and monetization regulation, the actions range from furthering the understanding of how the mechanics of loot boxes work, what effects do loot boxes have, especially on minors, to have loot boxes to be registered as gambling on national legislative level. Furthermore, in these legislations the primary responsibility is placed upon gaming companies to take action to regulate or outright remove loot boxes and that there would be notable consequence to force them to comply if they did not do so voluntarily. For our next section, let us move onto analyze some of the public discourse related to the cases.

5.4.2. Public discourse on loot box legislation

Case of Belgium, 2017

For this section we shall be looking into Reddit conversations related to the three cases discussed in the previous section regarding the loot box legislation in Belgium, UK and US. The sections shall begin with two different posts from r/Games and r/news discussing news articles related to the situation of loot boxes in Belgium. First we have a post made to r/Games which was made in response to an article from 2017 in PCGamer titled *Belgium's Justice Minister call for loot box ban in Europe (Updated)*. In the original article Chalk (2017) informs us that after an investigation into the games Overwatch and Star Wars Battlefront 2 Belgium's Gaming Commission had decided to consider loot boxes to be gambling and this move was being supported by Belgium's then Minister of Justice Koen Geens who also considered the combination of gaming and gambling to be harmful to children. However Chalk (2017) later amended the article by stating that Belgium's Gaming Commission had not, at the time, yet finalized their decision on to consider loot boxes to be gambling and that the Minister statements had been premature in nature. Let us now move on to look for some example from the Reddit post themselves starting with a comment made by u/CITY_FOX (2017) who states that:

“I wrote a paper recently comparing gambling to loot boxes and my professor said the most damning part of the whole piece was the effects on young people who have the potential to get hooked. The parents I have talked to have expressed worry about it becoming addicting, especially game like clash royale and coc”.

Beginning with the comment made by u/CITY_FOX (2017) they draw attention to negative aspects of loot boxes by not only referring to the reaction of his professor who expressed concern over the addictive nature of loot boxes and what effect it could have on young people, but also referring to the concerns of parents they had interviewed who also expressed similar concern in regards to their own children and the addictive properties of loot boxes.

On the other hand, I would note that their comment is mostly anecdotal and does not go into detail in regards to their research. They could have also discussed what consequences the additive nature of loot boxes have, for example, monetarily or in regards to mental health, similar to what was discussed in sections 5.1 to 5.1.2. Their comment also only mentions children and young people and does not discuss the expenses of older people. Finally, I would posit that most notable matter in the comment is the fact that they mention that “the parents I have talked to have expressed worry about it becoming addicting” (u/CITY_FOX, 2017) informing us that there is, as far as u/CITY_FOX has observed, concern among the general public towards loot boxes and it could be claimed that they are seen in negative light. Then we have a comment made by u/calibrono (2017) who states that “I’m sure Activision-Blizzard, Valve, Riot and basically every other publisher are very thankful to EA. What an accomplishment! Let’s hope the government actually follows though. It’s a long road”. Their comment is responded to by u/mrv3 (2017) who states that:

“The straw that broke the camel’s back. Valve have probably been the worst because CSGO has such a tremendous amount of money behind those items. Blizzard’s Overwatch to kids hasn’t helped the situation either. Riot probably don’t care as much since loot boxes for them are a smaller deal but Acti-blizz and Valve are probably getting a warchest of lawyers ready to fight this”.

This is followed by another response made by u/Rounder8 (2017) who states that:

“Right, everyone else seemed to know where to draw the line between tolerable and bullshit, then EA came running in, went 200 yards past that line, and tried to pretend they were just doing what everyone else was doing.

I don't like any loot box system, but I was okay with them existing since it was just cosmetics (though I really had issues with the ways blizzard was constantly making it harder and harder to get the good stuff in OW loot boxes while also decreasing currency earning to promote box sales) but EA did a great job demonstrating they could be bad”.

From u/calibrono's (2017) comment a tone of schadenfreude and mockery can be seen when they note that companies other than EA are also effected by the decision made by Belgium and they also express positive support for government taking action against loot boxes. As for the comment made by u/mrv3 (2017) one notable aspect of their comment is that according to them the loot box practices of EA go over a line of what they consider to be acceptable, “the straw that broke the camel's back”, and that warrants the measures taken by the Belgian authorities. Secondly, they note that there would be companies willing to fight the decision made by Belgian authorities (u/mrv3, 2017), which is in similar note to the discussions had in sections 5.3 – 5.3.2 in regards to ethicality of loot boxes. Similar sentiments regarding going over what is an acceptable practice regarding loot boxes are shared by u/Rounder8 (2017) who notes that “everyone else seemed to know where to draw the line between tolerable and bullshit, then EA came running in, went 200 yards past the line...”. Furthermore while u/Rounder8 (2017) demonstrates a more tolerant opinion towards loot boxes, e.g. “I was okay with them existing since it was just cosmetics...” the end of their comment could be interpreted as them considering actions of Belgian authorities towards Electronic Arts to be warranted: “EA did a great job demonstrating why they could be bad”.

On the other hand, all three of the comments are mainly surface level reaction, broad in nature and do not go into great amount of detail of the commenters views. Such details could include opinions on what actions, exactly, the Belgian government should take, what the consequences are for Electronic Arts and the rest of the gaming companies this effects, is there anything the gaming public can do to further the process and is there anything the gaming companies themselves could possibly do to make themselves look more positive in the eyes of the government and gamers. Finally I would claim that the mocking and negative tone towards EA and loot boxes in general, as was noted above, tell us that these commenters consider it to be a positive that the Belgian government is taking action against loot boxes.

Next we have a comment made by u/Mrbrioman (2017) who states that “Oh man Disney are gonna lose their shit with EA after this. Their biggest property is being directly associated with child gambling to the extent that laws might be written around it. I wish I could be fly on the wall at an EA meeting tomorrow”.

Finally, we have a comment made by u/NATIK001 (2017) who states the following:

“Assuming this even leads to an EU wide ban on loot boxes, I am going to make a prediction right now. It will only lead to EU specific releases of games.

Basically the game version sold in EU will mostly still have the shit grind that is meant to make you buy loot boxes, and the version for everywhere else has the grind + loot boxes. Publishers definitely don't want to make the non-loot box version seem more fun than the p2w version.

If it goes through in the EU I hope more countries follow outside the EU, but if it just goes through in the EU there will still be way to big a market outside the EU to just stop loot boxes completely”.

