



# **Manipulative game design: How Dark UX tactics drive player engagement**

Anna Ageenkova

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

Business Information Technology

Bachelor's Thesis

2025

## Abstract

<b>Author(s)</b> Anna Ageenkova
<b>Degree</b> Bachelor of Business Administration
<b>Report/Thesis Title</b> Manipulative game design: How Dark UX tactics drive player engagement
<b>Number of pages and appendix pages</b> 23 + 60
<p>This thesis looks into what is manipulative game design in free-to-play video games and dark UX tactics which are at its core. Goal was to understand what they are, how they are implemented and how what is their effect on player engagement.</p> <p>Dark UX tactics in this context refers to design patterns which intentionally create pressure, loss of control and overall confusion in order to steer players towards monetization.</p> <p>Through a mixed-method approach in survey and interviews research has captured player's spending behaviour, their recognition of the dark UX patterns in video games as well as emotional responses to them. In addition to that active free-to-play players provided richer insights into their lived experiences which made the results more well-rounded.</p> <p>The results show that manipulative UX tactics are widespread in free-to-play video games, particularly limited-time offers, premium currencies that obscure real prices and gambling like mechanics in shape of loot boxes and gacha. These tactics can increase short-term engagement and spending but in the long run they make players associate games with guilt and regret, causing frustration and inevitable churn.</p> <p>This thesis concludes that relying on dark UX may undermine long-term player trust and may hurt the sustainability of F2P business models. It suggests that game companies should shift towards more transparent and autonomy-supporting monetisation design which will allow them to maintain their revenue while reducing harm to the player base.</p>
<b>Key words</b> Dark UX, video games, free-to-play, monetization, manipulation

# Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
1.1	Research Problems and Objectives .....	1
1.2	Key Terms.....	2
2	Theoretical Framework.....	3
2.1	Dark UX patterns.....	3
2.2	Engagement-driven design.....	3
2.3	Video game monetization tactics .....	4
2.3.1	Loot boxes and gacha systems.....	5
2.3.2	Time-limited Seasonal events .....	6
2.3.3	Progression gate.....	7
2.3.4	Cosmetic Monetization.....	7
2.4	Ethical Considerations.....	8
3	Research Methods .....	9
3.1	Survey design .....	9
3.2	Interview design .....	10
3.3	Data collection.....	10
3.4	Data analysis.....	10
3.4.1	Quantitative analysis (survey).....	10
3.4.2	Qualitative analysis (interview).....	11
3.5	Ethical considerations .....	11
3.6	Limitations.....	11
4	Findings .....	12
4.1	Participant demographics .....	12
4.2	Spending habits .....	13
4.3	How pressure shows up in the moment.....	13
4.4	Line between fair and manipulative .....	14
4.5	Ownership vs Licencing .....	14
4.6	Why passes both motivate and burden.....	15
4.7	Self control .....	15
4.8	What keeps people playing despite monetisation .....	15
4.9	Why these patterns matter .....	15
5	Discussion.....	17
5.1	What the evidence implies.....	17
5.2	Battle passes.....	18
5.3	Self-regulation .....	18

5.4	Ownership.....	18
5.5	Suggestions for product, economy design, community, and comms.....	18
6	Conclusion .....	20
6.1	Answering the guiding questions.....	20
6.2	Final words.....	21
	Sources .....	22
	Appendices .....	24
	Appendix 1. Interview questions .....	24
	Appendix 2. Survey results .....	25
	Appendix 3. Interview Kevin .....	32
	Appendix 4. Interview Mark .....	56
	Appendix 5. Interview Dennis .....	58
	Appendix 6. Affinity Map.....	84

# 1 Introduction

As video game industry has been on the rise to become one of the most profitable and powerful parts of entertainment business it surpassed both movie and music industries in global revenue. According to the research company GWI's "State of Gaming" report from 2024 the difference is significant as gaming industry has been valued at £141.7bn versus combined value of £62.5bn when it came to movie and music industries. (Dentsu 2024)

It has been largely aided by the revenue of one of its sectors: free-to-play (F2P) games, which have been dominating the market for a while due to them attracting their player bases with the premise of a no-cost entertainment. In 2023 alone 85% of gaming industry revenue came from F2P games, amounting to the global revenue of \$111.27bn. (Statista 2025)

Motivation for choosing this particular thesis topic stems from a combination of personal interest (and frustration) and societal urgency. As a gamer I myself have direct experience with manipulative de-sign elements and predatory in-game monetization and have witnessed how those affect my decisions when it came to the game I play and content, I purchase in F2P games.

In addition to personal interest as mentioned above topic is timely as there is societal urgency on the matter with regulatory attention now directed to the gaming industry and specifically its monetization practices. There are new EU regulations in the works to combat current monetization mechanics and to address overall growing concern over ethical design in the technology sector (Digital Fairness Act 2025), making a deep dive into the topic of manipulative UX highly relevant in academia and outside of it.

In a broader context, manipulative UX in gaming illuminates wider set of problems, such as digital wellbeing, consumer rights, and responsible business. Many of the tactics utilized by the gaming industry, such as artificial scarcity and personal nudges mirror the strategies utilized by the e-commerce platforms and social media (Brignull 2023; Eyal 2014). Studying the ways those methods contribute to understanding how design influences general human behavior in global digital economy.

## 1.1 Research Problems and Objectives

The main objectives of this thesis are to investigate the way manipulative UX tactics in F2P games influence player engagement, retention and spending behavior and to generate empirical evidence showcasing said influence.

Research is to be conducted utilizing two methods: survey and interview. Using both methods should be a good way to gather enough qualitative and quantitative data to get an insight into the player's emotions and decision-making, awareness of the manipulation techniques, and their opinion of them. The goal for the end-result is to have a good analysis of player behavior, mentality as well as recommendations for ethical and responsible UX design in F2P games.

With that goal in mind, the research questions to guide this thesis are:

- What “dark”/manipulative UX tactics are commonly implemented in free-to-play video games?
- How do these tactics influence player engagement, retention and in-game spending?
- Are players aware of manipulative design, and how do they perceive it?
- What are ethical and sustainability implications of dark UX in game design?

## **1.2 Key Terms**

**Free-to-Play (F2P):** A distribution model where the base game is free; revenue comes from optional purchases and services.

**Microtransactions:** Small, in-game purchases ranging from cosmetics to progression boosts and randomized rewards; commonly integrated into core loops of F2P titles.

**In-game Currency / Price Obfuscation:** Real-money spending is converted into proprietary currency (e.g., “gems/diamonds”), which can obscure true prices and contribute to overspending risks.

**Loot box:** A (often paid) container yielding randomized rewards with gambling-like characteristics.

**Battle Pass:** A time-limited, tiered reward track that ties progression to sustained play across a “season”

**In-game Economy.** The system of virtual goods and currencies and the rules for earning/spending them within a title.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical foundation for the research done is established throughout this chapter, looking into various research and business ethics which give a possibility to analyze and theorize about dark UX, behavioral economics, gamification, manipulative monetization and player engagement.

The framework consists of four main areas:

- Dark UX patterns
- Engagement-driven design
- Video game monetization tactics
- Ethical considerations

Through these four theoretical perspectives the analytical part of the thesis can be more developed, as all theory informs the contents of the survey and interview plans and assures that empirical analysis does not rely simply on the subjective player accounts.

### 2.1 Dark UX patterns

The concept of the dark UX was first popularized in 2010 by Harry Brignull, who defined it as "a user interface that has been carefully crafted to trick users into doing things...they are not mistakes, they are carefully crafted with a solid understanding of human psychology, and they do not have the user's interests in mind". Throughout this thesis "dark pattern", "dark UX" as well as "deceptive pattern" and "deceptive and manipulative pattern" would be used interchangeably but they all refer to the same issue, the only difference being that "deceptive pattern" is the preferred short hand in the industry at the time.(Gray et al., 2018) In the context of gaming, dark UX often appears as manipulative monetisation mechanics, for example "loot boxes". (Brignull 2023)

Dark UX is positioned at the intersection of behavioural psychology and business strategy, as it often exploits such biases as:

- Loss aversion – fear of losing progress, rewards and opportunities. (Tversky 1991)
- FOMO (Fear of missing out) – anxiety caused by time-limited events/offers/content.
- Sunk cost fallacy

In taking advantage of these, UX designers transform user choice into predictable behavioral responses that favor monetization over user satisfaction. (Gray et al. 2018)

### 2.2 Engagement-driven design

For the purposes of this thesis, engagement driven design is referring to the strategies aimed at capturing attention of the user and sustaining them, which is more broadly known as "user

engagement". In social media it is achieved utilizing "endless scroll" strategies and algorithms with sole purpose of user engagement and retention (Huang 2025). In video game world it is evident in the use of seasonal rewards and events, loot mechanics as well as "daily login rewards" amongst many other things (Dentsu 2024; Yellowbrick 2024). Rewards vary from game to game, Genshin Impact rewards are shown in Figure 1 and it is notable that they change every week.

Engagement has become the primary performance metric in gaming, treating user time as monetizable asset and risk prioritizing profit over player wellbeing in turn turning persuasiveness into manipulation. (Dentsu 2024)

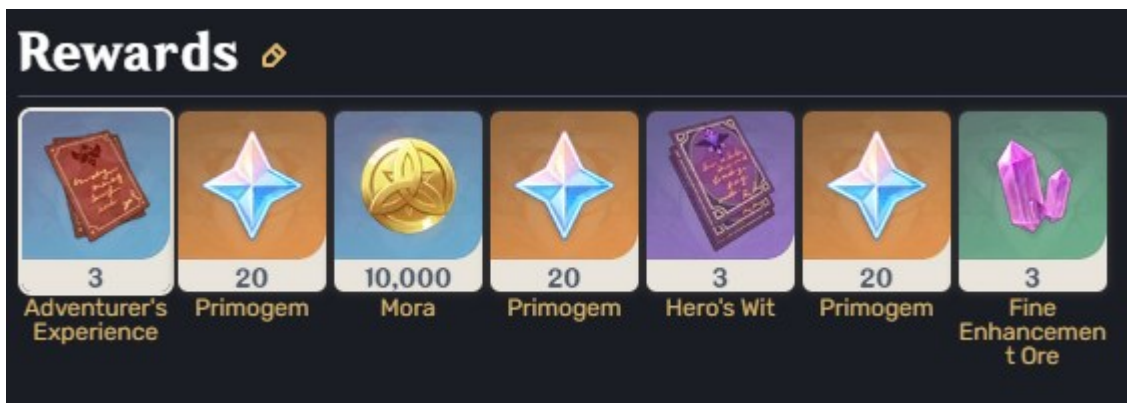


Figure 1. Daily login rewards in Genshin Impact from September 27<sup>th</sup> 2025

### 2.3 Video game monetization tactics

This thesis' focus is primarily free-to-play video games and so the monetization strategies described in this chapter cover this particular topic with only them in mind.

The monetization strategies of F2P games in the recent decade have evolved into highly sophisticated part of the game design, made to maximize the revenue through player engagement. If before games and possible add-ons were one-time purchase content (both physical and downloadable) now there are ever-growing ecosystems of microtransactions where every player interaction has a potential to be monetizable, for example rewards, progress and aesthetical items such as skins for your character. That is what allows for F2P games to exist, but in turn it made player experience transactional with constant cycle of engagement and expenditure which are born from design principles discussed in 2.2 section.

These monetization models rely on psychological reinforcement and use techniques once associated with casinos, such as variable reward schedules and scarcity pressures, and which are now an integral part of gaming economy. These design choices are made to subtly manipulate the

users and in turn take actions which benefit the company rather than the user making it a Dark UX design. (Zendle and Cairns 2018)

In terms of free-to-play video games there have been various different ways of monetization, but the most common tactics identified in literature are loot boxes, gacha, seasonal events, progression gates and cosmetic monetization.

All of the following models have been dividing gamer community, sparking conversations about ethical and legal concerns, to the point that European Parliament as well as consumer protection agencies across the EU have debated whether such mechanics constitute gambling and if gaming community requires more protection. The forthcoming Digital Fairness Act is aimed at ensuring fairness and transparency in the digital spaces and services, including video games which utilize “addictive design”. (European Parliament 2025)

### **2.3.1 Loot boxes and gacha systems**

Loot boxes and gacha systems, which use randomized rewards that copy gambling principles and structures, since players pay for randomized rewards not knowing if they will get cheapest possible reward or something valuable. Studies show a strong correlation between purchasing of a loot box in video game and problematic gambling behaviors (Zendle and Cairns, 2018). For example, in League of Legends players can buy two different types of loot boxes: Hextech Chests and seasonal loot boxes which change with new in-game “season”. Both contain random rewards such as character skins, emotes or rare in-game currency. In addition to those there is a newly introduced gacha system where players need to pay for a fourth different currency to gamble in hopes of receiving a rare reward of a Mythic skin, like Arcane Fractured Jinx shown in Figure 2. Difference between this and loot boxes is that in the later rewards are all randomized, in the former there is a goal of receiving a reward which is right in front of you in the form of a banner with a rare skin for your favorite character.

Odds of receiving the desired skin are extremely low, only 0.5% and guaranteed by 80<sup>th</sup> draw which costs 250 USD in in-game currency (Riot Games 2025). Research shows that this uncertainty and excitement is what activates the same neurological response as gambling does, making the experience so compelling (Zendle and Cairns 2018). Akin to slot machines, the combination of bright visuals, sound effects and just a chance to win “big” keeps players willing to spend more in pursuit of that big reward.

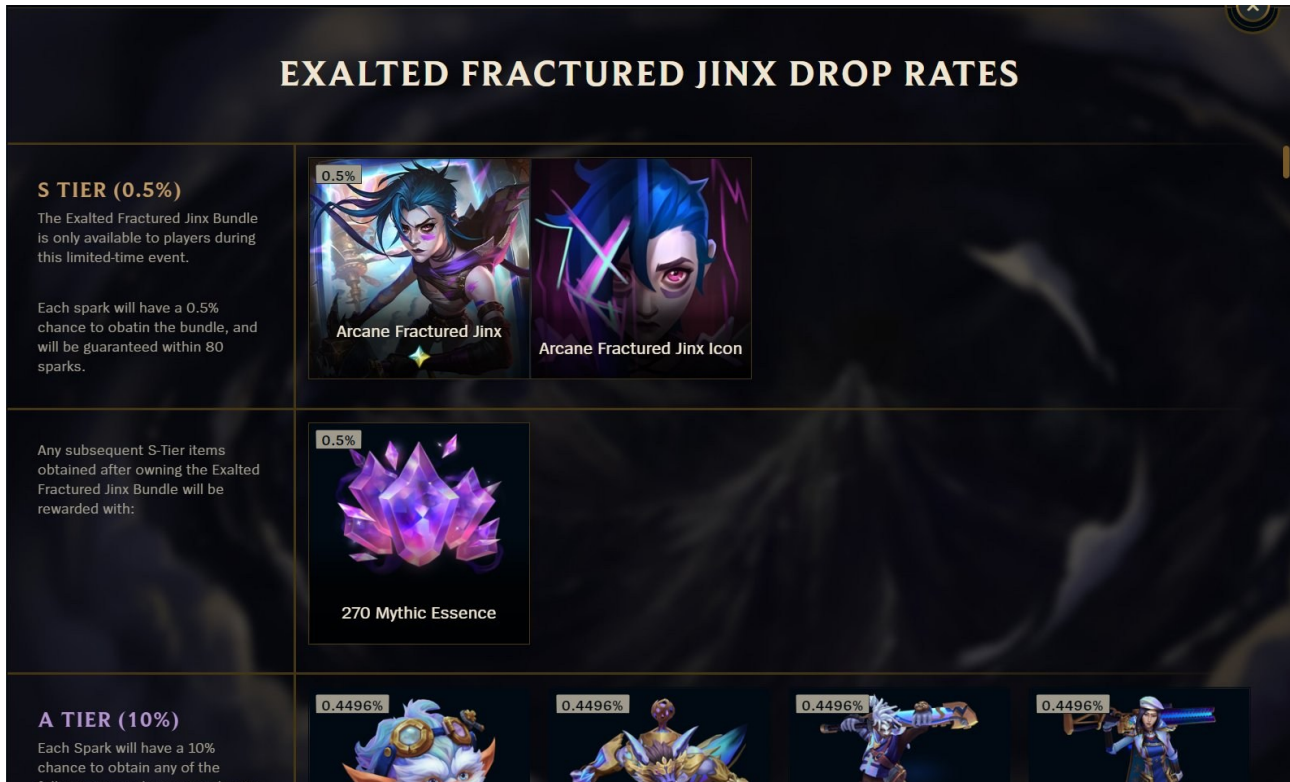


Figure 2. Example of drop rates in Sanctum gacha system in League of Legends

### 2.3.2 Time-limited Seasonal events

Many games use limited-time events sometimes referred to as seasons and they can last only a couple of days or more often weeks. The goal is to create sense of urgency as players are told to make sure to log in and play to earn the rewards before they disappear. This tactic exploits the fear of missing out, more commonly referred to as FOMO and is the anxiety that others are getting the experience or gaining something that you might miss out on.

