CRITICAL gambling studies

Interpassive Gambling: The Case of Slot Machine Vlogs on YouTube

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Abstract: Slot machines are recognized as a particularly risky form of gambling. However, there is a form of slot machine consumption that seems to have largely escaped the notice of regulators and scholars: the streaming of slot machine play on YouTube and other platforms. In this article, we present the results of our qualitative study of 21 slot machine videos. Our study examines how these videos portray gambling and how they align with the norms of YouTube's platform economy. Our analysis underscores the representation of slot machine gambling in this under-regulated media, emphasizing different tactics of viewer manipulation. We introduce the concept of *interpassive gambling* to reflect the ways that user-generated videos are a form of diffusion of gambling mechanics beyond traditional gambling venues. We conclude by calling for more scholarly and regulatory attention to this gamblified site of media consumption.

Keywords: Gambling-related media, slot machines, Youtube, user generated content, interpassivity, gamblification

Introduction

Advertisements for slot machines, casinos, or other gambling-related products are commonly regulated by government policies. For example, Quebec (where we are based) prohibits the use of language, music, or spokespersons popular with minors in gambling ads (Loto Quebec, 2014). These policies are put in place to protect vulnerable individuals—youth, for instance—from gambling enticement and, ultimately, from experiencing gambling-related harms. Policies are enforced on social media platforms as well, where advertisers are required to comply with local laws by using age restrictions and geolocation filters (Facebook, 2021; Google Support, 2021).

Surprisingly, user-generated content (UGC) has escaped gambling regulation in most countries. UGC is defined as content produced by social media platform users, such as posts, stories, or videos (Chandler & Munday, 2020). Social media platforms often moderate and regulate UGC differently than advertisements. For example, YouTube explicitly restricts gambling content in advertisements, but not in UGC (YouTube Help, 2021b). The advertisement/UGC distinction in YouTube's policies leaves a convenient loophole for a prolific genre of YouTube videos featuring slot machine gambling. A news article from 2016 reports 1.6 million results for the term "slot play" on YouTube (McDonald,

2016), and on July 23rd, 2022, the Google search "slot play site:youtube.com" yielded about 12.3 million results. Content creators dedicate entire channels to filming themselves playing slot machines in brick-and-mortar casinos, often with humorous commentary. These slot machine videos are ostensibly UGC, so they are exempt from YouTube's gambling advertisement policies.

In light of this emergent form of digital media, this study focuses on slot machine videos on YouTube. We examine how videos of slot machine play portray gambling, and how they align with the norms of YouTube's platform economy. We emphasize different tactics of viewer manipulation, arguing that UGC featuring gambling content can be viewed as a *gamblified* form of media production and consumption. "Gamblification" refers to the "digitally mediated diffusion of gambling game mechanics and principles" beyond traditional gambling venues (Zanescu et al., 2021, p. 2883; see also Macey & Hamari, 2022). Gamblification draws analytic attention to the "expanding grey area" between gambling and other forms of digitally mediated production and consumption, "from social games on mobile devices to popular platforms for 'spread betting' on financial markets" (Nicoll, 2019, p. 2).

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Nicoll and Akcayir (2020) have advocated for critical gambling studies, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary research that examines the social and cultural aspects of gambling. Our study responds to this call. Specifically, we propose *interpassivity* as a novel theoretical lens for critical gambling scholars to explore the gamblification of everyday life and the changing landscape of gambling consumption. Interpassivity is defined as the act of delegating pleasurable activities to others (Gekker, 2018; Pfaller, 2017). In pointing to interpassivity as a form of consumption by proxy, we question the existing distinctions in policy, law, and scholarship between gambling and non-gambling activities.

In what follows, we present an overview of the scholarship on slot machines and slot machine videos. Next, we discuss our conceptual framework, focusing on the concept of interpassivity because, unlike gamblification, it is not well known in gambling studies. We then present our methodology, analysis, and discussion sections. This study argues that unregulated slot machine videos exploit a regulatory loophole that should be on the radar of gambling regulators. Slot machine videos also highlight the need for new theoretical tools to understand contemporary gambling landscapes, where gambling practices and representations have spread beyond sanctioned gambling venues. We argue that slot machine videos enable viewers to gamble *through* the YouTuber, and question whether this practice should be regulated.