From u/Mrbrionman's (2017) comment they display similar mocking tone what could be seen in some of the previous comments, displaying that they consider Electronic Arts receiving sanctions over their loot box practices to be a positive matter. u/NATIK001 (2017) on the other hand hold a more reserved view on the matter at hand and from their comment we can gather that while they do consider restrictions on loot boxes to be a positive, they do not believe that the actions taken by Belgian authorities alone will be sufficient and that other countries need to follow suit in order for there to be a significant difference in the matter of loot boxes: “If it goes through in the EU I hope more countries follow the EU, but if it just goes through in the EU there will still be way too big a market outside the EU to just sop loot boxes completely”.

I would, however, also note that with u/Mrbrionman's (2017) comment, as was the case with some of the previous comments, the content is mostly surface level reaction that does not go into much detail in their views on the situation. For example, then they mention that “Disney are gonna lose their shit with EA after this” (u/Mrbrionman, 2017) they could have provided a bit more detail on just how exactly would Disney's reaction have an effect on Electronic Arts and their loot box practices. As for comment made by u/NATIK001 (2017) while they do go into a bit more detail in their thoughts on the situation at hand, their comment does not explain the exact details of, for example, what countries could or should follow after EU in the case that more widespread restrictions on loot boxes would have followed on the wake of Belgium or in the case of two different games for EU and rest of the world could such a practice have been even legal or possible in the first place.

As for the importance of what was said in these comments, u/Mrbrionman's (2017) can be seen as a further evidence to the negative view the gaming public has towards loot boxes. U/Natik001's comment is in similar vein, through the negativity towards loot boxes is expressed more so through their support towards Belgium taking action in order to regulate loot boxes. Furthermore their comments in regards to how "there will still be way too big a market outside the EU to just stop loot boxes completely" (u/NATIK001, 2017) are in similar tone to the what was discussed in sections 5.2 to 5.3.2 in regards to how gaming companies have no internal incentive to regulate their own loot box practices due to their profitability.

To summarize the comments made towards Chalk's (2017) article they express a great deal of mockery towards the fact that Belgian government is planning on taking action in order to regulate loot boxes due to their associations with gambling and said mockery can also be seen as continuing negativity towards loot boxes among the gaming public which has been shared by both media and authorities in the discussions in previous sections, as well as support towards authorities taking these actions. Following next, we shall be looking into public comments on the situation in Belgium a year later.

Case of Belgium, 2018

These following comments are from the subreddit r/news reacting to an article in Eurogamer from 2018 called *Now Belgium declares loot boxes gambling and therefore illegal*, which discusses the situation of loot box legislation in Belgium. In the article Yin-Poole (2018) informs us that after inspecting the games Star Wars Battlefront 2, FIFA 18, Overwatch and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive Belgian authorities have determined that out of the four games only Star Wars Battlefront 2 was not subjected under Belgian gambling laws due to the fact that it did not contain loot boxes that could be classified as games of chance. Yin-Poole (2018) goes on further that Koen Geens, Belgian Minister of Justice, had demanded loot boxes to be removed from these games due to their illegal nature and due to concern of what impact they could have on young players. Geens had also hoped to open a dialogue with gaming industry to determine whose responsibility it is to dispose of loot boxes from games (Yin-Poole, 2018). This proposal was met with the following statement from Electronic Arts:

"We strongly believe that our games are developed and implemented ethically and lawfully around the world, and take these responsibilities very seriously. We care deeply that our players are having a fun and fair experience in all our games, and take great care to ensure each games is marketed responsibly, including in compliance with

regional rating standard. We welcome the dialogue with Mister Geens on these topics, as we do not agree that our games can be considered as any form of gambling” (Yin-Poole, 2018).

Next, let us look at some examples of the comments from Reddit made in response to this article. To start with we have the following comment made by u/friendorbuddy (2018) who states that “Does this mean we’re all going to route VPN through Belgium to avoid loot boxes in games?” This then met with responses from u/FenrirTheUnbound (2018): “You’re onto something” and u/Stickers_ (2018): “Living in Belgium, I think it’s time to start looking for investors”. A third response to u/friendorbuddy’s comment is made by u/Wraithfighter (2018) who states the following:

“More likely to mean that, at least in the short term, people in Belgium are going to have to VPN a lot of AAA games. A nation of 11 million people doesn’t really have the oomph needed to force the major game companies to change their ways.

Far easier for those companies to say “Well, you don’t want us, we won’t be there”, IP block Belgian IP’s from their multiplayer services (and stores), not sell titles to Belgium stores or Belgians via Steam/Origin/Battle.net...and then tell player’s “Sorry, we want to sell you COD 15, but your elected representatives instituted onerous regulations to stop us”.

Guess where the outrage will be directed when Overwatch, Hearthstone and CS:GO are banned in Belgium”.

From u/friendorbuddy’s (2018) comment we can see similar mocking tone to what was seen in some of the comments from 2017, along with a negative disposition towards loot boxes in their desire to use VPN to avoid them. These sentiments are shared by u/FenrirTheUnbound (2018) as well as u/Sticekrs (2018) in their agreement with u/friendorbuddy’s statement. U/Wraithfighter (2018) on the other hand takes somewhat more cautious tone towards the news, with similar sentiments to u/NATIK001 from 2017 in that they believe game companies will simply make Belgian games to exclusive in lack of loot boxes and continue their practices elsewhere unless a wider action against loot boxes is taken by the authorities. Furthermore u/Wraithfighter (2018) expressed concern that if there is to be backlash from the gaming public due to possible lack of access to certain games it will be directed towards authorities rather than gaming companies.

On the other hand, I would note that for the most part u/friendorbuddy's (2018), u/FenrirTheUnbound's (2018) and u/Stickers_ (2018) comment are of similar surface level reaction similar to comments seen in the 2017 Reddit post on the Belgium case, lacking in detail. Such detail could include, for example, possible issues with using VPN to go through Belgium to avoid loot boxes, such as possible actions taken by gaming companies to prevent this or whether or Belgian authorities themselves would permit it. As for u/Wraithfighter's (2018) comment, while they do go to detail on their thoughts they are mostly from a negative viewpoint and they could have also taken into account, as was noted in the comment made by u/Mr_Sacks (2018), that there are other countries that had taken a negative stance toward loot boxes as well as, as has been noted in several sections analyzed previously, that the public opinion as well as media seems to hold gaming companies as the primary responsibility for loot boxes.

