

Gacha Games In English-language Journalism: How Do News Stories Represent The Emergent Form Of Quasi-gambling?

Yuchen HUANG

University of Sydney
Camperdown NSW 2006, Australia
yuchuang-c@my.cityu.edu.hk

Keywords

Gacha, Loot boxes, Video game, Journalism, News stores, Gambling, Public opinion

INTRODUCTION

Gacha games are a genre of video games that allows players to spend real money purchasing random virtual rewards (Blom, 2023). Gacha mechanics are highly prevalent in video games, and they have been criticised for being structurally similar to gambling (Xiao & Park, 2025). Also, spending on gacha mechanics is associated with problem gambling (Drummond & Sauer, 2018).

Journalism describes video games. However, the description often hold certain beliefs to set agendas by foregrounding certain phenomena while backgrounding others (Coleman et al., 2009) and shape public opinions towards video games in particular ways. Previous studies revealed that the US news magazines set a routine of conservative worries to provoke the public's fears of the negative effects from video games as a new technology from 1970s to 1980s (Williams, 2003); News coverage also prolongedly connects video games to violence by emphasising violent gameplay afforded by games such as *Death Race* and *Grand Theft Auto* (Keogh et al., 2026). Regarding the growing popularity and high profitability of gacha games in English-language countries in recent years, unsurprisingly, gacha games have also been reported by English-language journalism. However, whether journalism's description related to gacha games is different from previous studies' findings and how journalism describes gacha games and shapes public opinions towards this video game genre remains unclear.

50 English-language news stories describing gacha games from Google News, gaming news sites and commentary websites were selected to ensure a balance in the diversity of sources and content and the depth of discussion on topics. Discourse analysis was conducted inductively. This study identified four recurring themes in coverage: 1). Gambling; 2). Addiction; 3). Exploitation of young people; 4). Player experience. Coverage in the *Gambling* theme used persuasive rhetoric (e.g., highlighting the amount of money players spent during the gameplay) to evoke public panic and hostility towards gacha games that might incur huge financial loss. In the *Addiction* theme, some news stories warned the risks of being addicted against professional knowledge (e.g., referencing to academic research in relation to the connection between gacha mechanics and psychological and pathological harm); other stories descriptively emphasised how certain design (e.g., dark patterns such as Fear of Missing Out) in gacha games could be addictive and predative. Coverage in the *Exploitation of young people* theme extended concerns of gambling and addiction

to juveniles and focused on ethical considerations. Stories which used these themes as frames often focused on monetisation patterns of gacha games, drawing on previous academic and public discussion around video game gambling and addiction issues, emphasising the gambling and addiction aspects of gacha games and foregrounding their exploitativeness and predation while omitting other aspects (detailed in the last theme) (un)consciously. They are forces that sustain negative attitudes towards gacha games in the public sphere. On the other hand, certain number of news stories focused on *Player experience*, which stressed players' first-hand gameplay experience on gacha games' gameplay, narratives, and aesthetics. They acknowledged gambling and addiction issues but alternatively emphasised that such risks were manageable through players' agency. These stories create an alternative force to shape rules of playing and discussing gacha games by challenging what "should" be associated with them. These news stories offer a channel to understand gacha games as a genre of video games in public discussion, which were marginalised by coverage in other themes that primarily emphasise gacha games' gamblification design and their negative impact on players. External journalistic force shapes and is shaped by the virtual materiality of gacha games, and they co-construct a dynamic in public sphere.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Blom, J. (2023). The Genshin Impact Media Mix: Free-to-Play Monetization from East Asia. *Mechademia*, 16(1), 144–166.
- Coleman, R., McCombs, M., Shaw, D., & Weaver, D. (2009). Agenda Setting. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds), *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (pp. 147–160). Routledge.
- Drummond, A., & Sauer, J. D. (2018). Video game loot boxes are psychologically akin to gambling. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2(8), 530–532. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0360-1>
- Keogh, B., Butt, M.-A., & Carter, M. (2026). *Game Studies: A Critical Introduction to the Field*. Polity. https://politybooks.com/bookdetail?book_slug=game-studies-a-critical-introduction-to-the-field--9781509563784
- Williams, D. (2003). The Video Game Lightning Rod. *Information, Communication & Society*, 6(4), 523–550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118032000163240>
- Xiao, L. Y., & Park, S. (2025). Better than industry self-regulation: Compliance of mobile games with newly adopted and actively enforced loot box probability disclosure law in South Korea. *Acta Psychologica*, 260, 105490. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.105490>

BIO

Yuchen HUANG is a first-year PhD student at City University of Hong Kong. He was previously a research assistant with Prof. Leon Y. XIAO at the same institution. He also holds a Master of Digital Communication and Cultures and a Bachelor of Arts at University of Sydney. He led projects including examining companies' compliance with probability disclosure and warning regulations in Taiwan (China), as well as assessing Cognosphere games' compliance with the FTC Settlement in the US. His research interests are about video game gambling, gacha games, game characters, and player communities.

FUNDING

This research was not funded.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Yuchen HUANG has no conflict of interest.