Literature Review
Slot Machines

Electronic gaming machines (EGMs)[2] generate the highest revenue among all forms of legal gambling in Canada (Marshall, 2011), Australia (Productivity Commission, 2010), and Great Britain (Gambling Commission, 2021). EGMs, and slot machines more specifically, are recognized as one of the most addictive gambling products (Dowling et al., 2005; MacLaren, 2016). Their ubiquity and game design contribute to their highly addictive potential (Emond & Griffiths, 2020; MacLaren, 2016). With low bet amount and auditory and visual effects akin to video games, they are often seen as harmless games (Emond & Griffiths, 2020). These auditory and visual effects are designed to continually stimulate the player, creating the impression of uninterrupted fun (Dowling et al., 2005).

Scholars have found that some slot machine design features perpetuate cognitive errors typically found among people who experience gambling-related harms, such as believing that chance events are evenly distributed in time or that certain behaviors can influence the probability of success in situations of chance (Dixon et al., 2013; Hahmann & Monson, 2021). This illusion of control can result in superstitious

behaviors that anthropomorphize slot machines (Reith, 1999), for example by interacting with them in ways that are thought to induce payouts (Delfabbro & Winefield, 1999).

Slot machine videos are not only concerning because of the highly addictive nature of EGMs, but also because they are a readily available form of online gambling-related media. Online slot machines allow individuals to gamble from the privacy of their own home and to control their gambling environment (Murch & Clark, 2021). This can lead to longer gambling sessions and higher expenses for gamblers (Lavoie & Main, 2019). Researchers have suggested that online gamblers are more likely to exhibit reckless decisions while gambling (Montes & Weatherly, 2017), and are younger than their offline counterparts (Davoudi et al., 2022). Additionally, Dufour and colleagues (2020), found that the severity of gambling problems among online gamblers was a significant predictor of their migration to offline gambling. Thus, online gambling and, as we argue here, online representations of gambling, raise public health concerns because of their strong association with the development of gambling related harms.

Slot Machine Videos

Slot machine videos have received almost no scholarly attention, apart from Nicoll's (2011) and Nicoll and Johnson's (2019) work. In her paper 'Blowing up the Pokies', Nicoll (2011) uses slot machine videos as an analytical tool to help describe the sensory atmosphere in Australian EGM lounges. In a subsequent article, Nicoll and Johnson (2019) delve into the relationship between EGM distributors and slot video creators, contrasting it to the relationship between video game companies and video game reviewers on YouTube. They find that video game reviewers tend to disclose sponsorships, conflicts of interest, and relationships with game companies. EGM reviewers, however, do not disclose any partnerships, despite being authorized to film in casinos, where it is usually prohibited, nor do they restrict their videos to adults, thus potentially "promoting gambling to individuals who are under-age" (Nicoll & Johnson, 2019, p. 8). Nicoll and Johnson (2019) argue that this creates a conflict of interest, which needs further investigation. Our article responds to this call, though we focus less on the relationship between slot video creators and gambling companies, and more on the representation of gambling in slot machine videos, and what their consumption entails.

The Media Economy of YouTube Videos

Nicoll and Johnson (2019, p. 8) argue that creators of slot machine videos are "functioning parts of social media networks where individuals earn money by representing their consumption in particular ways".

[2] EGMs include slot machines, video lottery terminals, and video poker machines (Spencer & Clark, 2021).

Those who upload videos are not just creating an entertaining experience for the viewer, but they are also potentially influencing viewers' consumption behaviors by showcasing certain products over others.

The platform business model relies on customer data to individually target advertisements and services (Snircek, 2017). YouTube generates revenue from advertisements placed before, during, or after a video (Burgess & Green, 2018). For Postigo (2016), YouTube is characterized by an "architecture of digital labor," whose currency is subscribers. Postigo (2016) argues that YouTubers with large subscriber bases function as a management class that attracts and retains subscribers, generating revenue for YouTube. Content creators who are in the YouTube Partner Program also have a vested interest in attracting and retaining viewers, as they can receive a cut of the advertising revenue made by their video (YouTube Help, 2021a). Through monetization, these YouTube videos transform slot machine gambling, an ostensibly individuated leisure activity, into revenue-generating labor (Gekker, 2018; Griffiths, 2017). Another notable aspect of the YouTube media ecosystem is the culture of microcelebrity (Hou, 2019; Raun, 2018). YouTube micro-celebrities commodify themselves by manufacturing authenticity and capitalizing on intimacy, negotiating contradictions between their roles as community leaders and brand ambassadors (Hou, 2019; Raun, 2018).