A good example of this is a game called Fortnite, which has seasonal “battle pass” which is centered around a theme and has items which are available only within the pass and which are gone once the season ends. It isn’t uncommon to see people invest more time towards the end of the season to make sure all the rewards are acquired. (Komad 2023)

Usually battle passes/seasonal events have rewards for both paying and unpaying players and grabbing attention of both these time-sensitive designs keep people returning to the game, ensuring a healthy player count (Dentsu 2024).

### **2.3.3 Progression gate**

Another commonly used tactic is progression gate and difficulty barriers, which limit how fast players can advance. Games might include lives which recharge very slowly when lost, limited moves in the games, energy bars or deliberately difficult stages. Solution to all those problems is paying to continue playing (Bycer 2014).

For example, Candy Crush Saga mobile game is notorious for using this technique. Game allows only a few attempts at a level before introducing a choice of either trying again later once your lives are replenished or paying to skip the wait or better yet buy a level winning power-up. In effect, player frustration becomes the selling point and the same game which introduced these frustrating barriers sells the solution. (Walker 2014)

### **2.3.4 Cosmetic Monetization**

Cosmetic monetization has been touched on briefly in discussion about loot boxes, gacha and battle passes, but it is a tactic of its own as cosmetic purchases such as outfits, mounts, and other decorative items bring gaming companies a lot of money on their own (Knezovic 2025). Games like League of Legends sell many character skins, with the smallest amount of them shown on Figure 3.

Self-expression is turned into a product, where identity and desire to fit in have become part of the revenue model (Dentsu 2024).

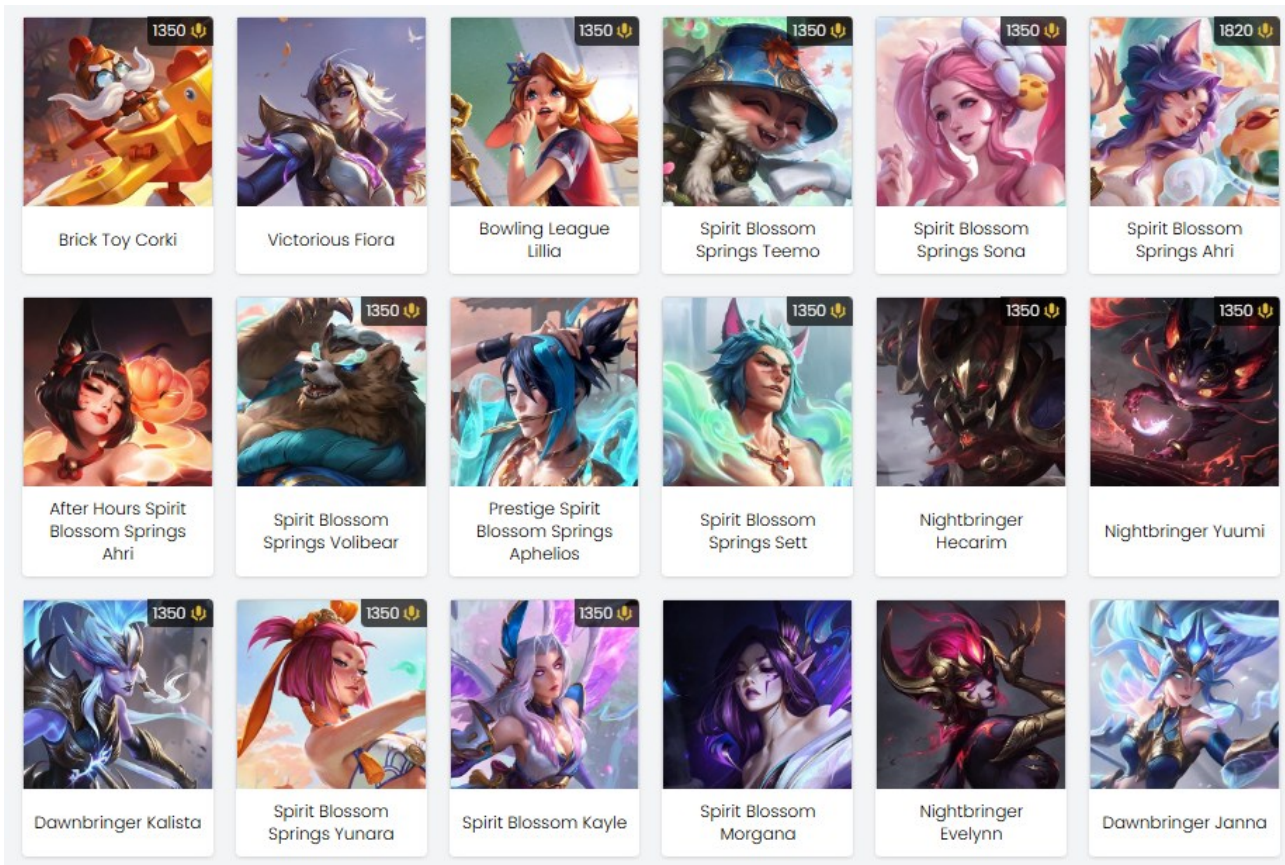


Figure 3. Example of skins in League of Legends

## 2.4 Ethical Considerations

When it comes to ethical considerations surrounding dark UX and its practices the consensus seems to be that in digital environments where engagement equals profit, user value is replaced with shareholder value. In turn it creates a system which intentionally exploits its users rather than serve their interests. (Gray et al., 2018)

According to Brignull (2023) deceptive design rarely arises from ignorance but it is a deliberate corporate intent. Players need to be aware that those practices are not accidental UX flaws, but calculated business strategies which pray on psychological vulnerabilities as it has been described in previous parts of this thesis.

Because of this manipulation of user vulnerabilities these kinds of practices have been under regulatory scrutiny. The European Parliament petition on consumer protection in gaming has shed light on how randomized rewards can harm minors since they resemble gambling (European Parliament, 2025). In addition to that the upcoming Digital Fairness Act seeks to address the “addictive digital design” across all digital services which will have an impact on video game industry.

### 3 Research Methods

This research thesis utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and analysis, in form of survey conducted using Google Forms and semi-structured interviews. Reason behind choosing both methods is to get a well-rounded understanding of how manipulative UX tactics affect gamer engagement, retention and spending in F2P video games.

Mixed methodology compliments each other, as quantitative data provides measurable patterns, while qualitative data offers more depth and contextual insight (Plano Clark, Vicki L. 2018, 1).

The presumption is that the effects manipulative UX tactics have cannot be fully understood with statistics alone. Goal here is to combine numerical data and personal narratives, to dig deeper into relationship between design, engagement and ethics in the gaming environment.

#### 3.1 Survey design

First stage of the research as mentioned before is online survey conducted on Google Forms, distributed across gamer communities, to measure player's spending behavior and awareness. The goal was to gather at least 50 responses to the survey.

The formulation of the questions was guided by the thesis' theoretical framework and research questions and assisted by the Gemini AI included in the Google Forms maker. Each of the questions was designed to have questions written in simple language without jargon and with a goal of a fast completion. Therefore, questions were presented using mostly multiple-choice and Likert-scale ratings (1-5) with no open-ended questions.

The survey ended up being 20 questions long and divided into three thematic sections:

- Demographics
- Gaming habits
- Recognition of manipulative design

Survey link was distributed on Discord gaming communities and Reddit with both recruitment posting and survey itself announcing survey's purpose and the fact that all the information gathered is anonymous and to be deleted within 6 months. To participate respondents had to be at least 18 years old and experience playing F2P games.

A total of 25 valid responses were collected within a three-day window with all the response data stored on Google Drive for further analysis.

### **3.2 Interview design**

When it came to interview design, choice fell on semi-structured interviews in order to get deeper answers to the predetermined themes of:

- Personal experience with manipulative practices in video games and in-game purchases.
- Awareness and perception of such game design
- Reflections on fairness, enjoyment, and long-term engagement

Participants were chosen based on their long-term gaming experience, the fact that they do play F2P video games regularly and on their availability to participate in the interview.

Goal was to conduct six semi-structured interviews in person and/or Discord voice call. Each session was booked for 40 minutes, and each participant was informed that interviews were to be transcribed and used in the thesis study.

Prior to the interviews the list of questions was made in order to keep the conversation on topic and to get deep into player's opinions and experiences. List of questions can be found in Appendix 1.

### **3.3 Data collection**

For ease of data collection, storage and analysis Google Forms were chosen as a data collection platform for survey because it is more convenient in terms of accessibility, automatic data recording, and built-in data visualisations with quick transfer to Google Sheets. Google Forms built in visualisations work great because they allow for simplified approach and minimize risk of data handling errors.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

In order to analyse both types of data provided by survey and interviews, two complimentary methods were deployed.

#### **3.4.1 Quantitative analysis (survey)**

Quantitative analysis relied on Google Forms' build-in statistics, which automatically summarize the data, like averages and visual charts. Those built-in tools and Google Sheets were sufficient in terms of this thesis.

The analysis of survey involved:

- Reviewing all responses for completeness.
- Identifying correlations between key variables such as frequency of in-game spending.

- Exporting charts to be included in Chapter 4 (Findings) as well as Appendix 2.

### **3.4.2 Qualitative analysis (interview)**

Data gathered in the process of interview was analysed using Affinity Diagram (also known as Affinity Mapping) methodology. This approach is widely used in UX user research to identify common themes, patterns and relationships in interview responses and helps to group them using visualisation. (Krause, Pernise, 2024)

After transcription of each interview, notable statements and notes from interviews were placed on digital sticky notes using the Miro board. In there notes are organized into thematic clusters based on conceptual similarities, allowing for quicker identification of similarities and patterns.

The process included:

1. Reading transcripts several times to understand participants' perspectives.
2. Extracting key comments and writing them down as notes.
3. Clustering the notes.
4. Identifying the theme of each cluster, such as FOMO, awareness etc.
5. Interpretation of data utilizing theoretical framework.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

This research has followed ethical standards of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and complied with EU GDPR requirements (Regulation (EU) 2016/679).

Participants of both survey and interview were notified about this thesis' objectives and data confidentiality in addition to being informed of possibility to skip any questions they find uncomfortable to answer to or too sensitive.

### **3.6 Limitations**

Several limitations were discovered during the research:

- Sampling bias: since survey was distributed in gaming communities results might overrepresent more engaged and knowledgeable players.
- Self-report bias: Spending habits as well as emotional responses are self-reported and so might lean into representing person's situation more favourably.
- Sample size: While survey responses and interviews provide enough material to be analysed they can't represent F2P gaming community as a whole.

## 4 Findings

Since the topic of the thesis turned out to be more complex and more personal to the participants, decision has been made to present findings telling a story rather than just showing off statistics. Evidence comes from Google Forms survey (N=25) and three semi-structured interviews (n=3) analysed with use of Affinity Diagram. Quantitative figures present the patterns and short quotes illustrate lived experience of the participants.

The goals set for number of participants was not reached due to time constraints surrounding the thesis and author's schedule. Both survey and interviews had to be done in short time, which limited the results of the study.

### 4.1 Participant demographics

Most survey respondents are PC players (80%) with the smallest representation being in mobile (4%) and cloud gaming (4%). Survey shows that play is a habit, roughly seven in ten log in to play at least a few times per week (29.2% daily; 41.7% weekly).

Games of choice for the participants were: League of Legends (8 mentions), Genshin Impact (4) with addition of Marvel Rivals, Clash of Clans and Roblox. Playing video games is a habit to these people and they all have a F2P game of choice.



Figure 4. Chart of games played by participants.

## 4.2 Spending habits

Spending appears to be accepted in F2P games, with 80% paying at least once. The most common spend is on cosmetics (72%) and battle/season passes (52%) with currency packs being present as well (36%) but it should be noted that majority of purchases in F2P games require purchase of in-game currency to make purchases.

Players have been spending considerable amounts, with third of participants reporting spending €250+, while other report spending in €10-€99 ranges. It should be noted that two-thirds (66.7%) have regretted a purchase, showing that even though spending is normalized it is in no way “risk-free”.

“Oh, yeah, for sure. I mean, there's cosmetics and stuff that I'm just like, okay, well, this looks like it was basically made like someone at bungee said, man. Kevin would really like this cosmetic.” (Interview: Kevin)

## 4.3 How pressure shows up in the moment

From the participant’s answers it is apparent that urgency mechanics are everywhere: three in four participants report seeing limited-time banners or countdowns; half encounter starter bundles; around two in five report loot-box prompts and daily streaks. These encounters leave players with more annoyance than anything else. Participants with “annoyed” as their typical reaction were a majority with 52% choosing that option in a survey; none of the participants chose “excited” option. A third agree that limited-time offers make them feel pressured (32%), though a majority push back against that feeling in self-description. The interviews help square this circle: players often resist the prompt, yet the presence of the prompts and time limitations still erode enjoyment.

“There definitely have been phases where it did, and I stopped playing destiny for a very long time for a period because it literally just felt like logging in doing my chores and going and doing something I else.” (Interview: Kevin)

How do these offers usually make you feel?

25 responses

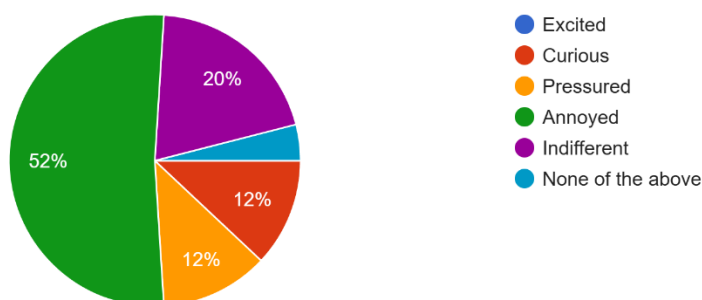


Figure 5. How in-game offers make participants feel.

#### 4.4 Line between fair and manipulative

The majority of the respondents think games are designed to make players spend (92%) and seem to agree that some titles cross into unfair/manipulative tactics (88%). Interviews open up more clearly on where that line sits. Practices seen as respectful include clear pricing, non-expiring access (e.g. returnable passes), and the ability to trade or gift ones own digital goods, instead of only owning a license to it. In turn practices which are perceived as exploitative include currency obfuscation (prices that don't map the real-world money), forcing over-purchasing via bundle sizes, stacked FOMO windows, and power-creep leans toward pay-to-win.

“When in-game currency doesn't map to money, it feels like a trick.” (Interview: Mark)

#### 4.5 Ownership vs Licencing

A recurring theme across interviews is the fragility of digital ownership. Players raise the concerns about shutdowns, bans, loss of assets and inability to transfer purchases. For example, Riot Games labels a purchase of a skin a purchase of a license for a digital good as shown on Figure 6 with Flora Fatalis Fiddlesticks. Systems that enable marketplaces or gifting appear to look fairer in the eyes of interviewees because value of the goods seems to be more persistent and under player control.