Finally, I would claim that as was the case with several comments in previous sections, the mocking nature of the comments in this Reddit post continue to exemplify the negative views some parts of the gaming community have towards loot boxes (u/FenrirTheUnbound, 2018; u/friendorbuddy, 2018; u/Stickers_, 2018). While u/Wraithfighter's (2018) comment also could be claimed to express this negativity via their support towards Belgian authorities taking measures, they also have a more cautionary voice on how effective these measures are in practice and furthermore their comment calls back to what was discussed in sections 5.2 to 5.3.2 in regards to profitability of loot boxes and how due to that gaming companies have no incentive on their own to regulate them. Therefore u/Wraithfighter (2018) rises a concern that this internal incentive would be enough for gaming companies to oppose national authorities in the matter of loot box regulation, this in turn could be used to further the argument that the measures taken by Belgian authorities are warranted and that more countries, such as Netherlands had done prior to Belgium, should also take action.

Next, we have the following comment made by u/grungebot5000 (2018) who states that "So are they gonna start making Belgian versions of AAA and mobile titles, or is Ubisoft just gonna stop selling them? Edit: christ, this was such a low effort comment, I wasn't even sure if Ubisoft was particularly bad about it". Their comment is then responded to by u/ledivin (2018):

"Most AAA games should be able to relatively-easily turn that feature off. See: how quickly Battlefield did it just before release. Most would also already have region detection somewhere in there, so it's just a matter of linking the two systems".

Similar to u/Wraithfighter's (2018) comment u/grungebot5000's (2018) comment expresses concern that gaming companies are simply going to go around the Belgian legislation by making

regionally exclusive games to them. U/ledvin (2018) on the other hand holds a more optimistic view towards the situation by pointing out that games containing loot boxes, such as Star Wars Battlefront 2 have internal mechanism to turn of loot boxes and that it would be possible to do so regionally.

However, U/grungebot's (2018) mostly continues the surface level reaction seen in previous comments and they could have gone into further speculation on how exactly would gaming companies go around the Belgian legislation and was there something the Belgian authorities could have done to counter any attempts by gaming companies to avoid compliance with their laws. As for u/ledvin (2018) they could have gone on to speculate, taking into account the profitability of loot boxes, just how willing gaming companies would be to just disable loot boxes from their games since, as could be seen in section 5.3.2 and discussion regarding the case of Belgium in 2017 above, there are some companies such as Electronic Arts who would rather attempt to argued against the legislation and continue to maintain the presence of loot boxes in their games.

Finally, I would claim that u/grungebot's (2018) comment could serve as a further example of how due to gaming companies themselves lacking incentive to fully get rid of loot boxes there is a need for legislation on national level. As for U/ledvin's (2018) comment, it could also be argued to serve as an argument for need to regulate loot boxes due to the possibility for gaming companies to, as u/ledvin claims, be easily able to disable loot boxes regionally but they arguably would be unwilling to do so, as can be seen in previous sections.

Next we have a comment made by u/CCCmonster (2018) who states the following: "Fantastic! I know that Belgium will have a sense of pride and accomplishment for making such a wise decision". While u/CCCmonster's (2018) comment for the most part can be seen as an endorsement for the activities of Belgian authorities, their comment also holds a mocking edge to it similar what has been seen in previous comments. This is due to them referencing an incident in subreddit r/StarWarsBattlefront in 2017 in a post titled *Seriously? I paid 80\$ to have Vader locked?* The post was started by u/MBMMaverick (2017) who began the post in order to complain about what they perceived to be unfair monetization on the part of Electronic Arts over in game content. They were actually responded to by Electronic Arts who stated that "the intent is to provide players with a sense of pride and accomplishment for unlocking different heroes" (u/EACommunityTeam, 2017). Electronic Arts' response was notoriously disliked, with the post at the time of writing being at -667769 downvotes.

However, as was with many cases before u/CCCMonster's (2018) comment is mostly reactionary and lacking in any further elaborations or details, such as what effects the "wise decision" made by Belgian authorities could have and what responses could be made by the gaming authorities. Still, if nothing else, as far as significance of content goes u/CCCMonster's (2018) comment serves a very clearly stated approval of the regulation of loot boxes.

Following that, for our final examples we have a comment made by u/tonytwocans (2018) who states that: "Too bad they're too small of a market for game developers to care". This is then responded to by u/Belial 91 (2018) who states that: "I think it is not unlikely that it will become an EU wide ruling eventually" as well as u/Mr_Sacks (2018) who states that:

"Expect that the Netherlands has basically said something to this effect too. They're currently giving the guilty parties roughly 6-8 weeks to change their games otherwise they'll start dishing out fines and perhaps even banning certain games. That's two of the richest and most digitally literate countries in the EU taking a hardline stance against it. Two countries that though small also wield large influence in the EU.

Everything has to start somewhere and if you pardon the pun, my money is on these glorified gambling machines going down EU wide given some more time".

Starting with u/tonytwocans' (2018) comment they echo sentiments expressed previously that Belgium alone would not be enough to significantly affect utilization of loot boxes in games. This sentiment, however, is not shared by u/Belial 91 (2018) who's holds a more optimistic tone in that other countries in EU might follow suit in imposing regulations on loot boxes. This optimism is shared by u/Mr_Sacnks (2018) who points out that Netherlands has also imposed similar and harsher penalties on utilization of loot boxes in games and they also go on to note that despite their size both Belgium and Netherlands hold notable influence in the European Union.

However, I would also like to note that in the comments, starting with u/tonytwocans (2018), instead of holding a negative view towards the matter, they could have gone on to speculate what possible effects the decision could possibly have. On the other hand, if they were inclined to hold onto a negative view they could have elaborated on how this lack of care on the part of the gaming companies could have manifested. As for u/Belial91 they could have provided more evidence on why they are so confident that legislation similar to Belgium would spread on to other countries in the European Union. As for u/MR_Sacks, since they share optimism with u/Belial91 on that other EU countries would follow on imposing restrictions on loot boxes they could have also elaborated on why they feel so confident on the matter. For example, since they noted that both Belgium and

Netherlands are influential countries within the EU they could have elaborated how these countries could use said influence to further the cause of loot box restrictions in the European Union.

Finally, I would note that while u/tonytwo cans' (2018) comment is rather negative in tone it could be argued that it serves a purpose as a further example on gaming public's desire to see regulations imposed upon loot boxes by authorities due gaming companies lack of incentive to do so themselves. As for u/Belia91 (2018) and u/Mr_Sacks' (2018) comments through them can be seen a clear endorsement of the actions of said governments and through that a continued negative view among elements of gaming public towards loot boxes.

