

# Paidic Money and Ludic Gambling Currencies in Novel Slot Machine Games

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Gambling games are usually regulated more strictly than other type of games. In many jurisdictions gambling is separated from other games to specific gambling environments, such as casinos or gambling halls (Kingma 2010). The separation is not as clear in online environments, however. In recent years, there have been ongoing convergence processes between gambling and digital gaming. Digital games include gambling elements, such as loot boxes (see Zendle et al. 2019), and digital gambling games utilize similar audio-visual or narrative elements which are familiar from recreational digital gaming (Albarrán-Torres 2018). Gambling and digital gaming industries have also been converging (Cassidy 2013). Gambling companies have bought shares from mobile and free-to-play (F2P) game companies, and vice versa. Industry convergence is connected to the fact, that one of the most profitable F2P game genres have been social casino games (SCG) (Gainsbury et al. 2016).

SCG directly simulate online gambling games, such as poker, slot machines or roulette (Gainsbury et al. 2014a). Starting to play is free and players can't bet or win real money from SCG (Gainsbury et al. 2014b), which challenges the assumption that gambling games are played because of monetary winnings. Playing itself has to be satisfactory, but the gaming experience can be enhanced by using money similarly to other F2P games (Kinnunen et al. 2016). Players can, for example, buy a place in higher tournament levels of poker or they can consume money on game related objects, such as game currencies and virtual items. Consuming money or using game currencies in digital games has been possible also in other game types than F2P games for many years (Dibbel 2006; Lehtonvirta and Castronova 2014). However, the possibility to use in-game currency to win real money has recently become available in novel slot machine games.

F2P games, SCG included, often utilize multiple currencies. These can be categorized roughly to hard and soft currencies (Luton 2013). Soft currency can be acquired by playing, but gathering it usually demands lots of playing time and it can be used to buy limited game-related items. Some of the game-related purchases can be paid only by hard currency, which can be bought with real money. This kind of double currency system is now incorporated in some new (real money) slot machine games, for example *Kingdoms Rise* series (Playtech 2019) and *Reel Rush 2* (NetEnt 2019), which can be seen as yet another example of convergence processes between gambling and digital gaming. In addition to real money, gamblers can win in-game currency, which can be

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accumulated from one gambling session to another, if gamblers play identifiably. At certain levels, these in-game currencies can be converted to monetary bets or they can be used to start bonus games, for example, which enable monetary winnings.

It is tempting to think that soft or hard in-game currencies are separate things from “real” money. However, money is not stable or static entity, but can playfully change to various – harder and softer – currencies. Theories of money by Georg Simmel and Viviana Zelizer, and Roger Caillois’ concepts of paidia and ludus can be used to explain this. According to Simmel (2004), money is essentially pure potential. In Caillois’ (2001) terms, money can be seen as essentially paidic. Money is not attached to any particular object, but can be exchanged equally and freely for any of them. Owning money means owning possibilities. However, in everyday situations money is rarely neutral or paidic potential. Zelizer (1997) has shown, that money is treated differently based on how it is earned and consumed. Salary is different money from poor relief and money earmarked for rent contains different meanings than money used during gambling. Paidic money is surrounded by many economic, socio-cultural and context specific frames, which have their own rules and which try to tie money’s potential to their own goals, in which case paidic money becomes ludic money or context specific currency. Even in these cases, money still preserves its paidic potentiality to change.

Paidia and ludus can be seen as ends of a continuum on which various games take place based on how strictly rules define them (Caillois 2001). Similarly paidic and ludic monies are not separate categories, but ends of a continuum. “Real” money is an ideal type of paidic money, which rarely exists in everyday situations. Different game and gambling currencies are ludic money or ludic currencies which have context specific meanings and value. Hard in-game currencies are closer to paidic end than are soft in-game currencies, because they can be changed more freely to game-related items (e.g. in SCG) and even back to “real” money (e.g. in gambling games). Soft in-game currencies have similarities to “real” money, but they are more clearly ludic money, because their value is tied to the game.

During the game, gamblers regard money as play money (Reith 2002) or ludic currency. The value of money is derived from its ability to keep the game going on. Only after the game is stopped and the winnings or losses are realized, other meanings are again attached to the money and money’s paidic potentiality can be restored. However, this process does not concern the new in-game currencies of novel slot machines, such as *Reel Rush 2* (NetEnt 2019). Their value is strictly tied to the game and the only possibility to change them for other currencies or paidic money is to keep accumulating the in-game currency by playing the game (with real money) until the pot is so big that the rules of the game allow it to be used as a bet in the very same game. At the moment of betting, players risk losing the ludic pot, but gain the chance to win money in its purest paidic form.

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