“If Riot bans me... I wish there was a way I could sell my skins.” (Dennis)

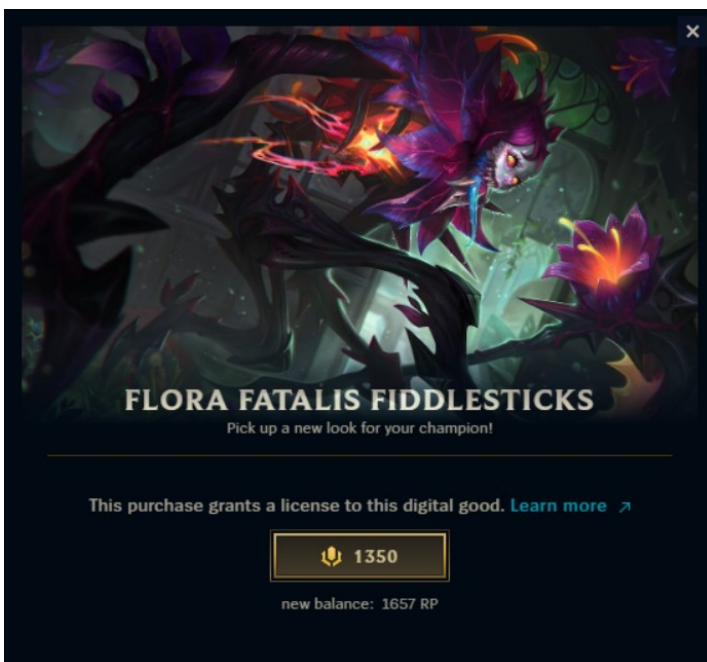


Figure 6. Purchase of cosmetic in League of Legends is classified as purchase of a license

#### 4.6 Why passes both motivate and burden

Battle passes were mentioned throughout interviews, as both examples of manipulative tactics and what game companies can do well. But always with a mention of a clock. For some the presence of the time-limited event is motivating; for others it creates sunk-cost pressure and turns leisure into obligation. The same type of product can create satisfaction, for example when completing the enjoyable season, or regret when money was spent but there was simply no time to complete things. Players explicitly prefer models that minimise unrecoverable loss, such as perpetual progression, rollover, or buy-to-unlock tracks.

“If I can’t finish, I won’t buy — I’ve paid before and it felt wasted.” (Interview: Dennis)

#### 4.7 Self control

From interviews it was evident that participants due to their familiarity with the tactics have come up with rules for themselves in terms of spending. For example: only buy a pass once every milestone was finished, avoid spending money on gacha if free currency can be achieved etc. Yet scarcity and identity cues (a skin for favorite character; a limited banner) can disrupt those rules, producing the very feeling of regret reported in the survey.

“Why do I have \$11 in my bank but spent \$700 on a free-to-play game?” (Dennis)

#### 4.8 What keeps people playing despite monetisation

Monetisation can trigger churn, several interviewees described stepping away from the game when playing the game started to feel like a chore or if the game introduces new monetisation mechanic. Despite that core gameplay quality and friend groups often pull people back to play. The implication seems to be that improving underlying play and social fabric can overturn the frustration with the store/monetisation.

#### 4.9 Why these patterns matter

Across methods, the same picture emerges. In day-to-day play, urgency mechanisms (e.g., limited-time banners seen by ~75% of participants) and onboarding offers (starter bundles, daily streaks) make the store feel ever-present and the game is a constant advertising noise. Players don’t necessarily label each offer as “pressure”, yet it does make them feel annoyed. This ambient irritation is not harmless: it coincides with spending on items which signal legible value, for example cosmetics and battle/season passes, and with it a relatively high level of post-purchase regret, particularly in situations where value is opaque.

Participants of this research do spend on their video games, but they do so with an eye on fairness, clarity and ownership/control. If game's practices violate those three pillars the experience is seen as manipulative and is destroying the goodwill even among paying users.

What must be noted is that these findings are indicative and not representative. The sample is small, PC-leaning and relies on self-report. Nonetheless, the pattern consistency across the methods strengthens the internal logic that the problem is not monetisation as a whole but the absence of control. In the following chapter these patterns will be built on to discuss design, community and policy moves to reduce the annoyance while preserving sustainable revenue.

## 5 Discussion

This chapter builds on the findings of the research, the interpretation of that the patterns likely mean for player autonomy, perceived fairness and sustainable monetization.

The central claim here is that players evaluate monetization not just by its existence but whether three conditions are met in order to make it acceptable: legibility (understanding the deal), durability (value lasts long enough to matter to the player), and lastly control (agency over value). Both survey and interviews suggest that violation of those conditions is what makes players annoyed and leads to feeling manipulated. Importantly, “manipulative” is not tied to paying but to the terms of the exchange. This finding reframes the design problem from “how to monetize” to “how to preserve consent while monetizing”.

### 5.1 What the evidence implies

Survey and interview have players describe the environment full of countdowns, streaks, and starter bundles. Interestingly half of the respondent’s reporting annoyance as their main reaction to the in-game offers but only few label any single prompt as coercive. This gap suggests that the issue might be the pacing of the offers. In practical terms, monetization is no longer occasional, but it is now ever-present layer that begs for attention in parallel with the core engagement loop.

Evidence shows that spending is concentrated in cosmetic and passes, which are both products which are visible and easy to explain (“I look different”, “I progressed”, “I did more than you”). Regret clusters around randomized rewards and time-limited events. This pattern is consistent with the following mechanisms:

- Pre-purchase visibility (driver of intent): Players can imagine the outcome and its relevance to their identity and goals and feel safer about the purchase. Offers are easy to evaluate and perceived risk goes down in their minds as purchase intent goes up.
- Post-purchase fragility (driver of regret): If the value is time-boxed or quickly devalued (expiry, meta shifts), the utility isn’t realised. This creates a mismatch between expected value and experienced value, leading to buyer’s remorse.
- Identity linked scarcity (driver of impulse): Limited-time items tied to player’s favourite character or other aesthetic trigger can make them ignore their own rules (“I won’t spend this month”). That impulse overrides self-control and if purchased item turns out “fragile”, then the regret is worse.

Model formed from these mechanisms explains how same player can both spend on in-game items and feel manipulated afterwards. The same player can buy something and still feel tricked

because what makes them buy (they can see it and it fits their style) is separate from how they judge it later (it expires fast, FOMO passes or they never really get to use it).

## 5.2 Battle passes

Best example of this in practice are the battle passes. Passes motivate action by pairing progress with a ticking clock. The same “item” has high pre-purchase visibility and creates sunk-cost anxiety (post-purchase fragility). Based on interviews the assumption is that players prefer perpetual or returnable passes, because they decouple value from deadline.

This suggests a feasible design move: keep the structure (tiers, quests, cosmetics) while softening the time constraint (rollover XP, seasonal banks, grace periods). The expected outcome is lower regret with minimal impact on conversion among already-motivated players.

## 5.3 Self-regulation

A part of identity linked scarcity mechanism discussed earlier is the self-regulation. Players report self-imposed rules, yet limited events tied to identity (a favourite character/skin line etc.) puncture these guardrails. The mechanism is familiar: scarcity + personal relevance overwhelms cool-headed budgeting. This has two implications.

First, designers should not leave ethics to “buyer discipline”. Second, optional aids (spend reminders, cooling-off toggles, odds disclosures) are not merely compliance tick-boxes; they actively support the play experience that keeps people returning.

## 5.4 Ownership

Even though ownership is not part of the model discussed earlier, ownership is something which has been an important topic to the players and therefore has design implications.

Systems that enable trading, gifting, or account portability simulate persistence and therefore feel fairer. Where that is impossible, transparent lifecycle communication (e.g., how long an item is expected to remain relevant) can still protect perceived value.

## 5.5 Suggestions for product, economy design, community, and comms

The suggestions based on the findings in terms of design are the following:

- Product: Reduce prompt frequency; batch offers rather than spraying them across sessions. Additionally avoid force over-buy. Align currency packs with common price points so players can buy exactly what they need. Expected effect: higher perceived fairness and fewer buyer-remorse complaints.

- Economy: Prioritise legible, durable value. Tilt the store toward cosmetics and passes whose benefits are easy to see and that last long enough to matter (e.g., non-expiring or rollover tracks). Expected effect: lower regret, steadier repeat spend.
- Community: Make progress collaborative, not punitive. Favour guild or friend goals that can be completed over flexible windows instead of daily streaks that punish missed days. Expected effect: stronger social pull with less “chore” fatigue.
- Comms: Swap countdown pressure for clear planning. Use labels like “returns next season,” “rollover enabled,” or “complete at your pace” to keep intent without fear of missing out. Expected effect: less anxiety, similar conversion on evergreen items.

Across functions, the goal is the same: design for legibility, durability, and control while managing cadence. Done together, these shifts reduce annoyance and regret, strengthen community goodwill, and make revenue more sustainable.

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis was guided by four questions: which “dark” UX tactics show up in free-to-play games, how these tactics influence player engagement, whether players notice them, and what are the ethical implications of these tactics. The answers/findings were found from Google Forms survey and interviews analyzed through the lens of theoretical framework and Affinity diagram.

### 6.1 Answering the guiding questions

Do players notice the “dark” UX tactics? In short – yes. In both survey and interviews players have consistently pointed out the same tactics they have noticed: time-limited offers, countdowns, in-game currency that blurs the connection to real money, loot boxes, streaks which punish breaks, and interruptive nudges. These patterns appeared throughout the gaming experience.

Along side those tactics are social levers such as purchase visibility, friend/group goals and identity-signaling purchases. In combination these tactics create an always-on sense of urgency.

When it comes to player engagement, findings are pointing to short term and long-term results. Short term, the effects of the UX tactics are very reliable: prompts and countdowns do push people to make purchases, especially when it came to battle passes and skins. Those purchase decisions would often be quick, with buyers’ remorse setting in later.

What is interesting is that in long term the picture becomes mixed. Respondents described regret, store avoidance or taking breaks, and yet they have returned for friends/community and for core gameplay if it has been consistently good. This back and forth explains how will engage and spend exists at the same time as dissatisfaction and why overuse of “dark” UX tactics erodes the experience.

Players are not oblivious to manipulation; awareness is high if one is to look at survey answers and interviews. The assumption is that the participants were over the age of 18 and have been playing for several years, hence they would be witnessing the rise of free-to-play video games and continuous adoption of “dark” UX as means of monetization.

When it comes to their perception of the tactics it is clear that hidden true cost, unfair/unclear odds in loot boxes and timers make them feel manipulated. Perceptions improve when value of a digital good is legible and durable.

Ethically, results of the study support that gaming companies have a duty to care about their players, with designs which should inform and encourage, rather than exploiting basic human urges and force players to make choices. Systems that respect autonomy and ownership align with

player welfare. From business sustainability perspective, pressure-first monetization tends to trade player trust for revenue. With growing regulatory attention on deceptive patterns and chance-based monetization (loot boxes etc.), designing free-to-play games in the manner they are today might raise compliance and reputational risk.

## **6.2 Final words**

When starting this thesis there was a risk that it would end up being a catalogue of “dark” patterns with no insight into the problem, but luckily the findings were more nuanced than that. What was clearly seen is that these tactics exist and they do move the numbers for gaming companies, but only in short term as they leave players dissatisfied with their experiences with games. This was an image which was clear from survey and interviews.

So where does it leave future game development and teams responsible? Personal takeaway is that designers need to treat trust as a resource when designing in-game systems. That resource is not easily refillable but when respected it can bring immense value. My pledge to the studios would be: don't sell players confusion and don't steal their time and money. Players are not blind to what is going on and do not appreciate being punished for rest or having to pay more for things they want just because the system is made to have obscure real-world currency to in-game currency exchange. That is how the trust resource gets depleted.

Clarity is respect when it comes to design and players do want to have clear picture of what exactly they are committing their time and money to, without pressure or the ticking clock. If games could also be designed for the moment after the purchase, there would be much less dissatisfaction and regret amongst the players leading to the community which is engaged and willing to spend on the things that they genuinely feel good to own.

## Sources

Brignull, H. 2023. Deceptive patterns: Exposing the tricks tech companies use to control you. London: Testimonium Ltd. URL: <https://www.deceptive.design/book/contents/chapter-11> Accessed: 28 September 2025

Bycer Josh 2014. Understanding the Barriers of Play URL: <https://www.gamedeveloper.com/business/understanding-the-barriers-of-play> Accessed: 2 October 2025

Dentsu (2024) Gaming: No longer just a side quest for brands. Dentsu Gaming Report, October 2024.

European Parliament (2025) Petition No. 0721/2024 on consumer protection in the video games industry. Committee on Petitions, PE772.092v01-00.

Gray, C.M., Kou, Y., Battles, B., Hoggatt, J. and Toombs, A.L. 2018. 'The dark (patterns) side of UX design', Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems. ACM, Montreal.

Huang, X. 2025. "The Manipulative Mechanisms and Multifaceted Impacts of Dark Patterns in Social Platform: A Case Study of Xiaohongshu", *Asia Pacific Economic and Management Review*, 2(5). URL: <https://doi.org/10.62177/apemr.v2i5.590> Accessed: 1 October 2025

Knezovic 2025. The Cosmetic Monetization Trend: How to sell Cosmetic Items. <https://www.blog.udonis.co/mobile-marketing/mobile-games/cosmetic-monetization> Accessed: 2 October 2025

Komad Milijana 2023. Product design and psychology: The Exploitation of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in Video Game Design URL: <https://medium.com/@milijanakomad/product-design-and-psychology-the-exploitation-of-fear-of-missing-out-fomo-in-video-game-design-5b15a8df6cda> Accessed: 2 October 2025

Krause Rachel, Persince Kara 2024. Affinity Diagramming for Collaboratively Sorting UX Findings and Design Ideas URL: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/affinity-diagram/> Accessed: 2 October 2025

Plano Clark, V.L. 2018. Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Riot Games Support 2025. The Sanctum URL: <https://support-leagueoflegends.riot-games.com/hc/en-us/articles/35821278718995-The-Sanctum> Accessed: 1 October 2025

Tversky, A. and Kahneman, D. (1991) 'Loss aversion in riskless choice: A reference-dependent model' URL: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2937956> Accessed: 1 October 2025

Walker 2014. Understanding Candy Crush's Psychological Warfare Tactics URL: <https://www.gamedeveloper.com/business/understanding-candy-crush-s-psychological-warfare-tactics> Accessed: 1 October 2025

Yellowbrick 2024. Top Player Engagement Strategies for Video Game Design URL: <https://www.yellowbrick.co/blog/animation/top-player-engagement-strategies-for-video-game-design> Accessed: 3 October 2025

Zendle D, Cairns P 2018. Video game loot boxes are linked to problem gambling: Results of a large-scale survey. PLoS ONE 13(11): e0206767 URL: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0206767> Accessed: 1 October 2025

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions

What free-to-play games are you currently playing the most?

How long have you been playing those games?

What do you enjoy about them?

Do you usually spend money in these games, or do you prefer to play for free?

Recent purchase or spending decision

Can you tell me about the last time you considered or made an in-game purchase?

What was happening in the game at that moment?

What kind of offer or item was shown? (e.g., loot box, limited-time event, bundle)

How did it make you feel when you saw it? (excited, pressured, tempted, curious, etc.)

Did anything or anyone influence your choice? (friends, social media, events)

Did you end up buying it? Why or why not?

Afterward, how did you feel about that decision — satisfied, neutral, or regretful?

Do you think game companies try to influence or manipulate how players spend money?

What kinds of tactics have you noticed in games that feel manipulative or pushy?

How do time-limited offers or countdown timers affect you?

Does anything in games ever make you feel FOMO (fear of missing out)?

Have you ever felt regret, guilt, or pressure after spending money in a game?