When the news broke out in 2017 that Belgian authorities were looking into whether or not classify loot boxes as gambling (Chalk, 2017) it was met with much mockery towards the gaming companies responsible as well as approval from the gaming public towards the possible classification of loot boxes as gambling and the regulations that would follow. Looking at the comments made in the year 2018 after these decisions were finalized a similar tone of mockery could be seen among the commenters as continued approval over the fact the authorities were intervening on loot boxes. While there were those concerned that gaming companies would attempt to subvert these legislation in one way or another there were also those who were optimistic that these would serve as a beginning for a continued regulation legislation on loot boxes in other countries in the area of EU. One such country, while no longer part of EU, who were looking into the question of loot box regulation the United Kingdoms and next we shall be looking into the public reactions on the UK Parliamentary inquiry regarding loot box legislation.

Case of UK, 2019

For our first source of examples regarding the public discourse over the actions of the UK Parliament in regards to loot boxes, we first have the following comments from a post made to the subreddit r/pcgaming in 2019, with the post being made in order to discuss a video made by Jim Sterling covering the situation in the UK. The video discussed the publication made by the UK Parliament's Culture, Media and Sport committee in regards to loot boxes and uses it as grounds for criticism towards the loot box practices of gaming companies, primarily focusing Electronic Arts and their FIFA game series (Sterling, 2019, 00:00 -13:22).

Let us next move on to look at some examples of public discourse. First we have a comment made by u/GenerousWineMerchant (2019) who states the following:

“Literally gambling. Game companies employ doctorate level psychologists in order to make their games addictive using gambling techniques known to casino game makers and operators for decades. Turning children into gambling addicts was *never* okay. It’s about time they regulate this abusive anti-social behavior by game developers”.

This comment is the responded to by a since deleted username, hereafter referred to as u/[deleted3] (2019) who states the following:

“Literally worse than gambling.

- Advertised to kids.
- No known odds.
- You get no physical monetary value back, only digital.
- You are expected to throw all digital value away within 1 year.
- The digital goods will 100% be unavailable whenever they decide to shut it down”.

Continuing the trend of a negative view towards loot boxes, u/GenerousWineMerchant’s (2019) comment serves as a rather straightforward condemnation of the loot box practices of gaming companies, with them specifically emphasizing the addictive nature of loot boxes, similar to what was discussed in the sections 5.1 to 5.1.2, and how they are engineered to be as addictive as possible. They also emphasize on how they are an especially negative influence on children (u/GenerousWineMerchant, 2019). Similar sentiments of negativity and condemnation can be found in the response given by u/[deleted3] (2019) from whose comment an especially notable point is their concern that money players spend on digital goods would all have been for nothing should the service hosting them be taken down by the gaming company.

However I would also note that the case with u/GenerousWineMerchant’s (2019) comment, as well as the others, is that while they do go on to detail in their thoughts, their claims such as “game companies employ doctorate level psychologists” and that gaming companies use “gambling techniques known to casino game makers and operators for decades” are left without any sources on which gaming companies have hired psychologists or what, exactly, these well-known addictive techniques are. Furthermore, while u/GenerousWineMerchant (2019) does mention the negative effects loot boxes could potentially have on children, they could have also discussed the effects on

older gamers. As for u/[deleted3]'s (2019) comment while their list of grievances with loot boxes does go into detail as well, they do could have provided examples of the negative aspects they had listed.

Despite all that, when looking into what significance of content there is to be found in their comments, both u/GenerousWineMerchant's as well as u/[deleted3]'s comments are further, clearly worded examples of the negative views that the gaming public holds towards loot boxes. This is done with specific concern raised towards the wellbeing of children.

Following that, we have a comment made by u/Buttermilkman (2019) who states that "this is going to fucking hurt EA hard. UK gamers LOVE FIFA and all that shit and if that stuff gets regulated or banned then god damn". I would note that u/Buttermilkman (2019) comment shares a mocking tone similar to the comments seen in the case of Belgium. Furthermore, a notable point of interest is their remark that should FIFA games be regulated this could possibly negatively impact the experience of the games players, which could potentially increase the ire of the gamers towards EA (u/Buttermilkman, 2019). However, their comment could have gone on to give more specific examples of how the regulation of loot boxes and the following ire of gamers could affect Electronic Arts. Furthermore, as the case has been many times before, u/Buttermilkman's comment could be claimed to be yet another example of the negativity that gamers view loot boxes with and that they welcome governmental authorities taking action to regulate them.

For our final examples we have a comment made by u/Ultimafatum (2019) who states that: "Good. The more countries do this the better. The industry desperately needs regulation for these evil practices to stop", and a response made to it by u/Zappy_Kablamicus (2019) who states that:

"I think a deeper problem needs to be addressed. The obsession with companies to not leave any potential money on the table. By NOT creating and monetizing loot boxes, they are just leaving money on the table, and that is unacceptable. And furthermore investing in research how to addict and attract people to buying them is the same way. Not to channel my inner hippy but our whole... everything, is in a sick place not meant for people".

Starting with the comment made by u/Ultimafatum (2019) their comment continues the negative tone towards loot boxes, with emphasis on the need for authorities to step in, with the implication being that gaming companies themselves are either unwilling or unable to regulate themselves, which is in line with discussion had in the sections 5.3 to 5.3.2 and how the case with the gaming companies seems to curve more towards unwilling. Similar sentiments can be found in the

comments made by u/Zappy_Kablamicus (2019) with them putting emphasis on the profitability of loot boxes and how gaming companies would be “leaving money on the table” should they not take advantage of loot boxes. These statements are in similar vein to what was discussed in sections 5.2 to 5.3.2.

On the other hand, I would note that u/Ultimafatum’s (2019) comment is in similar surface level reactionary tone as some of the comments seen in the Reddit posts concerning Belgium and like those comments they could have gone on to giving more details, such as examples of what, exactly, are the “evil practices” they refer to and how exactly should they be regulated. As for the comment made by u/Zappy_Kablamicus (2019) they could have perhaps provided more detailed sums on just how much money EA would be losing should they no longer utilize loot boxes and offer more detailed views on how this “deeper problem” they mention should be addressed. In addition to this they could have also discussed the issue of money on the player side, such as possible financial issues that loot boxes could possibly lead to, or what hypothetical financial benefits would there be for the average player should loot boxes cease to be available to purchase.

