

# Views on Gacha Games and Mechanics from a Canadian context: A qualitative study

**Ryan Nguyen**

Department of Psychology, University of Calgary  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
[ryan.nguyen1@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ryan.nguyen1@ucalgary.ca)

**Hyoun S. (Andrew) Kim**

Department of Psychology, University of Calgary  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
Department of Psychology, Toronto Metropolitan University  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
[andrewhs.kim@torontomu.ca](mailto:andrewhs.kim@torontomu.ca)

**Lisa Henkel**

Department of Psychology, University of Calgary  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
[Lisa.henkel@ucalgary.ca](mailto:Lisa.henkel@ucalgary.ca)

**David C. Hodgins**

Department of Psychology, University of Calgary  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
[dhodgins@ucalgary.ca](mailto:dhodgins@ucalgary.ca)

**Philip Newall**

School of Psychological Science, University of Bristol  
Bristol, England  
[philip.newall@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:philip.newall@bristol.ac.uk)

**Zsolt Demetrovics**

Flinders University Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing, College of Human  
Sciences and Culture, Flinders University  
Bedford Park, SA, Australia  
Institute of Psychology, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University  
Budapest, Hungary  
[zsolt.demetrovics@gmail.com](mailto:zsolt.demetrovics@gmail.com)

**Sherry H. Stewart**

Departments of Psychiatry and Psychology & Neuroscience, Dalhousie University,  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada  
[Sherry.Stewart@Dal.Ca](mailto:Sherry.Stewart@Dal.Ca)

### **Daniel L. King**

Flinders University Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing, College of Human  
Sciences and Culture, Psychology and Social Work, Flinders University  
Bedford Park, SA, Australia  
[daniel.king@flinders.edu.au](mailto:daniel.king@flinders.edu.au)

### **Hermano Tavares**

Faculty of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, University of São Paulo  
São Paulo, Brazil  
[hermanoqt@gmail.com](mailto:hermanoqt@gmail.com)

### **Jung-Seok Choi**

Department of Psychiatry, Samsung Medical Center, Sungkyunkwan University  
School of Medicine  
Seoul, Republic of Korea  
[jungseok.choi@samsung.com](mailto:jungseok.choi@samsung.com)

### **André Luiz Monezi Andrade**

School of Life Sciences, Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas  
Campinas, Brazil  
[andremonezi@gmail.com](mailto:andremonezi@gmail.com)

### **Andrea Czako**

Flinders University Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing, College of Human  
Sciences and Culture, Flinders University  
Bedford Park, SA, Australia  
Institute of Psychology, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University  
Budapest, Hungary  
Centre of Excellence in Responsible Gaming, University of Gibraltar  
Gibraltar, Gibraltar.  
[andczako@gmail.com](mailto:andczako@gmail.com)

### **Keywords**

Gacha, Gambling, Loot Boxes, Qualitative, Gaming, Video games, Perceptions

### **INTRODUCTION**

“Gacha” is a monetization system commonly used in video games that allows players to spend real-world money for randomized virtual rewards (Koeder et al. 2018). Gacha has attracted attention due to its similarities to traditional gambling mechanics as well as to loot boxes (Tang et al. 2025). Consequently, it is not surprising that regulations regarding gacha games have emerged in several countries, including in-game probability disclosure requirements and age-based restrictions (Welsh 2025; Xiao et al. 2025). Although previous studies have shown perceptions of loot boxes as being similar to traditional gambling activities, little research has examined player perceptions of gacha specifically, despite its growing popularity and role within many present games (Tang et al. 2022). Furthermore, limited research has explored these topics within Canada, which currently has no regulations specifically addressing loot boxes or gacha mechanics (Fleming 2020). Therefore, it is unclear how Canadian

players understand and differentiate gacha from loot boxes. This study aimed to examine Canadian perceptions of gacha, its relationship to loot boxes, and gambling-like mechanics.