Have you ever taken a break or uninstalled a game because of its monetization system?

Do you feel that you are in control of your spending in these games?

What do you think is fair or unfair about the way F2P games make money?

Do you think these systems should be regulated (for example, loot boxes or gambling-like mechanics)?

In your opinion, what would ethical monetization look like in a game?

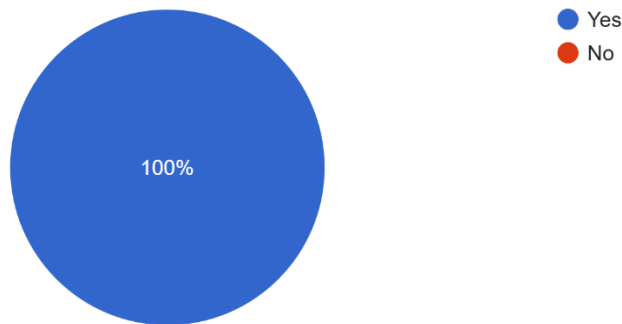
If you could redesign one aspect of monetization to make it fairer, what would you change?

What kind of balance between free content and paid content feels right to you?

### Appendix 2. Survey results

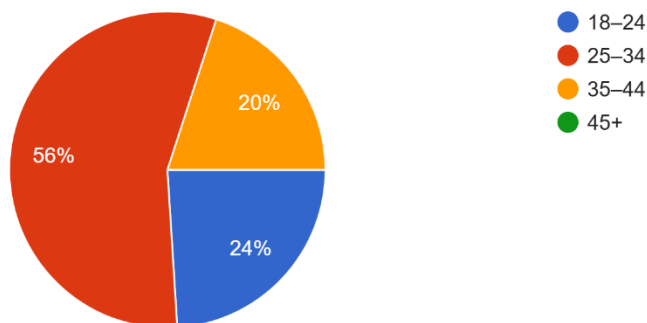
Do you consent to participate and confirm you are 18 or older?

25 responses



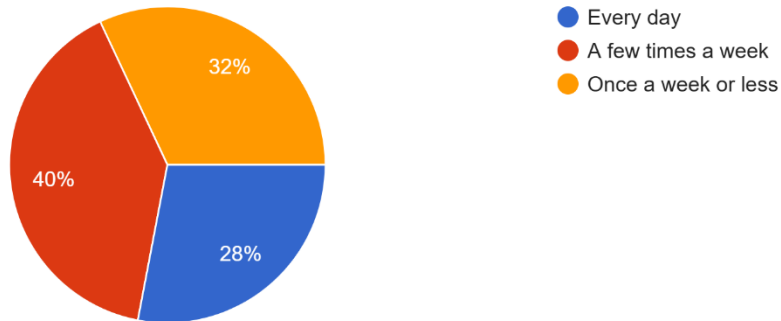
Age group

25 responses



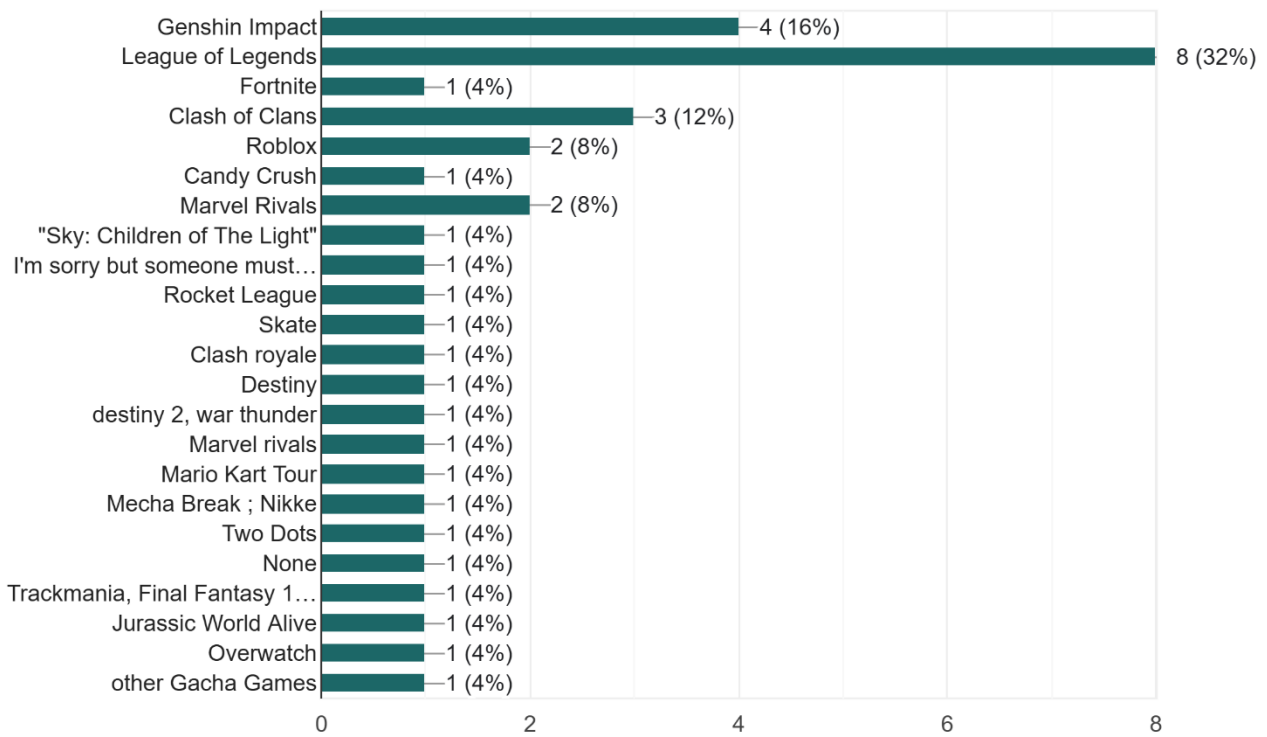
### How often do you play free-to-play games?

25 responses



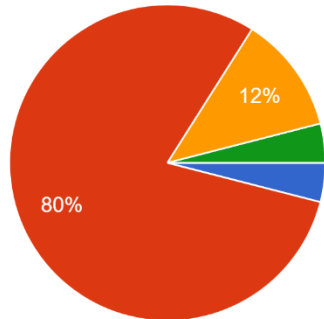
### Which of these games have you played in the past 6 months?

25 responses



On which platform do you play most?

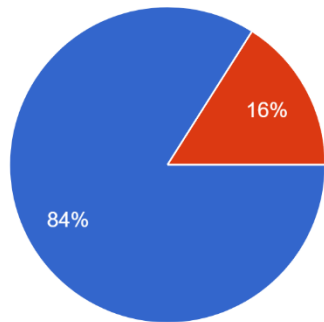
25 responses



- Mobile phone
- PC
- Console (PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo)
- Other (Cloud gaming etc.)

Have you ever spent real money in a free-to-play game?

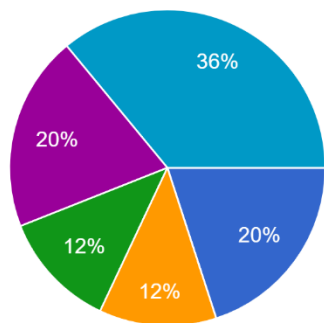
25 responses



- Yes
- No

How much money have you spent in total on F2P games?

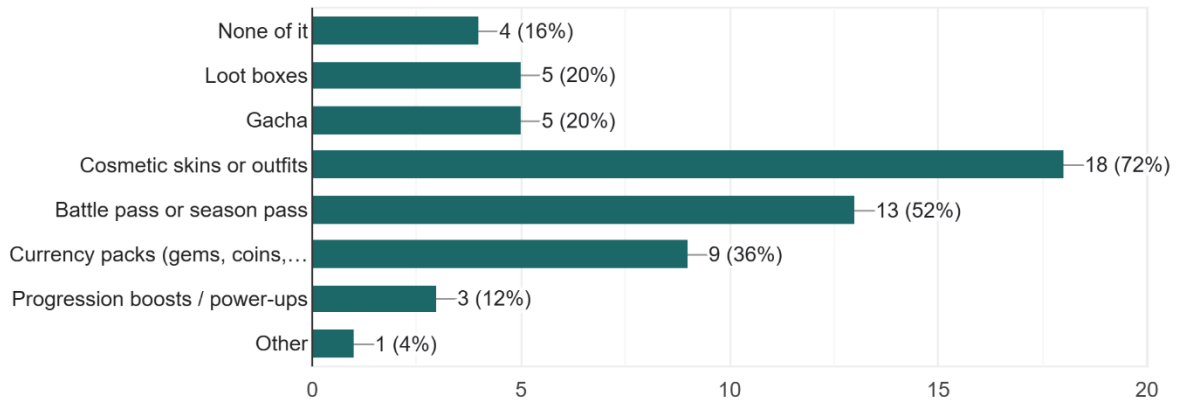
25 responses



- I have never spent money on F2P video games
- Less than €10
- €10-49
- €50-99
- €100-249
- €250+

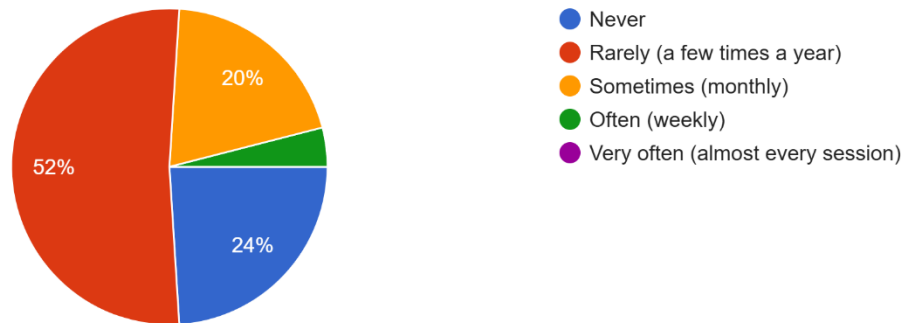
### What type of things have you paid for?

25 responses



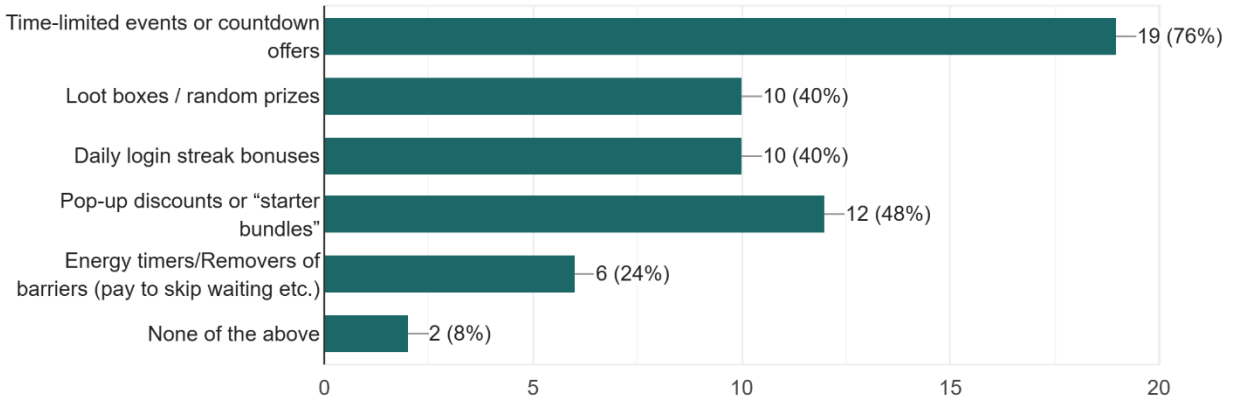
### How often do you spend money in these games?

25 responses



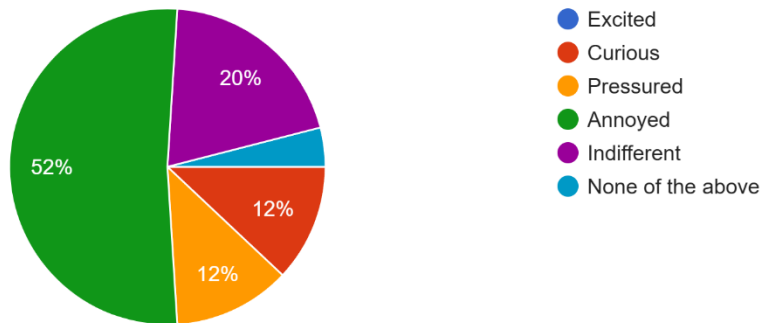
Which of these offers do you see most often?

25 responses



How do these offers usually make you feel?

25 responses



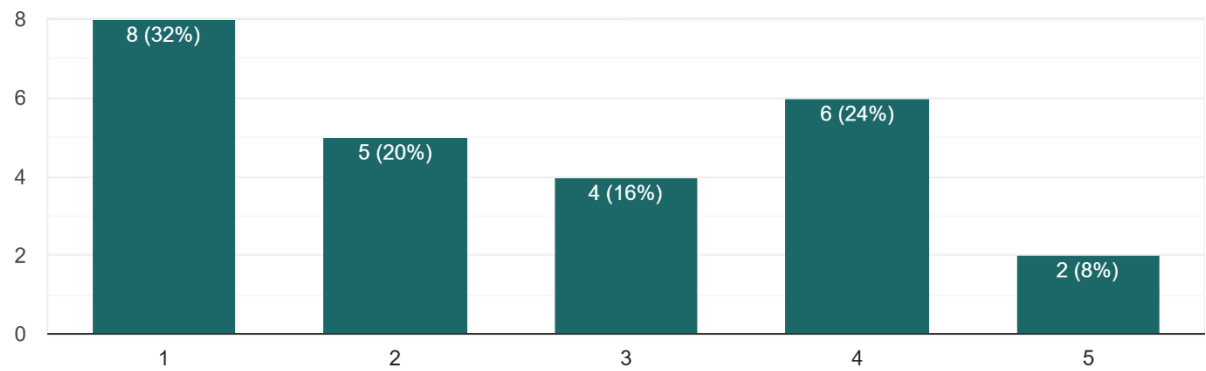
How much do you rely on in-game purchases to progress in the games you play?

25 responses



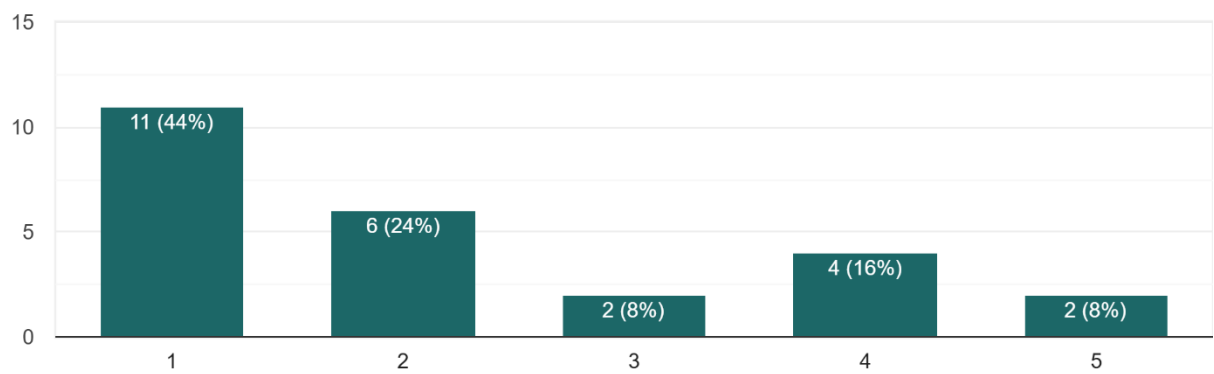
I often feel pressured to spend money because of limited-time offers.