However, even if these comments lack in detail, they continue to provide example of public opinions that consider any regulations imposed on loot boxes by UK authorities to be a good thing. Moving on from the year 2019, next we shall analyze some more recent examples of public discourse regarding the loot box situation in the United Kingdoms.

Case of UK, 2021

The following comments are from a post made to the subreddit r/pcgaming in the August of this year in order to discuss a petition requesting gambling act to also cover loot boxes. The petition made by Taylor (2021) is as follows:

“In July 2020 a House of Lord Committee highlighted evidence that loot boxes cause gambling problems or exploit problem gambling, and called for the Government to extend gambling legislation to cover loot boxes. In September 2020 the Government called for evidence on this but has taken no action.

It’s appalling that the government lets this practice continue unregulated despite the evidence that it does cause harm.

The Government should immediately bring into effect regulations under section 6(6) of the Gambling Act 2005 specifying loot boxes are games of chance”.

Next, let us move on to look at some of the comment discussing this petition. To begin with we have a comment made by u/WimbleWimble (2021) who states that “Since loot boxes are gambling, they should attract a 20% tax. Now is EA going to say “if you open this box, you’ll owe the government \$5? Or are they gonna eat the loss? Either way it’s a win”. This is then responded to by u/Federal_Badass (2021) with “Option C, consumer pays extra” as well as u/TDplay (2021) who states that:

“It’s not really much of a loss for them.

Worst case, their income goes from more than they’ll ever need, to a slightly smaller more than they’ll ever need. And if they want to recover the losses, they just start more predatory practices.

The only way to stop predatory practices like loot boxes is to ban them entirely”.

Beginning with u/WimbleWimble’s (2021) comment, while not as strong as could be seen in the comments in the previous sections, their comment also carries a tone of mockery towards Electronic Arts as well as a tone optimism on how the regulation of loot boxes could negatively impact the earnings of EA. As for u/Federal_Badass’ (2021) comment they hold a more pessimistic view of the situation and believe that it would be the wallet of the gaming public that would be negatively affected. Similar sentiments are held by u/TDplay (2021) who believes that unless loot boxes are placed under complete ban gaming companies would resort to finding other means of monetization should they wish to recover from their losses.

On the other hand, as far as u/WimbleWimble’s (2021) comment is concerned, they could have gone onto further detailed speculation how the monetization games could happen should gaming companies attempt to come with alternative methods and what monetary penalties there actually would be towards loot boxes. Similarly u/Federal_Badass (2021) could have elaborated on further on how exactly would the bill on loot boxes end up to consumers. Finally, since u/TDplay (2021) mostly discussed the monetary side of the matter, they could have given more specific sums to give an idea of how much the gaming companies and/or consumers could have gained or lost.

Furthermore u/TDplay (2021) could have speculated on what alternatives there could be to control loot boxes in the event total ban of the for one reason or another was out of the question.

As for the significance of content all three of the commenters further exemplify the negative views that the gaming public has towards loot boxes. However, from the comments of u/Federal_Badass (2021) and u/TFplay (2021) there is a notable concern over just how effective the measures taken to

regulate loot boxes truly are and that consumers could possibly be still under the risk being exploited by the gaming companies.

Following them, for our final examples we have a comment made by u/Steven2597 (2021) who states that the “problem is, this is only gonna affect the boxes you don’t know the probability and contents of. This need to disappear ENTIRELY!” This comment is then responded to by another deleted username, hereafter referred to as u/[deleted4] (2021) who states the following:

“I’ve said it once and I’ll say it again. Nobody expect the Devs know the probabilities of these boxes. Even a small skew as little as fraction of a percentage is capable of multiplying revenues through economies of scale.

Working them out by inverse without access to the source code is also incredibly challenging.

I’ve made the point before on subs like gachagaming and frequently I’m met with responses such as “nooo we take monthly surveys from our members” and they fail to understand the uncertainty and confidence intervals were working with.

If you ask any statistician whether what I’m talking about is possible, they’d say yes.

The gambling industry (attempts to) deals with this by using third party certs and audits. Gaming doesn’t have anything of the sort because their consumers are frequently children or statistically illiterate beyond some intro courses”

Another response to u/Steven2597 comment is made by u/Enk1ndle (2021) who states that “I’ll take a small improvement over nothing. Also paces the way for future laws”.

Starting with the comment from u/Steven2597 (2021), the tone of their comment is of very notable condemnation towards loot boxes and they have notable concern over that only loot boxes that do not tell their buyers the possible odds, due to them believing that issue with loot boxes is so severe that nothing less than a complete ban would solve it, similar to u/TDplay.

As for u/[deleted4] (2021) their comment goes on to highlight a different angle on how loot boxes are problematic, namely that “nobody except the Devs know the probabilities of these boxes”.

According to u/[deleted4] (2021) this would allow game companies to further monetize their games by manipulating the odds of their loot boxes, which could be argued to lead further exploitation of players, especially those who are “statistically illiterate”. These concern are of similar nature to the ones expressed in Sterling’s (2017) video regarding Scientific Revenue. Finally u/Enk1ndle’s

(2021) is of a more hopeful and optimistic tone, as they believe that even some amount of legislation could have a positive effect on the situation.

I would also note that, starting with u/Steven2597's (2021) comment, they could have gone on to elaborate why they believe that only loot boxes with unknown odds would be affected by legislation and that what exactly the issue was if loot boxes with known odds would remain available.

Furthermore, they could have taken an alternative view and speculated on possible positive sides of the issue, even if the ban on loot boxes was only partial. As for u/[deleted4]'s comment (2021) they could have elaborated on further on just how exactly gaming companies manipulate the odds on loot boxes and just how huge of an effect these manipulations have monetary wise. They could have also gone on to give advice on how players could increase their statistic literacy so they can better deal with loot boxes. Finally, when it comes to u/Enk1ndle's (2021) comment they could have provided examples of the "future laws" that loot box legislation would pave way to and how exactly would regulations made now make way for future laws. They could have also speculated on the matter from the other side and discuss possible situation where no future laws would be made. Finally, I would claim that when it comes to the significance of the content of these comments, they continue to exemplify the negative views that the gaming public have towards loot boxes and that regulation towards were considered to be more than warranted.