Interpassivity

To better understand the phenomenon of watching slot machine videos, we turn to game studies scholars and their exploration of a similar phenomenon, 'Let's Play' videos (LPs), or walkthroughs. These videos feature a recording of a person playing a video game, often featuring commentary (Gekker, 2018; Glas, 2015). We were especially interested in Gekker's (2018) analysis of this phenomenon through the lens of interpassivity.

Interpassivity, a concept developed by Pfaller (1996; 2017), Žižek (1998), and others, is the act of delegating pleasurable activities to others—human or non-human (Gekker, 2018, Pfaller, 2017). Pfaller and Žižek provide some examples of interpassive behaviors, such as recording TV shows for future enjoyment, despite knowing that you will likely never watch them, or relying on the laugh track in sitcoms to "[display] amusement" in the viewer's place (Pfaller, 2017, p.1).

Van Oenen (2008) and Schölzel (2017) have expanded this concept, rejecting the psychoanalytic inflections that Pfaller and Žižek gave interpassivity. While Pfaller and Žižek argue that interpassivity is a universal, transhistorical human experience, Van Oenen (2008) historicizes the concept, interpreting it as a form of resistance to the demands of modern life. According to Gekker (2018, p. 236), Schölzel adds that interpassivity allows actors to "step outside the interactive control loops that characterize many computerized (and political) systems today". Gekker

(2018) draws on Van Oenen's and Schölzel's interpretations of interpassivity in his study of LPs. Gekker (2018) argues that watching LPs reduces the anxieties associated with the use of digital media by delegating gameplay to another player. Gekker discusses two aspects of LPs as interpassive media which are especially relevant to the current study. First, in his introduction, he describes his thought process when choosing to watch a video of a game rather than playing it:

> … launching the game myself at this hour in the evening has a particular danger of lost hours and a difficult morning. Here, the time code presents a known quality: I will experience gameplay through this YouTuber for exactly 28 minutes and 22 seconds. Then, I will be free again (Gekker, 2018, p. 220).

Though Gekker does not deepen this point in his analysis, the fixed temporality of YouTube videos is an interesting characteristic highlighted by the theorization of interpassivity, especially when considering slot machines, which are designed to keep the player playing for as long as possible (Schüll, 2012). Gekker also emphasizes audience participation through social media comments and posts. He shows how dedicated social media communities allow viewers to reflect on the games in "an empathetic, yet detached setting, which is difficult to imagine in other media forms" (Gekker, 2018, p. 235). This social element is not always present in other interpassive media, such as Pfaller's examples—the DVR and the laugh track (Pfaller, 2017).

With the popularization of video game spectatorship, Gekker hopes that consumers "will be able to glance at the circles of ludic control around them, and step away" (Gekker, 2018, p. 236). In this paper, we follow Gekker's interpretation of interpassivity, though we question the degree to which it is possible to "step away" from interactive control loops on social media platforms like YouTube (Gekker, 2018, p. 236; Hoebanx, 2022).

Methodology

We set out to address the following research questions: How do slot machine videos portray and remediate gambling? How do they align with the norms of YouTube's platform economy? What can the concept of interpassivity tell us about the consumption of gambling-related UGC?

To answer these questions, we conducted a netnographic study using a sample of 21 slot machine vlogs on YouTube. Netnography relies on participant observation in online communities and the analysis of publicly available data online, such as blog posts, comments, or videos (Kozinets, 2015). Before beginning data collection, the researcher should conduct an exploratory phase to familiarize themselves with the

discourses, social codes, and topics of interest in the studied community. This helps the researcher select the most relevant data for their project.

Data Collection

The first author conducted a three-month exploratory phase. During this phase, the first author searched YouTube for slot machine videos by combining the keywords "slot machine," "gambling," "casino," "vlog," and "video" in YouTube's search bar. This exploratory phase revealed that slot machine videos on YouTube follow similar formats. They are around 15 minutes long, the content creators rarely show their faces, and the titles are often attention-grabbing, with mentions of jackpots or bonus rounds. A month-long period of data collection followed this initial period of exploration.

Our video selection criteria were: 1) slot machine videos in English, and 2) published by different YouTube channels. We wanted an array of videos by different content creators to ensure that any observed similarities came from the video genre, rather than a YouTuber's vlogging style.