25 responses



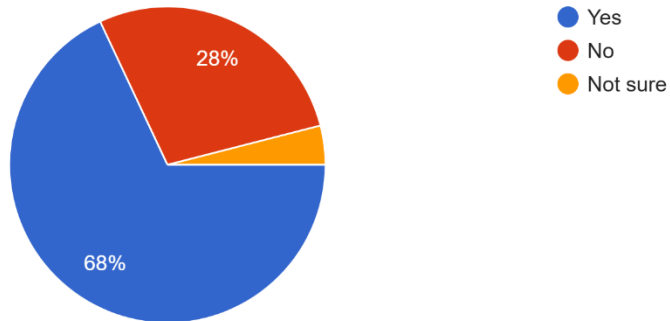
I sometimes buy things in games just to avoid FOMO.

25 responses



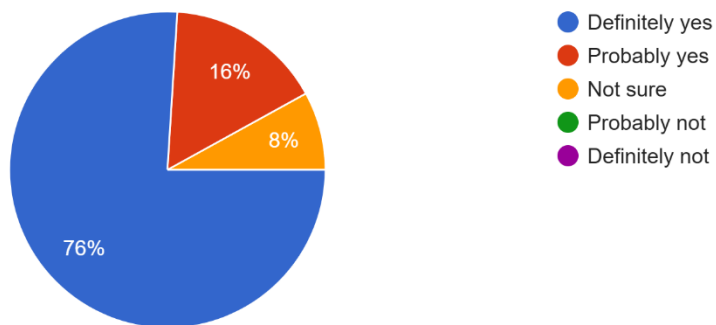
Have you ever regretted buying something in a game?

25 responses



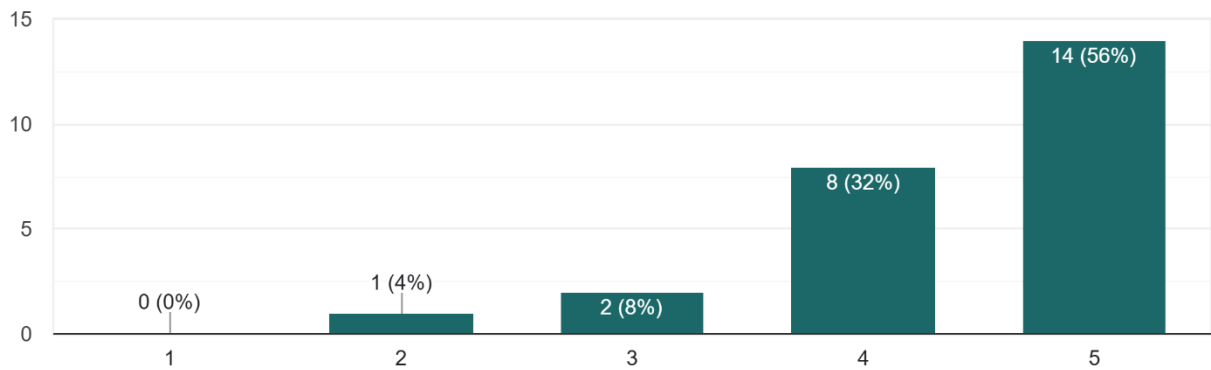
Do you think these games are designed to make you spend money?

25 responses



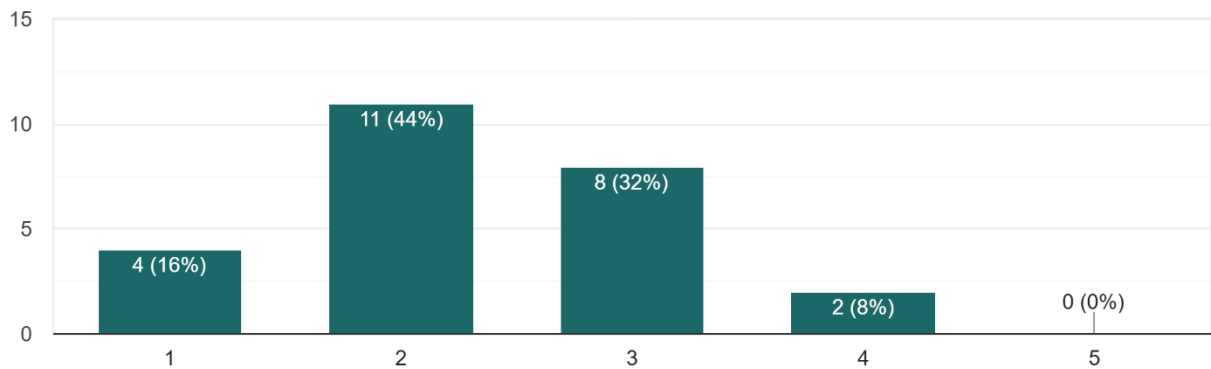
I believe some games use unfair or manipulative tactics to make players spend

25 responses



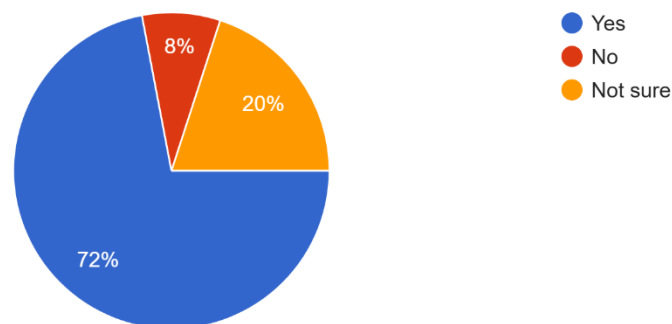
How fair do you think most free-to-play games are when it comes to monetization?

25 responses



Do you think loot boxes or gacha systems should be regulated like gambling?

25 responses



### Appendix 3. Interview Kevin

Speaker 1 (00:09)

Okay, so what are your current free to play games?

Speaker 2 (00:15)

Technically, destiny is free to play. Destiny. I have played a lot of them but I'm not currently still playing a lot of them that I can think of.

Speaker 1 (00:31)

Well, why? Why do you still go back to destiny?

Speaker 2 (00:34)

Time investment is a big part of it. I put a lot of time into getting equipment and stuff in that game. And so if I stop playing, it feels like a waste, which is great.

Speaker 2 (00:46)

But also just the gunplay in that game is really, really good. And that's the only reason it hasn't died is because of how tight the actual like gameplay feels that in playing with friends is fun.

Speaker 1 (00:58)

Well, we mentioned the suncoast fallacy. How does it make you feel to say that

Speaker 2 (01:04)

I mean, I know about it. I've also, I've gone to school for game design. So, very aware of the tactics that like these companies use I had to do a very similar course to this about free of play stuff.

Speaker 2 (01:17)

So I mean, I know I'm being manipulated. But as long as it doesn't feel like detrimental, and it's fun, then I I'm able to kind of go, yeah, that's bad practice. But you don't have to engage in it in a lot of the cases, either as long as it doesn't have that gameplay.

Speaker 2 (01:34)

So

Speaker 1 (01:35)

Okay, but have you ever engaged in anything destiny store wanna do?

Speaker 2 (01:39)

Oh, yeah, for sure. I mean, there's cosmetics and stuff that I'm just like, okay, well, this looks like it was basically made like someone at bungee said, man. Kevin would really like this cosmetic.

Speaker 2 (01:51)

Let's put it in the game and yeah, so there's definitely been times where I'm just like, all right? Yeah, no question, just buy whatever this looks cool.

Speaker 1 (01:59)

How much do you think you've spent so far?

Speaker 2 (02:01)

Well, it's hard to quantify with destiny, specifically just because there's expansion content, and then there's cosmetic content. If you count all of it together, hundreds of dollars easily, because every year is for the expansions, is like a \$100 get everything for that year type of thing. If you only count the cosmetics Probably no more than like a 150I don't do it very often.

Speaker 2 (02:26)

But when something hits I was like, I really want this then I'll cave.

Speaker 1 (02:33)

But do you ever pay for the passes?

Speaker 2 (02:35)

Like the season passes, yeah, they come with that like \$100. Purchase like included. It's like all the DLC all the like their version of battle passes, all that stuff.

Speaker 2 (02:46)

So, technically, yes, I don't know if I wasn't getting those big bundles if I would always get the season passed. But since it's just included with what I'm getting anyway.

Speaker 1 (02:57)

Even though it's included, do you feel like it's worth the money and the time you put it.

Speaker 2 (03:01)

Generally, yes, cuz each one will include like an exotic gun that you can, which is like it's a special gun that will work differently from other. It'll have like a special trade or something which you can get through just playing it for free. But they give you it immediately.

Speaker 2 (03:18)

And yeah, I would say, for the most part, I've gotten my value out of it. There's definitely been some where it's like I'm never going to use any of the stuff in this past. But it's, it's a thing to progress that makes my brain happy.

Speaker 1 (03:29)

I mean, if it makes you happy, but does it ever feel like work trying to complete it?

Speaker 2 (03:36)

There definitely have been phases where it did, and I stopped playing destiny for a very long time for a period because it literally just felt like logging in doing my chores and going and doing something I else. I actually wanted to do. It's gotten better and then recently it got worse.

Speaker 1 (03:54)

What changed then? And now

Speaker 2 (03:56)

Basically, so they, the game used to be super grindy to unlock, like base stuff for gameplay and stuff. And then over time, they've made it less grindy, and then this is the most recent expansion that came out. They went back to they like revamped a lot of the like leveling systems in the game.

Speaker 2 (04:15)

So leveling up your character became a lot more of a grind than it had previously. So now we're kind of back into a dip where it feels kind of like a job again. The community as a whole doesn't love it.

Speaker 1 (04:30)

No, it, I I've heard stuff. I participated and stuff, so I get it. But I hope quickly because you mentioned the expansions, because it kind of counts as manipulative tactic in a way, the fact that they had expansions, which they then wanted, how does it make you feel?

Speaker 2 (04:52)

It's so I'm in a weird place with that. Because yeah, so destiny had like its vanilla content that came out when the game first launched, and then Uber time, their excuse basically, was that they just couldn't maintain having all this content on the game as they were adding more and more. So they went and basically removed a lot of the older content as the game went on.

Speaker 2 (05:15)

And not being able to have those like campaign missions and stuff that came out back then, especially since with destiny. It's like a it's a ongoing narrative. Every expansion, like it's building and building and building on itself.

Speaker 2 (05:26)

And when you're removing like a huge chunk of that story, from the Game and your only way to experience It is to go watch a YouTube video of people who were playing around, then it from a narrative perspective, it makes the game feel incomplete. But then yeah, if you did play during that time, and you got like weapons, armor and stuff like that. That you just had to throw in the trash.

Speaker 2 (05:50)

Essentially it, yeah, it felt really bad. And people hated it when it happened. There's like a kind of light version of that going on right now, where they didn't get rid of old content, but they're making they specifically made like, Hey, if you use a weapon that came out like this expansion, all of the weapons that are new do, like 15% more damage than all.

Speaker 2 (06:10)

Other weapons. So it's not actually getting rid of the old stuff, it's just making the new stuff. Obviously way better to use than the old stuff.

Speaker 1 (06:20)

That's a completely new way too.

Speaker 2 (06:23)

It's an interesting choice.

Speaker 1 (06:25)

How does it make you feel?

Speaker 2 (06:27)

For me, personally like it doesn't make the old stuff unusable. It just makes the clear decision. If you want to midmax and do the absolute, like most damage or whatever you can to use the new stuff.

Speaker 2 (06:37)

So I personally, I just use whatever I like I use whatever's fun that I have. I haven't it? I haven't felt the need like I have to go throw away all my old stuff and only use the new stuff.

Speaker 2 (06:47)

So I do recognize, it's a really not great tactic to use, but also I'm not really letting it affect me, because I'm just refusing to kind of engage with it. And just being adamant and using my old stuff that's fun.

Speaker 1 (07:04)

But do you think like if you cared about? Would you feel fomo that like, you know, if someone else in your group had that? And you didn't

Speaker 2 (07:12)

Um. Not, I don't get fomo like that. Personally.

Speaker 2 (07:18)

Generally, so it like another person's experience doesn't generally affect my own in that case. So as long as I'm having a good time or whatever. Yeah, they can use all the new stuff.

Speaker 2 (07:28)

Have fun. Do like 15% more damage for me? As long as I'm having fun using my stuff, I don't really care.

Speaker 2 (07:33)

It doesn't affect me.

Speaker 1 (07:37)

Um. That actually, I like that it covered so much stuff. I wanted, but it's kind of like You mentioned that you did buy like cosmetics all of that What cosmetics make you feel like when you purchase that?

Speaker 2 (07:54)

Like, how does it make me feel? Yeah, I mean, a big part of destiny for a lot of people is dressing up your character to make them like, look cool and stuff. So like it is satisfying when like, oh I had to buy this armor set, that's cosmetic for like 10 bucks, but I look really, really cool.

Speaker 2 (08:16)

Like, in, like constantly, like, getting compliments from other people in the game, like, oh my God, you combine those pieces with that pieces that looks really cool. So like there is like a satisfaction of just basically like dressing up your bar meeting essentially.

Speaker 1 (08:34)

Okay, but did you ever buy it like to fit in with your friends or group

Speaker 2 (08:38)

No, generally, if I'm going to spend money on something like that, it's for myself. I can't think of a time where I've ever been like oh, everyone on my team is using this cosmetic. I need to use this cosmetic too.

Speaker 2 (08:48)

The only kind of pressure I would feel like that is like, I guess like like Fortnite would be a good example is you start with the the inability to even pick what you look like in that game unless you spend money generally, sometimes I give out free skins. And stuff, but until you engage with the microtransactions in that game, you look just like a normal, boring character that you don't even get to pick. So like there's more incentive there to spend money, so it's like, oh I want to look like.

Speaker 2 (09:18)

I want to at least a consistent character that I got to pick if not like. I want to be Spider-Man or whatever.

Speaker 1 (09:26)

You mentioned Fortnite, so I have you played it a lot.

Speaker 2 (09:30)

In the past, yes, I haven't played it in a long time, but I did, especially during like COVID and stuff. I got very heavy into Fortnite so that it was a name that a lot of my friends were playing. So it was a way for me to be social with them.

Speaker 1 (09:42)

How much have you spent there?

Speaker 2 (09:46)

Let's see battle passes are about 10 bucks. I definitely did like the At least I don't know the exact number, but probably a couple \$100 at least total

Speaker 1 (09:57)

Do you regret any spendings?

Speaker 2 (10:00)

Uh, I mean, yes, and no, because they I feel like I got my money's worth of like enjoyment out of them when I was playing. Obviously it's not doing anything for me now when I'm not but I mean, it's hard to quantify, like emotional like happiness and stuff. Doing monetary value kind of but I would say, overall, I mean, there's been dumb things where it's like I might purchase a skin and then just like you get it in gaming.

Speaker 2 (10:27)

You're just like, oh, this doesn't look as good in games as it is or

Speaker 1 (10:30)

Is there a possibility to return

Speaker 2 (10:33)

With Fortnite specifically, I know there is they basically you have like a ticket system where you get 3 refund tickets that like they refresh every like 6 months or a year. I forget the time frame, but there is a way to like do that, but you can't do it very much.

Speaker 1 (10:49)

What about destiny?

Speaker 2 (10:51)

Destiny I don't believe there is a system for that. I I don't think you can return items what you get it. You just you get it, you realize you don't like it and you go well.

Speaker 2 (11:01)

There goes that money

Speaker 1 (11:03)

Do you think there should be a system

Speaker 2 (11:05)

Probably, I've never really thought about it until now. But having that kind of a system in Fortnite, where if it's like oops, I bought on accident, or it's just wasn't what I wanted is definitely a nice feature to have. So it would be a positive thing to have to dust me

Speaker 1 (11:22)

Do you think that, for example, Fortnite or destiny would benefit from possibility to sell you items because they kind of so they belong to you? And you can sell them

Speaker 2 (11:32)

It I mean, the feature would be nice, but Systems like that or can get sketchy so fast like like everything around like I've never played counter strike. But I know counter strike, it's like that where you can like buy and trade skins and stuff, and there's a whole insane sketchy, like casinos market for that casinos, money laundering. All kinds of weird stuff and I think a lot of developers just don't want to touch that because it gets into such a messy place so easily.

