

Games and Gamification

CS103F: Ethical Foundations of Computer Science

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Discussion: Games and Gamification

Gamification and Gambling Mechanics

- Gamification is the process of introducing “game mechanics” into everyday applications to increase user retention and involvement
 - Usually centered around badges, achievements, leaderboards etc
 - Distills games down to “rewards for user effort”
- Gambling mechanics allow player to vie for a great reward by placing a relatively small bet
 - Elements of chance and high payoff
 - Success results in a large dopamine reward that can become addictive (similar to drug use)
 - The act of “pulling a slot machine lever” has inherent dopamine rewards as well
- Free-to-play games often centered around both gamification (investment of time rather than skill) and/or gambling (high levels of RNG)

Gambling and Regulations

- Most countries highly regulate gambling
 - Loot boxes and gambling mechanics are in a gray area legally as rewards are virtual rather than physical
- China and South Korea requires loot box mechanics to reveal odds of all virtual items
- China does not allow the sale of loot boxes for real money
 - Considered “virtual lottery tickets”
 - Can give loot boxes as “gifts” with the purchase of other virtual items
- Australia considering restricting sale of games with gambling mechanics to children under 18
- Netherlands and Belgium determined loot boxes violate their existing gambling laws
 - Belgium investigating EA for involvement in illegal activity
- US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) currently investigating loot boxes as gambling mechanics

I-Clicker Question

- How should US legislation change regarding gambling mechanics in video games
 - A. US should not legislate such games
 - B. US should restrict such game purchases to adults of legal age to gamble
 - C. US should require games to reveal odds as with lottery tickets
 - D. US should not allow real money transactions for accessing gambling mechanics
 - E. US should require some combination of B, C, and D

Mental Health and Gaming

- American Psychiatric Association publishes the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) to help with diagnosing mental health issues
- The DSM-5 (published in 2013) recognized gambling disorder as a mental disorder
 - Only behavioral addiction recognized in DSM
 - Addictions general substance-based
- The DSM-5 recommended further research into Internet gaming disorder to determine if addiction to online video games constitutes a mental health condition

What are Whales?

- Whales are small percentage of player population that make up majority of free-to-play game revenue in spending
 - Usually have some form of gambling addiction
 - Can lose their money and their relationships to predatory game design decisions

Why Exploit Whales?

- Free to play games need to make money somehow
 - Games are expensive and risky to create
- Many players are unwilling to spend money on game – hence the rise of “free-to-play” mechanics
- Free-to-play mechanics coming full circle and being reintroduced into more traditional games

What does this suggest for broader gamification?

I-Clicker Question

- How should companies approach mental health issues associated with gamification reward systems?
 - A. Companies do not need to consider potential for gambling addiction
 - B. Companies should restrict such gamification mechanics to adults of legal age to gamble
 - C. Companies should reduce rewards to reduce likelihood of addiction
 - D. Companies should only use gamification mechanics when designing systems to "better" the user
 - E. Companies should do some combination of B, C, and D

References

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