The decision to regulate loot boxes in Belgium was met with much mockery towards gaming companies and with strong approval of regulatory laws to be had. In the case of UK, while there was some mockery to be had (e.g. u/Buttermilkman, 2019) and the reception towards classification of loot boxes was met with approval, the tone of the public commentary in discussion was notably more focused on hostile condemnation of loot boxes as exploitative and harmful. Furthermore as was the case with Belgium there were those who were concerned with gaming companies' willingness to comply with possible laws and that they would instead try to come up with new methods of monetization (e.g. u/Zappy_kablamicus, 2019; u/TDplay, 2021). Next, we shall move on to our final topic of analysis as we take a look at the public discourse surrounding the proposed bill for loot box regulation in the United States.

Case of the U.S, 2019A

For this section we shall be looking into two posts from different subreddit that both were made to discuss an article from Kotaku regarding the loot box bill mad by Senator Haley. In the article Schreier (2019) discusses the proposed bill and how it would completely ban both loot boxes as

well as microtransaction form games that minors could have potential access to, due to concerns that these games could exploit minors for monetary gain.

Moving on to examples of public discussion these first comments reacting to the article come from a post from subreddit r/pcgaming. To begin with, we have a comment made by a deleted username, hereafter referred to as u/[deleted5] (2019) who states that they “feel like EA will lobby against this”. Their comment is then responded to by u/parkowork (2019) who states that “it has potential to wipeout billions in revenue in the industry... any dev house who likes making money should be lobbying against this”.

From u/[deleted5] (2019) and u/parkowork (2019) comments we can see an, arguable, tone of concern that gaming companies would not comply with any potential legislation to loot boxes and microtransactions but instead would go on to lobby against them, with u/parkowork’s going on further and claiming that this is in order to maintain a source of revenue.

On the other hand, when it comes to the comment of u/[deleted5] (2019) they could have elaborated further on the reasons why they believe that EA would lobby against them, such as mentioning the profitability of loot boxes, similar to u/parkowork. Furthermore, they could have discussed possible actions the U.S. government could take to combat the lobbying and ensure that the bill has a better chance to pass. As for u/parkowork’s (2019) comment they could have elaborated as a bit further on which gaming companies they believe would join in on the lobbying against the proposed bill and which companies would be the ones to most likely suffer from the loss of revenue. Finally, I would argue that both u/[deleted5]’s (2019) and u/parkowork’s (2019) statements serve as further examples of concern over the unwillingness of gaming companies to self-regulate due to the sheer profitability of loot boxes, which harkens back to the discussions had in the sections 5.2 to 5.2.2 as well as sections 5.3 to 5.3.2.

Following that, we have a comment made by u/sboard23 (2019) who states the following:

“Microtransactions really ruined AAA gaming in my opinion. They shifted focus of the business model away from selling copies of games to post-purchase sales, and (in my opinion) that’s why games from big publishers these days always just feel lackluster.

For example look at the sports games like Madden or NBA 2K (more console games than PC, but they’re the best example I think). They used to be fully featured games with heavy customization options and different game modes. Now you get none of

that “gamey” stuff that made those games so fun, and just get a bunch of in game coins and other shit. It’s depressing really. You would think these games would continue to add features over the years, not take them away.

I’ll always support game developers who give you a *full* game for your money.

Playing Divinity Original Sin II right now and you can tell they made the game for the players, not for the money”.

Their comment is then responded to by u/grady_vuckovic (2019) who states the following:

“I 100% support any games which is sold as a full game. The DLC business model, if used at all, should be used to sell significant expansions to games at a fair price, not used as a way to slice tiny portions of a game out of the shipped content and then sell it at an extra high price.

I’m voting with my wallet, I don’t buy cosmetic DLC or loot boxes, I refuse to pay \$5 for an outfit or car model, or some nonsense like that.

The worst part is the effect it has on games, killing what should be natural progression system where player unlocks content via... ya know... actually playing the game and winning”.

Starting with the comment by u/sboard23 (2019) we can see a tone of condemnation towards the monetization practices of gaming companies, however this is done from a different angle than what has been discussed thus far. While they do hold that microtransactions are exploitative they do not do so from the point of views that they are addictive and/or gambling like, but that modern monetization practices allow gaming companies to ship their games in smaller content quantity that what could be expected and that this enables them to use this cut content to further monetize their game by forcing players to buy these content additions if they want to experience the full game (u/sboard23, 2019). U/sboard23 (2019) goes on to claim further that these monetization practices have a direct negative effect on the quality of the game and the gaming experience.

As for u/grady_vuckovic’s (2019) comment, their views are of similar nature also claiming that companies exploit more money from gamers by slicing “tiny portions of a game out of the shipped content and then sell it at an extra high price”. Furthermore, like u/sboard23 before them they go on to not that these monetization practices could be claimed to have an adverse effect on the gaming experience of the players (u/grady_vuckovic, 2019).

I would also like to note that with u/sboard23's (2019) comment, they could have discussed whether or not there is a possibility that those with addictive personalities or issues with handling money could be more likely to spend money on buying DLC and/or microtransactions. Furthermore, they could have discussed what possible methods there could be to return to the practice of selling games as complete. As for u/grady_vuckovic's (2019) comment they too could have discussed possible methods on how to make gaming companies resort to less exploitative methods of monetization and maybe elaborate further on the effect that "voting with wallet" could potentially have on the profits of gaming company and whether or not it is an effective method of protest.

Finally, I would argue that when it comes to these comments, they both serve as a different kind of view on the negativity that gamers hold towards microtransactions and their adverse effects. Furthermore, while they do not state so directly, due both of the comments holding the monetization practice of gaming companies as a negative subject it could be argued that both comments through that endorse the ideas proposed in the bill.

Next we have a response made by u/Shirlenator to u/spushlash (2019) after u/spushlash expressed their approval to the proposed bill. The response by u/Shirlenator (2019) is as follows: "Yes, I fully trust a bunch of old guys that know nothing about video games to properly regulate them and not overreach or overreact in any way". Finally, we have a comment made by another deleted username, hereafter referred to as u/[deleted6] (2019) who states that "Good. This was long overdue. I'd argue they should be subjected to the same laws that gambling, like slot machines are".

Starting with u/Shirlenator's (2019) comment they hold a more reserved view towards the proposed bill, expressing concerns that authorities in the U.S. government could use it to regulate the gaming industry more than is necessary. As for the comment made by u/[deleted6] (2019) it is the most clearly stated approval in thus far of the proposed bill, with them using the similarities between loot boxes and gambling as a reason for approval.