Speaker 1 (12:06)

But if it was regulated, would you want to, like have ownership of your digital items?

Speaker 2 (12:13)

I mean, it would be nice to be like. Oh, I'm not using the skin in Fortnite. Let me basically like give the license to the skin to someone who's going to use it.

Speaker 2 (12:21)

I mean, of course, that would be a nice feature to have in the consumer, but I also don't think there's much of an incentive for companies to do that. Because they'd much rather that person. Just see you have a cool skin and buy it themselves.

Speaker 1 (12:34)

True. What is the most outrageous like tactic? You've ever encountered while playing video games.

Speaker 2 (12:42)

Ohh, God. I mean, destiny's had a lot of insects. It's something I would have to think for a sec about.

Speaker 1 (12:59)

Which made you like share the friends be like? Oh my God look at this.

Speaker 2 (13:03)

I mean, I never played the game, but I know the battlefront games basically had like game of like gameplay affecting cosmetics really or Not cosmetics microtransactions, the wrong person to speak on it. But I remember it being like the most egregious version of that, where it's basically the loot box is provided in game bonuses. That directly affected gameplays so it literally was to win.

Speaker 2 (13:32)

Yeah, it's pay to win a 100%. There's and there's other aspects to pay to win type stuff that sometimes they don't take into account like a good example. Fortnite had like a skin that make you look like an army man right?

Speaker 2 (13:49)

Yeah, and it was very green, and people figured out that, oh, you can use this as camouflage. You can hide in the Bush with this very green skin. And you just blend in, so in an aspect that is also pay to win because you have a camouflage advantage as the players don't have in that instance.

Speaker 2 (14:06)

They did fix that by making the skin look like it was like covered in mud, like a kid had been playing with it in the mud. Basically, so it was all like Brown over it and stuff too, to try to fix that. But That wasn't on purpose, though.

Speaker 1 (14:20)

But that's like from what I know. It's kind of also why some people play the female characters because the hitboxes are smaller.

Speaker 2 (14:28)

I don't I don't know if that it depends on the game. Because I would imagine, like a female skin in Fortnite. Compared to a male skin on the back end, they probably do have the same hitbox, but also people will like to think that they don't like, oh, the character is visibly slimmer, so they must have a smaller hitbox.

Speaker 2 (14:46)

I'm sure there are games that do that, but I don't think it would be the default because it would it would be such a balance issue that would be so apparent immediately like, oh I picked the big bulky skin. So I'm just asking to die. Easier and then no one will buy that skin.

Speaker 2 (15:03)

So I feel like in most cases. That's not actually a thing, but I'm sure it is somewhere.

Speaker 1 (15:10)

It's part of the yonkins precas, in kind of pre interview you mentioned that you bought a skin in Halo where you have the cat ears.

Speaker 2 (15:17)

Oh, yeah, Halo is tech Halo. Infinite is technically free to play. You can play the multiplayer for free.

Speaker 2 (15:24)

But the campaign has paid, yeah, they one of the pays cosmetics in that is basically just cat ears on your helmet, just to have cute cat ears on your back armor and like we were talking about outside of this, technically that would make you more visible, because like, if you're crouched behind something. Their little cat ears are just poking out. So

Speaker 1 (15:51)

So you're paying to lose

Speaker 2 (15:53)

In essence, yeah, you're trading looking the way you like for actual like tactical ability. I guess

Speaker 1 (16:00)

What made you buy that skin?

Speaker 2 (16:02)

I like hats. It looked good. There have been cosplayers before that have basically made like hello, Kitty Spartan, armor that look really good.

Speaker 2 (16:10)

So adding cat years to like the Spartan helmet has always kind of been like a thing in the community. And it's a thing they added the game and yeah, I like cats, cat ears are cute.

Speaker 1 (16:21)

So it's just once again, just to make you happy with the cosmetic.

Speaker 2 (16:25)

It my brain goes, Ah, my Spartan looks cool or that. Now when I die, I explode, and confetti comes out

Speaker 1 (16:34)

I mean, it makes you happy. That's the most important thing Just a sec. Because we kind of covered the awareness and so on.

Speaker 1 (16:47)

But do you think that You as an adult, have a different relationship with all of this than compared, for example to a minor who is just joining this?

Speaker 2 (17:00)

But if the the main thing would depending on the age of the person right? But the main difference is, you're not using your money, and especially if they're young enough to where they don't have a concept of like, how much stuff costs. I'm sure, as a kid.

Speaker 2 (17:17)

It's going to make me sounds. Old structure didn't really exist when I was a kid. You bought the game and that was it.

Speaker 2 (17:25)

The game was on the disk. They couldn't update it. And that was that, but I could definitely see a kid, especially if their parents are irresponsible enough to just have like their cards saved to the console or something.

Speaker 2 (17:37)

Kid goes I want to be master chief in Fortnite and just hits the button that makes that happen without any regard for the money and then as an adult. Yeah, I'm very aware of every single dollar that I'm spending, because it's mine.

Speaker 1 (17:52)

Do you think there should be more control for how much people can spend or if they can even spend that money?

Speaker 2 (17:58)

Mm. It's it's hard to say because you want adults to be able to do whatever they want with their adult money. And the more like barriers you put between a consumer buying the stuff they want with their money.

Speaker 2 (18:14)

It But you also do want to protect children, so it's a weird. Yep, it's it's hard to say. Should a 10-year-old be able to just buy whatever they want?

Speaker 2 (18:26)

Just because their parents left their car on their console or whatever probably not. But then that's also more of a responsibility thing on the parent of applicant. So

Speaker 1 (18:37)

No, absolutely, but kind of from there going to like. Do you think it's fair the way free to play games are making their money?

Speaker 2 (18:47)

As long as it doesn't affect gameplay and like microtransaction stuff is like purely cosmetic. I don't really see an issue with it. When you end up getting into issues with fairness, when you're able to just land yeah, like the battlefield example, where you can just pump money into it and be better.

Speaker 2 (19:10)

I think we had a similar system at some point. Probably runes or something where you could just get in game buffs, just for pumping money into it. So I think that's the only time you really go into like Unfairness, now there's also the aspect of is it fair for them to prey on basic human brain chemistry.

Speaker 2 (19:32)

That's also the question. Yeah, that I mean, no, but there's really nothing stopping them from doing it either. And again, as long as it's not like detrimental to your life, you're not like going bankrupt over Fortnite skins or something.

Speaker 2 (19:49)

And you're getting your enjoyment out of it. Go for it, I guess like I said, I know these tactics and I still participate in some of them. So I'm kind of willfully be manipulated in that case.

Speaker 2 (20:02)

So yeah, it's it's hard to say. That's not fair when you know what they're doing, and you're like actively participating in it.

Speaker 1 (20:10)

Have you ever purchased a loot box?

Speaker 2 (20:14)

Yes, when I was playing overwatch, which was not free to play at the time at the time, I was playing it. I definitely in that game specifically bottle, Waterloo boxes, I played hearthstone as well. Which is free to play, which is interesting because In that case, the microtrack transactions do affect the gameplay.

Speaker 2 (20:36)

Because you're buying cards, it's a virtual card game. It's just like you were playing like Pokémon cards or something just virtual, but you do have to buy them for real money in order to play the game with those cards.

Speaker 1 (20:50)

Do you think it's fair?

Speaker 2 (20:56)

If you had to pay for hearthstone first and then pay for the packs, I would say no. But that structure has existed for ever since trading cards have been a thing. The only difference with hearthstone is they made it virtual instead, which goes back to kind of the ownership that you were talking about, where I virtually own thousands and thousands of hearstone cards.

Speaker 2 (21:19)

But if that's if hearstone ever goes down 1 day I don't, I can't just pull them out of my closet and be like, let's play hearstone. They're just gone so yeah.

Speaker 1 (21:29)

And do you think there is an ethical way to monetize any of these games?

Speaker 2 (21:35)

There is, I think I think the best example I could think of that off the top of my head is like Halo infinite, because a lot of other games I have like the battle pass structure will take advantage of fomo or just by making stuff by limited time. So it's like, okay, I have to complete this battle pass. I'm only halfway through the battle pass.

Speaker 2 (21:57)

So it's going to end in the month. Oh, no I have to play a lot of the game so I can make sure I get my Money's worth out of the thing. I pay for whereas with Halo they made all their battle passes available indefinitely.

Speaker 2 (22:09)

So once you buy them, you just have them really so even like the first battle pass, if I didn't complete it. And 5 years later, I play Halo infinite, I still have that battle pass and still making progress. Also I believe I might be wrong.

Speaker 2 (22:24)

Just because I haven't checked but I believe you can also go back and buy previous battle passes as well. That existed so they don't go away ever as far as I know.

Speaker 1 (22:35)

Do you think it's supported by the fact that the base game is paid for

Speaker 2 (22:41)

I mean. Yes, I'm sure they make a lot more money on the microtransactions than they did for the campaign. Just because if you think of the volume of people you're going to get a lot more people in on the game for free that they will buy microtransactions, I think the population of people that will do that is higher than the population of people that just come into play The Campaign, just because free is free.

Speaker 2 (23:05)

So you're just going to attract a lot more people with free than you are with even like 5 bucks.

Speaker 1 (23:11)

Are you, for example, in destiny Fortnite or Halo I ever pestered to spend money with bullbooks.

Speaker 2 (23:20)

Destiny, destiny, kind of does, where like they'll do pop anytimes. There's like, oh, we added all these new armor sets to the cosmetics store or whatever you'll get a pop-up, but it's not like incessant. It's like once, but they'll do it at really tone deaf times sometimes too, where, like, oh, people are really mad about the monetization in this game right now.

Speaker 2 (23:40)

And then you get like, 4 pop-ups for cosmetic stuff. So they're not the best on timing on that stuff sometimes. But

Speaker 1 (23:50)

Is it annoying to see 44 pop-ups?

Speaker 2 (23:54)

Cuz, it's just like I'm not going to spend money on this. No, no, no, no. So generally, especially for me, where I only engage with that occasionally when there's something that really matches with what I like. It is definitely annoying or it's like, oh you you got the special weapon that only has like a 5% drop out of a rate or something.

Speaker 2 (24:15)

The second you get back to like the menu of the game. There's a pop-up. That's like, Hey, you got the new gun.

Speaker 2 (24:21)

Do you want to buy the new skin for the new guns? Here it is immediately like they are on top of making sure that, oh Hey, you have a new Avenue to spend money. Do you want to

Speaker 1 (24:31)

Does it dampen your joy from getting your gun or just getting into the game?

Speaker 2 (24:35)

Um, not generally just cuz, I don't it unless it's affecting gameplay. I don't really let that type of thing bother me. That's just me personally, no, like

Speaker 1 (24:49)

That I'm talking about your experience. So that's what's important. Kind of like is a finishing touch.

Speaker 1 (24:59)

What kind of balance between free content and paid content feels right to you?

Speaker 2 (25:05)

Um. Balance between free and made content I, I think stuff like like like new campaign missions stuff like that. I mean, if we want to stick to death as an example, I'm totally okay with paying for the expansion content, because that's giving like new story content, typically new planets, new environments and stuff to go to.

Speaker 2 (25:28)

So there's enough there that I feel is worth paying the money for yeah, but like the free experience for destiny is garbage. I said it's technically free to play when it launched. It wasn't, you had to pay for the game itself in the first place, and then they sense, made it to where you have access to a very small pool of stuff in the game.

Speaker 2 (25:52)

For free to play, it feels more like a like a demo or a trial because of how restrictive you are and how little you have access to unless you pay for stuff. But over time, they have made a lot of the older content. That's still in the game free.

Speaker 2 (26:06)

Just because no one, not a lot of people are buying an expansion from 4 years ago. That's still in the game. So they have been better about getting that stuff out for free.

Speaker 2 (26:16)

So I would say, if we're using dussi as an example, they do a at least decent job of making the justification for the paid content worth it, while also making the free side. Okay, at least.

Speaker 1 (26:34)

Ohh, actually, that was not the question I just realized I hadn't asked. Do you think there should be a government regulation for these like monetization, things for

Speaker 2 (26:47)

Stuff that is just like outright gambling, like Loot boxes are like the big-ticket issue. There, where especially with how high of a population of kids are engaging with that type of a system like even games like Pokémon beverage of slot machines. Cuz They didn't want to get advertise gambling to kids.

Speaker 2 (27:08)

But for some reason, when loot boxes do it, it's okay. I It's hard to say just cuz again. You don't want to regulate what adults are allowed to do with their money, but you also don't want kids to get wrapped up in manipulative tactics like that either.

Speaker 2 (27:27)

So unless you have some way of four sure, verifying someone's age, which is a whole issue right now it's a whole year. It's It's hard to say because you do want enough regulation that The groups that should be protected are being protected but not too much. That you Are keeping people from being able to do what they want as a consumer.

Speaker 2 (27:52)

So it's a really wishy washing answer, but it's that finding that balance is really difficult. But I do think there should be some level of oversight, just how much is hard to answer.

Speaker 1 (28:06)

All right thank you so much. Yeah, for sure, thank you. Thank you so much.

Voice 251018\_150035

#### **Appendix 4. Interview Mark**

1. Destiny, uma musume and bunch of other stuff. Filling the certain genre and free access to the game. It used to be fortnite. Destiny is now for community.

2. A month ago. In Destiny. Two weeks ago in uma to do the rolls. Specific character. There was pressure because it was a banner to get a specific character. Was def FOMO feeling. Uma never makes him feel like he gets his money's worth, no guarantee or anything. Pity at 200 pulls but they don't carry over. I put 20, then another 20..then 50 bucks

Some games make me feel rewarded and some not. Maybe ZZZ makes it feel rewarded, BP are usually worthy, but sometimes it feels like a job, but when it comes to it he choses to drop it. If enjoying the game then BP is worth it without FOMO.

Helldivers battlepass, you don't lose the access to the old one. It would be more consumer friendly if it was the industry standard.

Most commonly seen tactic: pure sex appeal. "they know what they are doing", character design and skins. Also bad moneytization where ingame currency doesn't match real money.

Money = in game money should be regulated, because it

Feels satisfied sometimes. In Destiny it feels meh to buy items. First Desendent makes cosmetic purchases feel worth it.

Hollow feeling

Why buy if makes you feel meh? He is fortunate to be able to buy it, there is no limit

Regret over buying? Genshin. 400 dollars for pulls, but he doesn't play it. Can't wait for stuff to happen, he needs game here and now.

There should be a way to be able to have ownership over digital purchases.

Warframe lets you sell your digital items and there is a community around selling and buying items. Ecosystem just works.

Warthunder on the other hand has loot boxes, and sometimes you get a vehicle and it is exclusive to a lootbox or buying it from the market place. People are ready to pay 2000 dollars because they want the item.

Some games make in game currency more impactful than cold cash because you get better item in game and you do participate in the community. It feels rewarding.

11. Purely if he is interested in the item. Time aspect won't make unappealing item interesting. Mostly gacha characters for him.

13. Regret or guilt? Yes and no. Only because he knows it is indulgent spending.

14. Girls frontline two! Cute girls representing guns. Liked the game a lot, spent a lot of money. Then they added new level of gacha and made prices even higher than they were. Then they threw in gacha skins and it felt very predatory. Didn't want to interact with it anymore so he uninstalled.

15. he feels in control of his spending

16. Is it fair? As broad statement yes, but there are games which take advantage.

There is a way to be respectful like warframe

21. More digital rights ownership . Like stop killing games movement. That would be a good place to start.

Children participation in these games should be regulated, because adults have right to make poor decisions. Monitored-

22. Tough.. It depends. There are games which given full game experience for free because they monetize it via skins etc. Other games have to payed for, because of the amount of production which goes into it. There is sweet spot between content and monetization.