Twenty-nine current gamers who also opened loot boxes took part in qualitative interviews to explore their experiences and perspectives on gambling-like activities within gaming. Participants were asked specifically about their familiarity with gacha games and mechanics. Additionally, participants were also asked about their thoughts on the similarities and differences between loot boxes and gacha. Content analysis was used to analyse responses. Overall, 70% of participants ( $n = 20$ ) stated that they were familiar with gacha, while 30% stated they were not familiar ( $n = 9$ ). Among the game titles with gacha mechanics directly mentioned by participants, the most commonly stated were games from HoYoverse ( $n = 15$ ), *Umamusume: Pretty Derby* (Cygames 2021) ( $n = 5$ ), and *Fate/Grand Order* (Delightworks 2015) ( $n = 4$ ). When asked about the similarities, participants expressed that they view gacha and loot boxes as the same ( $n = 9$ ). “Yeah, to the point where like, I think in my mind, like, I'm not sure I would have even necessarily made a distinction between them” (Participant RN08). Additionally, participants also stated how loot boxes and gacha produce the same in-game interaction, for example, using a form of currency to open something to gain a desirable. Participants also mentioned the similar aspect of randomness found in both, in terms of obtaining a random reward or acquiring a random character. Participants also related their experiences with these mechanics to be of similar nature to gambling ( $n = 4$ ). “It's like these games have become more like the slot machines and it's very obvious about it.” (Participant JA07).

In contrast, regarding differences, it was expressed how gacha is a central component to the game; for example, it is required for progression, competitiveness, and for an overall better in-game experience ( $n = 10$ ). “For gacha systems it's more integral to like playing the game, cause from what I know it's like you need to interact with the gacha to get more units or more characters to play with.” (Participant OS08). Other differences noted were that loot boxes were perceived as purely cosmetic ( $n = 7$ ), in comparison to gacha where the rewards impact gameplay ( $n = 7$ ).

This study provides insight into how gambling-like monetization systems, including gacha, are perceived by Canadian video game players. Findings suggest that participants were very familiar with gacha systems and, although finding many similarities, were able to distinguish them from traditional loot boxes. These distinctions were based not only on their underlying mechanics, but also how the systems were experienced within gameplay, specifically their perceived role in progression and overall playing experience. Both were described as sharing a similar random element, while gacha was more commonly viewed as central to gameplay and loot boxes as an optional cosmetic feature. Despite these distinctions, many participants continued to view both as functionally similar, with some describing resemblances to gambling. This distinction between mechanics and player experiences suggests that approaches based only on the structural characteristics of these systems may not fully capture how players understand and experience them. Further qualitative research is therefore needed to better understand these experiences and inform potential policy and legislative approaches to gambling-like mechanics, particularly for loot boxes and gacha, which currently remain unaddressed in Canada.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Fleming, M. (2020). Fixing the odds: Designing intelligent loot box policy in Canada. *University of Toronto Faculty of Law Review*, 78(1), 75-108.  
<https://canlii.ca/t/7ncjq>

- Koeder, M. J., Tanaka, E. & Mitomo, H. (2018). "Lootboxes" in digital games: A gamble with consumers in need of regulation? An evaluation based on learnings from Japan. <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/190385>.
- Tang, A. C. Y., Lee, P. H., Lam, S. C., Siu, S. C. N., Ye, C. J., & Lee, R. L. (2022). Prediction of problem gambling by demographics, gaming behavior and psychological correlates among gacha gamers: A cross-sectional online survey in Chinese young adults. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 13, 940281. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2022.940281>
- Tang, A. C. Y., Kwan, R. Y. C., Wong, E. M. L., & Cheng, W. L. S. (2025). How gacha gaming and life quality shape problem gambling risk: Insights from a cross-sectional study using Hong Kong-based online survey of young adults. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 16, 1663328. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2025.1663328>
- Welsh, O. (2025, May 7). *Genshin impact introduces age-gating as part of loot box crackdown*. Polygon. <https://www.polygon.com/genshinimpact/597934/genshin-impact-age-verification/>
- 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>

## Game References

- Cygames. 2021. *Umamusume: Pretty Derby*. iOS, Android, PC. Tokyo, Japan: Cygames.
- Delightworks. 2015. *Fate/Grand Order*. iOS, Android. Tokyo, Japan: Aniplex.

## BIO

Ryan Nguyen is a prospective master's/PhD student who holds a Bachelor of Science Honours in Psychology from the University of Calgary. He is a research assistant and volunteer with the Addictive Behaviours Lab under Dr. David Hodgins. His research interests focus on gaming, loot boxes, esports, and the convergence of gaming and gambling, including his published honours thesis under Dr. Andrew Kim examining problem gaming, gambling, and psychological characteristics across esports athletes, spectators, and video gamers. His current research examines gaming experiences with gambling-like mechanics, and how their distinct characteristics can be understood alongside research, policy, and legislation.