

The loot box problem

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Shaun Garea. Credit: Massey University

Individuals with gambling problems and excessive gamers spend more on loot boxes than their peers, new research published in *International Gambling Studies* confirms.

Loot boxes are virtual treasure chests—a randomised video game feature

earned by gamers in order to customise characters or weapons. These contents may affect progress in the [game](#), or simply be designed to convey status. Loot box revenue reached US\$20 billion in 2021—exceeding online casino revenue of US\$3.2 billion.

The study, entitled Meta-analysis of the relationship between problem [gambling](#), excessive gaming and loot box spending, led by Ph.D. candidate Shaun Garea investigated whether virtual items obtained in video games via loot boxes are purchased disproportionately by those with problem gambling and/or excessive gaming symptoms.

Mr Garea says with the increasingly popularity of gaming, research investigating new mechanisms of monetisation that do not currently meet, or have not yet been classified as meeting current legal definitions of restricted activities (such as gambling), is important to ensure best practice, appropriate access, and safe gaming here in New Zealand and the rest of the world.

"Although the present analyses examine these relationships [problem gambling and excessive gaming] separately, there is clearly potential for a combined or additive risk that has not been identified," he says.

While these associations have been confirmed, causal direction has not, he adds. "Whether problem gambling leads to higher spending on loot boxes or whether buying loot boxes increases [problem gambling](#) symptoms is a question that needs further investigation."

Mr Garea's study identifies that statistically significant and clinically relevant relationships exist and as such this should provide valuable information to other researchers, consumers, parents, and legislators.

"Many countries have implemented, or are working on, potential loot box legislation to curb possible disadvantage to those at high risk. My

research aims to assist consumers and [decision makers](#) to weigh empirical evidence and make informed choices."

Mr Garea is also an artist and filmmaker. His drawing representing [loot boxes](#), entitled 'Pandora's Box', will be featured in his presentation of the paper at the virtual SARMAC conference in July 2021. More of his artworks can be found on the [Estrata Productions](#) website.

More information: Shaun Stephen Garea et al, Meta-analysis of the relationship between problem gambling, excessive gaming and loot box spending, *International Gambling Studies* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/14459795.2021.1914705](#)

Provided by Massey University

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