Ever bought to fit in? No, but bought let people participate

### **Appendix 5. Interview Dennis**

Speaker 1 (00:01)

Alright. First of all, thank you for participating. This And let's just start So what free to play games are you currently playing the most?

Speaker 2 (00:15)

Send it to you.

Speaker 1 (00:16)

Anything else?

Speaker 2 (00:20)

I don't, I don't leave

Speaker 1 (00:23)

How long you've been playing those games?

Speaker 2 (00:25)

It's in this one0 for a little over a year and league of legends for about 56 years, 7 years.

Speaker 1 (00:34)

Hey What do you enjoy about them?

Speaker 2 (00:38)

League of legends is friend time. With a sense of crippling addiction, zendless on 0 is a fun art style and a fun gameplay. Mechanic.

Speaker 1 (00:53)

Do you usually spend money in these games or do you prefer to play For Free?

Speaker 2 (00:58)

I prefer to play for free but I have spent money in both

Speaker 1 (01:02)

In which out of the 2 have you spent the most

Speaker 2 (01:04)

Most money makeup legends without a doubt. I may be spent \$60 on zens.

Speaker 1 (01:12)

Okay, how much do you think you spend on the week of list?

Speaker 2 (01:15)

Since well, over 700

Speaker 1 (01:19)

Housing, that number makes you feel

Speaker 2 (01:21)

Like a\*\* Like a skill like why the f\*\*\* do I have \$11 in my bank account? But I've spent \$700 on a free to play Game.

Speaker 1 (01:30)

Just so you know, this will be transcribed. This verbatim will be put in the thesis. Okay, just as long as you're

Speaker 2 (01:36)

If you want to edit it, however you want to go for it.

Speaker 1 (01:40)

I use the language, but Um. Well, can you tell me about the last time you considered or made an in game purchase?

Speaker 2 (01:53)

I put \$50 on the league account. 3 months ago. In anticipation, for this current battle pass and the possibility of maybe buying a skin that is a limited skin for worlds.

Speaker 1 (02:13)

Okay. Um. Well.

Speaker 1 (02:22)

Why the battle pass

Speaker 2 (02:25)

It had a banner that my wife Constantly says, I don't have any good banners. And then it also had 2 skins that are for one champion that I specifically play one champion that I have played and will definitely play again at some point. But both are which are lower slash story based And I am a sucker for the game war.

Speaker 1 (02:58)

K. Well, when you saw those items in the battle pass, how did it make you feel? Or for example, you mentioned that you also want that skin for the world.

Speaker 2 (03:08)

You mentioned earlier, transcribed, how do you feel about language?

Speaker 1 (03:13)

Not too much story.

Speaker 2 (03:14)

Okay. Well, I felt

Speaker 1 (03:20)

Excited pressure tempted, curious.

Speaker 2 (03:23)

Or tempted I'm trying to think of another way to put it. I felt like The Knew what they were doing enough to appeal to a niche group. And it was enough to slap people who I haven't spent anything on league in probably 6 months, but because of the fact that this is a lower based skin made me want to not want almost it.

Speaker 2 (03:56)

It's borderline addiction. It made me feel like I needed to buy it since it was limited.

Speaker 1 (04:03)

So it's not just that it was lower, but also that it was limited.

Speaker 2 (04:08)

Yes, this skin is only available through the battle pass, and it was lower based, which is what my favorite thing about the game is

Speaker 1 (04:18)

So I did you end up buying the battle pass.

Speaker 2 (04:21)

I have not yet because I do have principles. And if I cannot complete the battle pass by the I complete the battle pass, then purchase it that way. Because in the past, I have played video games that were not even free to play, but were games that had battle passes.

Speaker 2 (04:42)

And I've spent 10 or \$15 on it. And then not completed it to the point to where then either. I need to spend more money to buy levels or I've just lost out on it.

Speaker 2 (04:55)

And I don't like that feeling cuz. It feels like I've wasted my money even more than buying free to play Game.

Speaker 1 (05:03)

Really? Yes. I've been asking this from other gamers, but because battle passes have been coming up.

Speaker 2 (05:17)

Mm.

Speaker 1 (05:19)

What is your Opinion on battle passes.

Speaker 2 (05:24)

I hate them why I understand the need to have engagement from the company. They need to have players playing at all times otherwise, they don't hear you'll hear articles like games player base is decreased by 200% in 3 days or oh dead game. No one plays the game anymore.

Speaker 2 (05:50)

And because of that, like they need to keep people playing, they need to keep you engaged that way, you also feel like you need to pay to go out and play them. Battle passes have opened up a problem. Just about every genre of video game from mobas to shooters.

Speaker 2 (06:18)

To even R PG's or story based games where it is the idea even crafting like we A game called tales of maybe guard like that game has a battle pass form in it. Is it Important that you play It now, but is it The fomo mechanic that humans are afraid of being left out of the social And I absolutely hate the fact that Fortnite doesn't just have one battle pass Fortnite has 3 battle passes. Destiny is a pay for game that I play.

Speaker 2 (06:57)

It's not They say it's free to play, but it's not. It's an expansion every year game

Speaker 1 (07:03)

But it's available to play football.

Speaker 2 (07:05)

It's available to try for free. I truly believe it's not free to play Over, I would say, 75% of the story is pay for Half of the activities are pay for like you can play it a little bit with your friends, but it's it's a trial

Speaker 1 (07:26)

You mentioned formal. I will kind of come back to it, but Thus, completing a battle pass. Or like any event, does it ever feel like a chore?

Speaker 2 (07:41)

Always, always always. There are like there. Have been times where I'll play league and a bunch of my friends are playing and so I'll play 2 to 3 times a week.

Speaker 2 (07:53)

And then by the end of the By the end of a month, I'm already done with the battle pass. And that doesn't feel like a chore, because I play as I go. But then games like destiny games like zenozone 0, when zenzone 0 was new, it felt like, oh yeah, I'll go ahead and I'll pay for the battle pass because I'm playing Every Day.

Speaker 2 (08:18)

I'll finish it, no problem. In the last like they, the Zen, the zone 0 has a free to play battle pass and that free to play battle pass has a premium and a free version, just like destiny, and in the last 3 months 4 months I have not purchased the zemble zone 0 battle pass. Because I've only been able to maybe get to like level 30 of 50 by just doing my turn on the game.

Speaker 2 (08:49)

Get my free currency Turn it off. If I paid for it, I would feel like I had to continue. Destiny is one where I said it's free to play.

Speaker 2 (09:00)

But it's also not they have a free to play tier, or they have a premium tier. Because I bought the year of destiny, when the new expansion comes out, I got all of this. All of the battle passes for the next Four Seasons.

Speaker 2 (09:19)

Now, I paid for that because I wanted the story at the start. But now I have the battle pass automatically and what does that mean? It means I have paid for it, and I have to get to the end of it.

Speaker 2 (09:33)

And that makes destiny feel more like a chore to me. If I paid for the zone 01 would feel obligated to finish it. I am trying currently to finish a battle pass.

Speaker 2 (09:45)

I have 2 days to finish and I have 5 levels left to go rather than playing another game with my friends or watching a show. I'm playing this game on my own.

Speaker 1 (10:04)

You clearly are aware of the tactic. They're trying to use on you. Why do you keep doing it?

Speaker 2 (10:12)

In this case, it's cuz. It was a skin that I could only get through the battle pass. Twoskins and a banner.

Speaker 2 (10:22)

And it if it wasn't a theme that I enjoyed like. It is AI used the term lore earlier. It is A Story process that I really enjoy if it would have been a story that I didn't enjoy, that just had free skins.

Speaker 2 (10:37)

I've ignored probably the last 6 battle passes from league and I haven't purchased them because the skins didn't interest me. The lore didn't interest me. And while other people, even in my friend group would buy the battle pass and be like, yeah, look how pretty the skin is or look at that.

Speaker 2 (10:58)

It wasn't enough to hook me. In this case, it is something that I know I would enjoy if I had it

Speaker 1 (11:11)

Once again you mentioned fomo. Have you ever bought any cosmetic or anything like this to fit in with your friends or maybe gain a status you wanted inside the game.

Speaker 2 (11:27)

Never a status No, I've never I I go out of my way to ban in league of legends for the Transcript. You can pick champions. And then once you pick a champion, you can pick a skin when the first \$1000 skin came out.

Speaker 2 (11:48)

I non-stop band. The champion that was associated with that skin, that way, even if somebody had The skin They couldn't play It in my lobby. Because the fact that I have never felt the need to have the status symbol.

Speaker 2 (12:04)

If I see somebody who has Even one of the \$100 skins, or the \$200 skins that you don't go oh, wow, that's a beautiful skin. I go. Wow Must be nice to have a 100 extra dollars to just throw away.

Speaker 2 (12:19)

I don't look down at them. Cuz. They're playing the same game as me.

Speaker 2 (12:23)

I even though I as I said, spent probably \$700 in the last 7 years on this game. I don't look down at them for spending money. I don't look at down at them for playing the game.

Speaker 2 (12:34)

I look down at them for like It is a game that if this company ever decided to ban you, it's gone And you're willing to shell out \$500 for a skin.

Speaker 1 (12:50)

I will circle back to that, but I kind of want to ask you again. If you've ever purchased anything to fit in with your friends.

Speaker 2 (13:05)

No, and part of that is because I have very generous friends. If they all had a specific thing, and they wanted it to if they wanted us all to match I have friends who have more money than me. Who would buy that skin for me or would buy that cosmetic?

Speaker 2 (13:29)

I have Purchased A Amount in a game that was not free to play. I purchased a in game mount so that all of my friends could ride the same thing together and we could all be together. But not for us to fit in together.

Speaker 1 (13:53)

Okay. You mentioned that. League of legends would bend you and you lose access to all of your skins like I kind of want to go back to that.

Speaker 1 (14:14)

Do you think that gamers should have possibility to have access to there Digital goods and have ownership of them.

Speaker 2 (14:27)

Yes, but also What good does it do I am a big fan of owning your own media. I think that if you have the capabilities in the storage, you should purchase your book if you have the capability in the storage, you should purchase your movies DV. Ds TV shows because in this day and age, everything is being taken away, no one owns anything.

Speaker 2 (14:56)

Maybe that's part of the reason why I do like card games and things cuz, it's physical, but I wish there was a way to say. I owned a skin in league allegions right? I wish that I could say even if this account is banned.

Speaker 2 (15:14)

This is mine, but this goes back to what does it matter, because if you're banned and riot says rights, the company that owns league, a legends and riot says, you're not allowed to play the game anymore. What am I going to do with that skin? What am I going to do with that bunch of pixels that I paid \$10?

Speaker 1 (15:38)

Well, for example, do What is your opinion on? For example, people Selling their own like in game assets. Like contenter strike selling their guns.

Speaker 2 (15:54)

So I don't know enough about that. Personally. I have watched 1 or 2 YouTube videos about, like counter strike, being able to sell skins and things like that.

Speaker 2 (16:09)

I think without the loot box mechanic behind it. And removing the gambling side of getting a skin If I could sell skins out of my account. I could definitely see that I like that idea.

Speaker 2 (16:27)

But that goes back to my If riot bans me from playing league of legends, and they just log out my account cuz. What happens when you're banned in league of legends is you just can't walk back in. But if you get banned from a riot game, I wish there was a way that I could sell my skins like I if you could tell me that that was an option, I absolutely would agree with it.

Speaker 2 (16:53)

I think that that should be the case. However I also have played this for so long. I've just accepted the way it is.

Speaker 2 (17:06)

It does.

Speaker 1 (17:07)

No, I see your point. You clearly are aware of what games are trying to do to you, but I still I need to ask, do you think game companies try to influence or manipulate how players spend money

Speaker 2 (17:26)

200% and I say 200%, knowing that, you know, a 100% is everything I say 200%. In the fact that not only are they aware and are they choosing to do it? They are actively developing new ways to do it.

Speaker 2 (17:39)

They are going above and beyond just Hey Buy this in the next 5 minutes or it goes away. They are saying Hey, buy this in the next 5 minutes. But if you buy this, you can also go this at a discount if you buy this as well.

Speaker 2 (17:55)

Buy the bigger pack They're actively coming up with new ways to make people spend money

Speaker 1 (18:02)

What is the most outrageous way? You've seen like video game trying to manipulate players to spend money

Speaker 2 (18:13)

That's hard. That's really hard. I think

Speaker 1 (18:20)

Or just in your opinion like what would have been like the one which you remember that like, I can't believe they're doing this.

Speaker 2 (18:27)

See, there's ones I'm trying to think of ones that have affected me, because the first one that comes to mind is, you know, overwatching counter strike in their loot box system like overwatch. Everyone knows about the gambling. That was going on with that.

Speaker 2 (18:43)

Everyone knows about c sco skins and the loot boxes that go with those. And I'm just like I can't relate too much cuz. I never did any of those.

Speaker 2 (18:53)

I was never one of those gambling. In fact, even with the gotcha in Zen with zone 0, like I Which is a gotcha game? I originally told myself I would never pay for gotcha.

Speaker 1 (19:09)

But nothing good.

Speaker 2 (19:10)

But they got me I think the most I think the one for me that hurts me personally the most Is if you use destiny as a free to play if you go back to that one. I've told you about how much I love. The lore destiny has something to wear if you go ahead and you complete The hardest difficulties of things you then.

Speaker 2 (19:44)

If you complete it in, let's just say 2 months, the first 2 months of this is active. Then, you unlock the ability to purchase physical merch, like a jacket. Then, you have only 2 months after you achieve, so you've got the first 2 months.

Speaker 2 (20:04)

You gotta get beat it in that 2 months then. After the cutoff point you have 2 months after you beat it to make your physical purchase. And if you don't make your purchase before the end of the total 4 months that physical merch, purchase option is gone and you can't get that back.

Speaker 2 (20:23)

If we're talking free to play, I'd say the most egregious would have to either be Fortnite. Or I'm the hall of legends from league of legends. Fortnite with their battle pass, then their Fortnite subscription.

Speaker 2 (20:44)

Then, still having skins that are on a limited rotating shop, then having their own currency on top of it, having that currency not be able to be purchased in a specific amount, but only in 5 10 25 or 50 kind of examples. League of legends, I'd have to say that their hall of legends is The most egregious thing for them. Because the fact that they go ahead and do things like, you know what?

Speaker 2 (21:17)

Maybe maybe instead of Halloween legends, it's maybe one of their make a wish skins they've done make a wish skins, where it's like proceeds benefit a good cause. But it's like \$500 for skin, and that's I feel like that's pulling at your heartstrings. Cuz, you feel like you're donating to a cause, but also you're just giving Ryan money.

Speaker 2 (21:35)

But the hall of legends is A Specific creator or a specific pro sport personality that you like and it is a skin, not just 1 but three separate tiers of skins that have unique cosmetics, unique situations, unique battle pass unique E modes. And none of it is In lower base, it's all To celebrate an individual who is in the proceed. And once again, that can be \$500.

Speaker 2 (22:16)

And I think that is Absolutely too much for a thing of pixels that would get taken away from you.

Speaker 1 (22:26)

That that sounds that sounds like a lot.

Speaker 2 (22:31)

Or the most egregious monetary is also by Ryan games. There's a game called valorant that they have. Where it's skins for your guns, not even for your characters.

Speaker 2 (22:42)

And they have gun packs that are for one specific theme. They're limited, they rotate 125 bucks for 4 guns, 4

Speaker 1 (22:58)

Well, you say about the, you know, the limited run for the the guns, the skins. Well, does anything in games ever make you feel fomo all the time? What's the most recent

Speaker 2 (23:17)

Battle pass that I've talked about, like 5 times

Speaker 1 (23:21)

Put it on your mind.

Speaker 2 (23:24)

I, the biggest fomo, is either the destiny, 2 seasons, which isn't free to play so I will stop talking about that. But probably like gotcha games. I There are time like In Zen less on 0 which is the gotcha game.