On the other hand, when it comes u/Shirlenator's (2019) comment they could have perhaps given more detailed reasoning on why they believe that the U.S. government would not know how to regulate video games properly as well as they could have perhaps discussed a what-if-scenarios and what it would mean if the bill were to be approved. As for u/[deleted6]'s (2019) comment they could have also elaborated further on their reasoning why loot boxes and microtransactions should be subjected under gambling laws specifically.

Finally, it could be argued that u/Shirlenator's (2019) comment serves as a counterpoint to more approving discussion, reminding people to carefully consider the subject matter at hand from

multiple viewpoints as well as consider all the possible consequences that the bill could possibly have. U/[deleted6]'s (2019) comment on the other hand is, as noted previously, much more clear cut case of approval towards the proposed bill, rising concerns similar to what was discussed in sections 5.1 to 5.1.2, and the comment also serves as one more example of the views among gaming community that government level regulation is needed.

So when it comes to the public discourse regarding Senator Hawley's bill proposal, while there is some approval there is also a great amount of concern over whether or not the regulations were possible at all, with some of the said concern directed towards opposition from gaming companies, but also some of the concerns is directed towards the competence of the legislative authorities. Let us next move on to our final Reddit post to be discussed in this thesis.

Case of the U.S, 2019B

Our second set of examples regarding the public discussion around Senator Hawley's bill comes from a post made to the subreddit r/xboxone in response to Schreier's article. First we have a comment made by u/athros (2019) who states the following:

“It targets only real money transactions for Loot Boxes, not the further practice of “Buy this currency which is the only thing you can use to buy loot boxes.” Just another worthless law with a solid loophole so people can say “We solved it!”

Also, it looks like the actual text of the bill isn't available online, so Hawley is playing it close to the chest, likely for good reason”.

Their comment is then responded to by u/Khazgul (2019) who states that “that's a shame. The conversion of real money to tokens in one way to obfuscate how much people actually spend from themselves”.

From u/athros' (2019) comment we can see a rather negative tone towards the news regarding bill, with them stating that the measures proposed in the bill do not cover enough grounds and the also expressed doubts that the measures they would be were not effective enough to reign in the gaming companies. As for u/Khazgul's (2019) comment they also express a negative view towards the monetization methods of games by highlighting how currencies available in game obscure the real amount of money spent from gamers.

On the other hand, when it comes to u/athros' (2019) comment they could have, for example, that even if the proposed bill did not cover everything, what positive effect sides were there to be had from the areas of interest that it did. Furthermore, u/athros (2019) could have gone onto more detail

on how the bill would need to be changed in order to be more effective. As for u/Khazgul's (2019) comment they could have perhaps provided more details on how exactly do in game currencies obscure the real amount of money spent, how huge the actual spent amounts are and what possible negative effects these unknowing spending could have.

Furthermore, I would argue that while u/athros' (2019) comment has a negative view on the bill, it could also serve a purpose in raising points of discussion regarding the effectiveness of the measures proposed and whether or not legislative authorities are doing everything they can or should be doing to address these issues. As for u/Khazgul's (2019) it serves as a further example of the negative aspects of loot boxes and microtransactions as well as of the negativity gamers view them with.

Following that we have a comment from u/DyZ814 (2019) who states the following:

“The Protecting Children from Abusive Games Act” is such a weird name for a bill like this it feels like lol.

Also like others have said, I'd need to know what is classified as “pay to win”. I'm not a fan of micro-transactions personally, but honestly I don't care what people spend their money on. If I love a game, and micro-transactions help the economy, I'm fine with it. I won't spend money on them, but I have no problems if other people want to”.

When it comes to u/DyZ814's (2019) comment it, similar to u/athros (2019), also holds a negative view towards to proposed bill, expressing concerns over what they consider to be vague language in the bill and what the actual effects of the bill would be if it were to be passed. Furthermore, their comment is also among the few that express a more indifferent tone towards microtransactions: “I'm not a fan of micro-transactions personally, but honestly I don't care what people spent their money on”.

However, I would also note that since they do not seem to mind microtransactions (u/DyZ814, 2019), they could have gone on to further detail, besides them helping economy, in order to explain why they do not. Also it would have been interesting to know, how aware of the negative aspects of loot boxes and microtransactions, such as the ones discussed throughout this thesis, they were and what their views on these were.

I would also argue that their comments, as was with u/athros, could serve as a talking point on what, exactly, the contests and effects of the bill actually would be and their comments also serves as an

example of more contrary opinion to the negativity seen thus far when analyzing public discussion, highlight that there are those within the gaming community that do not mind the monetization practices gaming of gaming companies.

Finally, we have a comments from u/javycane (2019) who sates the following:

“Yeah let’s start allowing the government to get a hold on videogames and next thing you know they are censoring what you can play and what not.

I’m sorry, but I’m tired of the For the Children excuse to justify this. If parents give free access to money to underage children and don’t monitor purchases that IS ON YOU not the developer or publisher”.

Their comment is then responded to by u/84981725891758912576 (2019) who states that:

“I don’t like the children angle of it either but this is such a slippery slope fallacy. The industry clearly failed to regulate itself, it’s absolutely in the wheelhouse of government regulation to prevent companies from fucking consumers too hard”.

From u/javycane’s (2019) comment we can see a continuation of the apprehensive tone that could be seen in the other comments in the post, with them expressing doubts in regards to the true intentions of the bill and expressing concern that the it could be used by the U.S. government to control the media that people consume. Furthermore, u/javycane (2019) also highlights that as far they are concerned parents have a responsibility to monitor the spending of their underage children. As for u/84981725891758912576’s (2019) comment while they do also express concerns over the effects that the bill could possibly have they express a counterpoint that the government does have a right and a responsibility to regulate gaming companies since, in his view, they have failed to regulate themselves.

However, I would also note that when it comes to u/javycane’s (2019) comment they could have, for example, gone on to further detail on their views and provided further detail on how they believe that the government would proceed to dictate the games people would be allowed to play and what would be allowed to play. Furthermore u/javycane (2019) could have also discussed the possible positive effects the bill could possibly have had as well as whether or not gaming companies truly had no responsibility what-so-ever when it came to controlling the spending of minors. As for u/84981725891758912576’s (2019) comment they could have provided further details on how exactly the gaming industry has failed to regulate themselves as well as, considering the tone of the Reddit post overall, what possible negative aspects, in their view, the bill could perhaps possess.

