

The Illusion of Control: The Impact of Visual Framing on Lootbox Purchasing Intent [Working title]

Supervisor: Sonja Herrmann <sonja.herrmann@uni-passau.de>
Date: As of now
Type: Bachelor's Thesis, Master's Thesis
Language: German or English

Motivation:

The "Free-To-Play" gaming model relies heavily on microtransactions, with lootboxes generating significant revenue through probability-based rewards. While the psychological similarities between lootboxes and gambling are increasingly documented, isolating the specific use interface (UI) and user experience (UX) design choices that drive this behaviour remains a challenge. This thesis will focus on the design of in-game stores and the framing of lootboxes therein and the effects on consumer decision-making.

Goal:

The primary objective of this thesis is to conceptualize and design an experimental mock-up based on preexisting literature that isolates the specific interface mechanics driving volatile consumption in digital games with lootboxes. While the Free-to-Play business model increasingly relies on probability-based microtransactions, there remains a critical gap in understanding how specific design choices influence the perceived value of these volatile purchases. Therefore, this thesis aims to systematically test how visual choice architecture and information asymmetry influence a user's intent to engage with probability-based rewards versus deterministic, direct-purchase alternatives. Potential research questions include: In what ways do deceptive visual frames alter a consumer's willingness-to-pay for a randomized reward compared to its objective expected value? How does the positioning of probability disclosures (e.g. hidden in a sub menu or displayed prominently next to the purchase button) impact purchasing intent?

References and Related Literature:

Battacherjee, A. (2012). *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices*.

Miao, J., & Jain, S. (2024). Designing Loot Boxes: Implications for Profits and Welfare. *Marketing Science*, 43 (6), 1242-1259.

Hamari, J., Alha, K., Järvelä, S., Kivikangas, J. M., Koivisto, J., Paavilainen, J. (2017). Why do players buy in-game content? An empirical study on concrete purchase intentions. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 68, 538-546.