Speaker 2 (23:46)

I play a character will be available for 14 to 17 days, no 3, it's usually no 21 days. So it's on a three weeks cycle. And once that character is gone, you don't know when they're going to come back around.

Speaker 2 (24:08)

So this game operates on A elemental base, which means there's fire lightning. Ice and others on one level. And then on the next level, it also operates on a class system.

Speaker 2 (24:30)

So tank healer GPS There's not always a fire tank that's free. So if you see a if you have a team that you want to build, that's like all fire-related. And you need a tank in this example And there's a special class agent that is fire based Then, you're either going to pull for it.

Speaker 2 (24:59)

And pay money eventually, cuz, you're going to run out of free stuff. Or you have to wait until the next one comes out. But you also don't want to pull for that fire based tank agent.

Speaker 2 (25:12)

If the rumor has it that in six weeks, there's going to be another fire base tank agent. So why pull for this one when you know, the new 1's going to be stronger? And the fomo of that game Excuse my language for this next part, but Really f\*\*\*\*\* hurts when they create a character that they also give really good story, which means good lore for me which is my form of addiction.

Speaker 2 (25:45)

But they create a character that is a really good story. It matches the element type. I need it matches the character design.

Speaker 2 (25:52)

I need and it matches the element. But then they tell me that there's just going to be a stronger one in like six weeks. And knowing that.

Speaker 2 (26:07)

I have to wait gameplay Vs sentimentality to a character. And if it's really bad, sometimes, that means I end up playing really hard to make sure I get to the battle pass point so that I have those extra pulls for the next character just to try. But I'll make sure I get this character now.

Speaker 2 (26:31)

Because maybe I won't even get that character.

Speaker 1 (26:34)

Okay, well, it makes sense. But you mentioned lore several times. In your opinion, is it common for video games to use? Lore, as a vehicle for monetization.

Speaker 2 (26:55)

That's hard to say. In the last couple of years, yes. Especially the gotcha games, destiny, nope. I said, I was going to stop talking about it.

Speaker 1 (27:07)

Destiny is free to play. It is classified as free to play, so you're not drawn in mentioned

Speaker 2 (27:13)

Destiny has a thing where they will have their seasonal story. And then if that seasonal story is really good, sometimes they'll have armor that or weapons, that look really good. And those armor and weapons are Lord.

Speaker 2 (27:32)

The only way to get those specific ones are through the battle pass. Um. The what but in Zen list zone 0 and other gotcha games Yes, those are the ones that I feel are the most egregious at that because the fact what they will do is There's a new story that comes out about every 2 months.

Speaker 2 (27:58)

A new update to the story, think episodic like watching your favorite TV show and so you play through the story, and what does what happens in that story you meet the character that's on banner. This week. Or you met a character?

Speaker 2 (28:15)

You met a character 3 patches ago or 3 stories ago. And now, that character is now available to be purchased for their gotcha Poles and Once again, it all depends on You know how good was the story there have been characters where I've gone and said I didn't like that character. I don't want to pull for it.

Speaker 2 (28:42)

It's really good for my team. So I'll pull like 2 or 3 times only with free to play. But I'm not going to pay money for it.

Speaker 2 (28:50)

And then there have been times where it's like I love that character. I love what that character looks like. I love what that character does, and I'm going to I'm going to pull all my free Poles and if

I don't get it, I'm gonna spend If I'm within a certain range of 10 to \$15 after the free polls, I'll spend the 15 Because I'm just that close.

Speaker 2 (29:22)

But if it's, oh I went ahead, and I pulled, and I didn't get it. But I'm \$50 away, I'm not going to spend I will restruct.

Speaker 1 (29:36)

That's actually, if they're 8. I haven't considered that point. As a vehicle, so Your answer is very important.

Speaker 1 (29:51)

Have you ever? Regret it Have you ever felt regret after a purchase or Maybe guilt.

Speaker 2 (30:00)

Guilt, no, it's my money. I spend it I've never chosen to spend money on a gotcha instead of buying a friend, a birthday gift or anything like that. So I've never felt guilty.

Speaker 1 (30:15)

But the point about regret

Speaker 2 (30:17)

Every time anybody asks me how much I've spent a week

Speaker 1 (30:20)

Okay.

Speaker 2 (30:23)

When I look at Like I felt regret if I'm playing like Zen lizzone 0 and I spent \$15 on the character. And there wasn't a rumor that a new one's going to come out around the corner, and then they just drop a new character like next patch. That's better than the one that I have.

Speaker 2 (30:47)

And I'm like. Why did I spend the money like I? If I wouldn't have spent the money, I would have saved enough free polls by the time that character came out.

Speaker 2 (30:56)

But I could have gotten that character instead of spending the money that I spent And so, what do I have to do now? I have to either grind that game. Or I have to spend money

Speaker 1 (31:13)

But have you ever taken a break or uninstalled a game? Because of the monetization system

Speaker 2 (31:21)

No, country. No, I don't think I have not specifically because of the monetization. I have Like call it I'm gonna use anymore, never mind.

Speaker 1 (31:39)

Okay, I need to reel this in In your opinion. Is it fair the way the free to free to play games make money?

Speaker 2 (31:56)

2 appoint. I think that. I'm free to play game like I don't play free to play mobile games anymore because it's just egregious ADS.

Speaker 2 (32:07)

Like, I know, advertising is a way to keep games free and on mobile. It's considered the norm, but if I was playing league of legends and an ad popped up on screen that I have to hit or every time I died. I got an ad I would uninstall league, so for me Knowing that there are people out there that are wailing out on the 500, the 800, the 1000 the \$200 scandes like those are people that I'm like, okay.

Speaker 2 (32:42)

Keep spending so that I can keep playing my game relatively easy. Um. But.

Speaker 2 (32:52)

I have never just I don't think it's fair when there is this fomo, and when there is like, oh you know you want to go ahead and pull, I'm going to use Zend this. You want to make 5 Poles? Well, you have to pay 4 tentacles.

Speaker 2 (33:15)

You can't pay for 5 I find that unfair.

Speaker 1 (33:21)

Do you think that the systems should be regulated?

Speaker 2 (33:25)

Absolutely.

Speaker 1 (33:27)

Do you think they should be related for both adults and children or maybe just for the younger part of the really

Speaker 2 (33:35)

Gambling addictions are a real problem game. Addictions are a real problem, even games that you would consider like. That are just, you know, p\*\*\* games.

Speaker 2 (33:46)

I feel like free to play p\*\*\* games. They're people for sex addiction. Gotcha is just slot machines?

Speaker 2 (33:55)

Slot machines are still regulated. In the United States, not every state will allow you to gamble. I think that they should be accessible.

Speaker 2 (34:05)

And I should not As an adult, I should be able to play It. And choose to play It, but I feel like it still should be regulated to the point where If I'm an adult Can I go ahead and pay for 2 for a \$500 skin? Sure, but should there be Waze, put into the game.

Speaker 2 (34:32)

To make it fair that if I want to buy that 500 skin, I get to buy that 500 skin, not I have to buy 5 packs of \$100 of currency. There needs to be some kind of control and regulation there to understand and make all the game companies.

Speaker 2 (34:52)

Do things that are fair if I am banned. You brought up the CS go. I'm thinking about if I am banned.

Speaker 2 (35:02)

I wish I could sell like bits and pieces of my account because I have collections of skins that rotate once a year or maybe never rotate again like those are things that are. I've spent a lot of money on it. And I wish there was a way for me to sell them if I didn't want them anymore.

Speaker 1 (35:25)

And kind of going into that? What kind of balance between free content and paid content feels right to you?

Speaker 2 (35:34)

For a long time, I thought zenus was really good. I'm starting to feel less and less. Now that the game is getting bigger.

Speaker 2 (35:41)

There's more characters. There's more story, there's more battle passes. There's more items.

Speaker 2 (35:48)

It's starting to feel like it's a job to get some things in that game. I felt like for the first year when that game came out. It was a pretty good balance of there'd be a new agent, a new character.

Speaker 2 (36:04)

Every three weeks and every three weeks you also got to pull for one of the old characters again. But now it's like Okay, this is a new character. Here is one of the old characters, but that old character was from a year ago.

Speaker 2 (36:21)

It's like, yes, it's still good, but it's not. It's hard to justify saving up for that thing that I feel want when you know, there's going to be that new thing that's always right around the corner. So it's become more Tough for me to even justify paying money to zendless cuz.

Speaker 2 (36:43)

I'm like, if I just save eventually. I'll get the characters I want. So I haven't spent on Zen list And probably 4 months What month is it?

Speaker 2 (36:59)

It's October July probably.

Speaker 1 (37:04)

Okay. Alright, thank you very much.

Speaker 2 (37:09)

Is that all? It's all

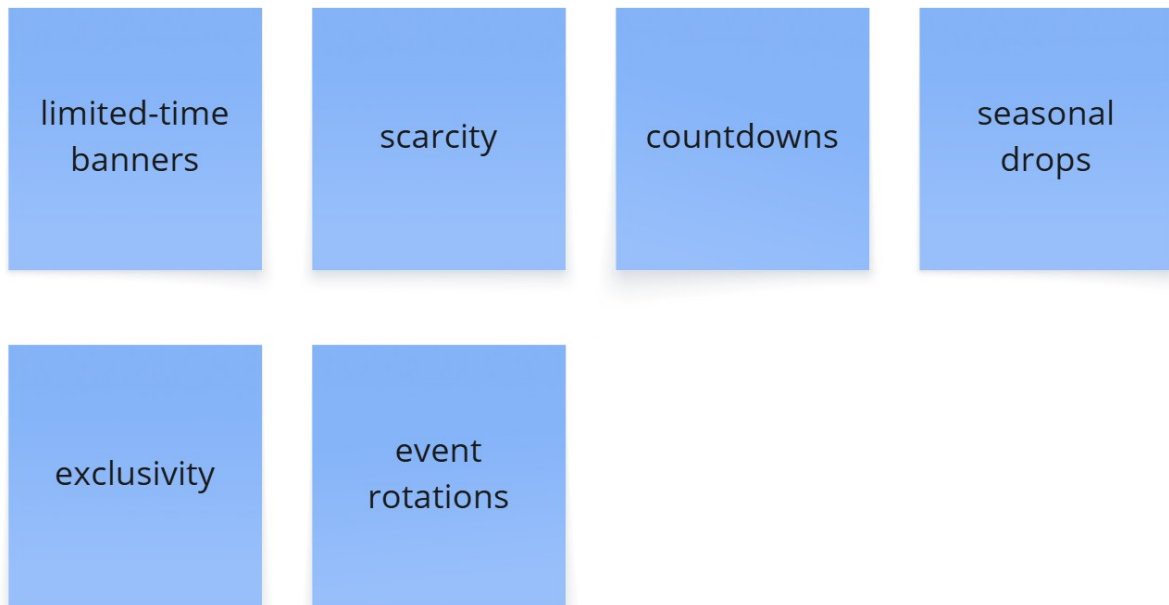
Speaker 1 (37:11)

Thank you. You did great

Voice 251018\_213059

### Appendix 6. Affinity Map

## FOMO



af

# Pressure

time-boxed

grind

chore-feeling

sunk cost

completion  
anxiety

# Emotions

regret

buyer's  
remorse

limited  
satisfaction

disappointm  
ent

# Ownership



# Regulation

age gates

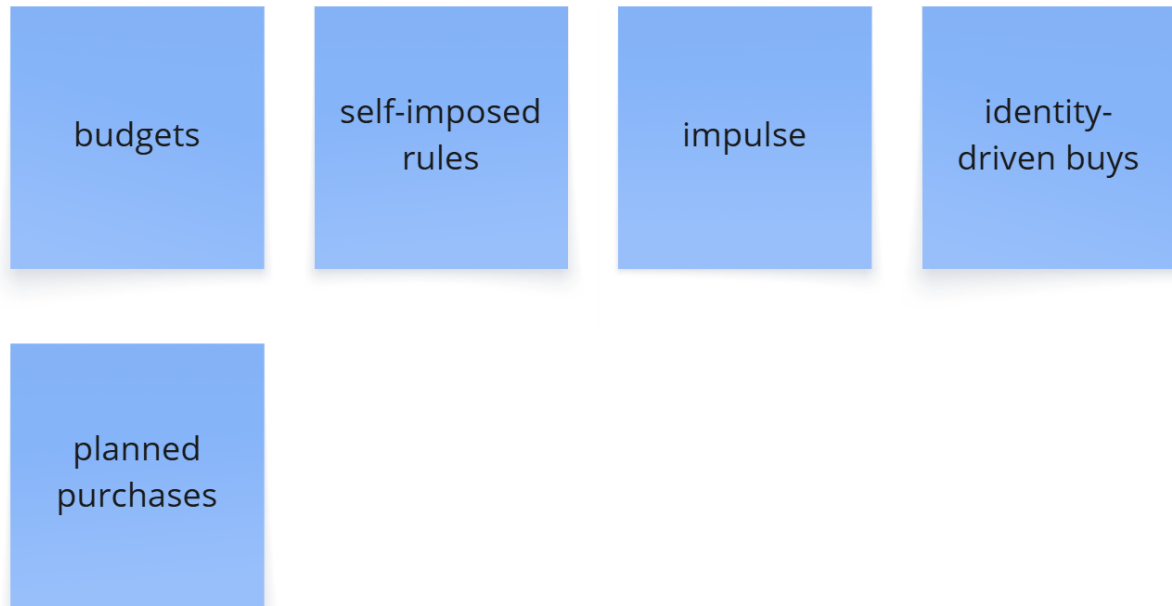
Odds disclosure

Loot boxes

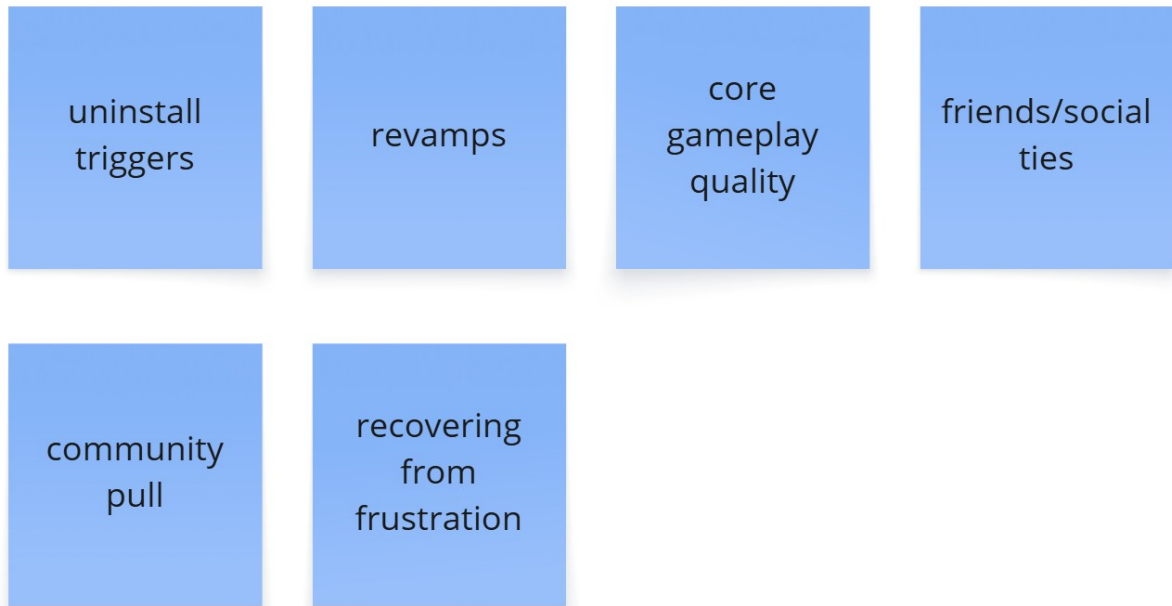
Spending caps

compliance

## Spending and self-control



# Churn vs Retention



# Free vs Paid Value