Finally, I would argue that u/javycane's (2019) comment provides us with further talking points on the topic of governmental regulation and that on matters such as loot box regulation, even with all the negative aspects highlighted, there still need to be a thorough discussion on all possible effects that a governmental intervention would mean, both positive and negative. As for u/84981725891758912576's (2019) comment their comment serves as another example of the concerns over self-regulation that gaming companies seem to have, similar to what was discussed in sections 5.3 to 5.3.2, as well as provide a more positive view on the subject of governmental intervention.

In summary, when it comes to the public reactions towards Senator Hawley's loot box bill proposal, while there were those who welcomed it, there were also several concerned voices on the effectiveness of the bill as well as whether or not it would be possible for it to pass in the first place. Furthermore, in contrasts to the public discussions had in regards to the loot box regulation in Europe, while there were, similar to Europe, concerns over whether or not gaming companies would be willing to subject themselves to regulation or would they rather oppose them, there were also concerns on the effectiveness as well as the competence of the government and whether or they would be able to impose regulations at all. And in some cases, there were outright hostile views towards government intervention, with concerns expressed over the intention as well as the effects of governmental intervention.

To further summarize the whole of section 5.4.2, for the most part the public reaction was very much of the mind that any regulatory measures taken by government were more than warranted, with a common public sentiment being that companies would be unwilling to self-regulate loot boxes and microtransactions in their games due to their sheer profitability, which is in similar vein to public discussions examined in sections 5.2.2 and 5.3.2. That is not to say that this acceptance was universal, as could be seen in the Reddit posts regarding the U.S. situation, there were also concerns raised over what would truly follow from government intervention.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the discourses surrounding loot boxes from the year 2017 onwards, since that is where my bachelor's thesis ended (Röning, 2018, p. 19), and to look into views on loot boxes from the perspective of media, the gaming community as well as legislative authorities. In order to do this, we utilized the following four points of discourse analysis: focus on analyzing a social problem, identify possible obstacles that prevent it from being resolved, consider

whether or not social order need the problem and identify possible ways to surmount the obstacle (Fairclough, 2001, p.125) and my research questions were:

- 1) What kind of discussions are there regarding the nature of loot boxes and their possible issues?
- 2) What kind of discussions are there regarding the continued use of loot boxes by gaming companies and the reasons behind this?
- 3) What kind of discussions are there regarding questions of ethics with loot boxes?
- 4) What kind of discussions are there regarding the official responses taken by authorities towards loot boxes?

When it came to the point of analyzing a social problem, and discussing the first question, I approached these from the point of analyzing if loot boxes had negative aspects to them and if so, what they were? When looking into research conducted into loot boxes our answer was that there were indeed negative aspects when it came to loot boxes. From research examples of Cairns & Zendle (2019) as well as Brooks & Clark (2019) we would find out that those with personalities prone to addiction were more likely to spent on loot boxes and that were connections could be made between loot boxes and gambling. From media articles such as those by Gach (2017) and Kleinman (2019) we would learn stories of ordinary people who had suffered significant monetary losses due to spending on video games with loot boxes and microtransactions. And from examples of public discourse found on Reddit, such as the personal anecdote of u/CadenceLikesVGs (2018) we would see further sorties of just how negative an effect loot boxes and microtransactions could have on gamers.

As for the point of identifying obstacles as well as the second question, I approached these by asking who would benefit from the continued existence of loot boxes. The answer to this was the game companies whose games contain loot boxes and/or microtransactions. Example of the profit that gaming companies made from loot boxes could be found not only in the articles of Gach (2017) and Kleinman (2019), but also among the materials of governmental authorities, such as the report made by UK Parliamentary committee (2019, p. 24, 28). Furthermore, when analyzing the public discourse from Reddit, such as the post in the subreddit r/OutOfTheLoop from 2019, many were quickly to point out the sheer profitability of loot boxes (e.g. u/SolDarkHunter, 2019).

When it came to the point of analyzing whether or not there was need for the problem and answering the third question, I approached these by analyzing whether or not there was an ethical

discussion to be had regarding how gaming companies profited from loot boxes. When looking into research made by Cairns & Zendle (2019) as well as Brooks & Clark (2019) regarding how damaging loot boxes could be and taking into account stories such as the ones reported by Gach (2017) D’Anastasio (2019) and Kleinman (2019) an argument could be quickly made that there are ethical issues with loot boxes. Further ethical issues could be seen in works like the video by Sterling (2017) on how there were instances of gaming industry that were not only aware of the addictive nature of loot boxes, but actively encouraging it and yet when called to explain themselves, they were quick to try and avoid responsibility, as could be seen in the UK Parliamentary report (2019). As for the public discourse, sentiments there were also that there was an issue with the ethicality of loot boxes (e.g. u/TheWorldLiterally, 2018) and that companies were an active part of these issues (e.g. u/bearlick, 2019).

Finally, when it came to the point of identifying possible solutions and discussing answers to the fourth question, I approached these by analyzing the governmental measures proposed or taken by countries that had discussed the issue with loot boxes. From cases such as seen in Belgium (Orland, 2018a; Taylor, 2018), the United Kingdoms (UK Parliamentary Report, 2019) and the United States (S. 1629, 2019) countries that discussed the issue with loot boxes deemed them to be relatable to gambling and that they could have negative effects on minors, and thus they should be regulated by legislation since there was an apparent issue when it came to self-regulation by gaming companies. The public discourse surrounding these was mostly very welcoming towards government intervention, especially in the cases of Belgium (e.g. u/CCCMonster, 2018) and the United Kingdoms (e.g. u/GenerousWineMerchant, 2019). In the case of the United States the public was notably more reserved in tone, with some holding an outright negative view towards government intervention (e.g. u/javycane, 2019).

For final point, in my Bachelor’s thesis I noted that from 2013 to 2017 the tone of discourse was, at first, fairly neutral towards loot boxes, at least among media, but began to quickly turn negative, especially in the sphere of public discourse (Röning, 2018, p. 21-22). When looking at discussion on media (e.g. Sterling, 2017; Sterling, 2019) in legislation (e.g. S. 1629, 2019) and in public discourse (e.g. u/CCCMonster) it could be safely claimed that the discourse has continued to turn predominantly negative towards loot boxes leading up to 2020. As we move on to the new decade, it remains to be seen how the issue of loot boxes shall be discussed and handled.

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