The first video selected for our sample was the top result for the search "slot machine" on YouTube, on August 9, 2019. Transcription, view count, comment count, channel name, likes and dislikes, and the first few pages of comments were collected. We then selected the first videos in the "Recommended Videos" sidebar that met our criteria. This became our second video. We repeated this snowball-sampling-like procedure until an initial sample of 15 videos was assembled. We chose to follow YouTube's recommendation algorithm to approximate the experience of a viewer who is new to slot machine videos, as opposed to a viewer who already has favorite channels or content creators. Data collection was conducted using a browser page in private mode to limit access to the first author's personal browsing history, but the recommendation algorithm could have been biased, for instance, by the author's location, device type, or language preferences. The algorithm tended to recommend the most popular slot machine content creators, demonstrating how YouTube affordances reinforce the system of microcelebrities in subcommunities (Raun, 2018). Recommendation algorithms are essential for content distribution and can play a role in steering audiences towards particular media (e.g., Hoebanx, 2022).

Sample

The sample contains 21 videos (15 initial videos, plus an additional six videos to ensure that we had reached data saturation). They were uploaded between August 8-29, 2019. The videos did not always mention where they were filmed, but those that did (n =15) were filmed in the U.S.A. The videos are between 10 and 32 minutes long ($\bar{x}$ = 13 minutes). At the time of collection, the videos had on average 2612 views a day (number of views / number of days since publication). The video

with the most views had accumulated over 18,000 views in two days. The channels on which these videos were published had an average of 20,468 subscribers (max = 75,000, min = 214).

Analytical Approach

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, the first author read, coded, reread, and recoded the data from the 15 initial videos. After generating the initial themes, she collected six more videos and found that no new themes emerged from the additional videos. The first author arranged the initial codes into overarching themes. The second author then checked the accuracy of these themes and their concordance with the data.

Analysis

The results of our analysis are divided into three sections. The first section delves into the video content, the second section relates to the video format, and the last section focuses on the audience.

Video Content

The themes in this section address our first research question: How do slot machine videos portray gambling?

Slot machine videos only capture a fraction of the physical casino experience. The viewers' field of vision is limited by the video frame. For the most part, the representation of slot machines in YouTube videos is limited to their reels, rather than the entire machine. The rest of the slot machine, as well as the casino environment and the content creators themselves, are rarely shown.

Only three out of the 21 sample videos featured the content creator's face. In those three videos, content creators only film themselves briefly, to explain their plans for the play session. For example, one YouTuber begins her video by filming herself in her parked car:

> Player: "Hi everyone! I am doing another late night galivant. I believe it is about 12:35 in the morning, so I am here at one of my locals, and I hope I win big, wish me luck! Bye guys."
> [The video cuts to the YouTuber filming herself in an underground parking lot, walking towards the casino. The video cuts again to a shot of slot machine reels.] (Video 20)

While these YouTubers are not visually present, their presence is felt nevertheless in most of the sample videos through their constant gameplay commentary. These disembodied commentaries usually take the form of monologues, with very few moments of silence. In addition to the game commentary, the viewer can also hear the slot machine sound effects and the ambient noises of the casino. This bustling soundscape is partially manufactured by the YouTubers themselves, who are occasionally seen turning up the slot machine

volume. Slot machine videos introduce some distance between the gambling experience and the viewer-as-interpassive-gambler. While video viewers are not entirely immersed in the gambling experience, many slot machine elements remain: the sounds, the reel design and the game mechanics.

Gameplay commentary was absent in only four out of the 21 sample videos, where the content creator remained silent. In the videos with gameplay commentary, we found that the content of this commentary fell into three main sub-themes: (1) Instructions; (2) Strategies; and (3) Anthropomorphizing the machines.

In their commentary, YouTubers will often provide some instructions about specific features on slot machines, suggesting, for instance, how to trigger bonus rounds, or jackpot-winning tile combinations. For example, in this excerpt from a video about the game *Lock it Link*, the player explains how to trigger free credits:

> Player 1: "Lock it Link, piggy banking. Look at that major, guys. $3,300, wouldn't that be amazing?"
>
> [The player […] starts playing as he talks to his friend. […] As the reels spin, some tiles featuring a purple building with the word 'BANK' at the top appear.]
>
> P1: "Three of those banks starts the feature, you get to choose if you want the piggy banking or if you want the free games. I personally never have tried the free games; I love that piggy banking. I have gotten a major on the game. I filled the screen […]." (Video 12)

The YouTuber in this excerpt not only explains how to win a bonus game, but also his personal preference for accumulating banks instead of taking "free" games. While slot machine videos are not how-to videos *per se*, they can function as demonstrations and consumer reviews of newer slot machines.

The *strategies* theme focused on players explaining how they hope to influence their odds of winning. Unlike the *instructions* theme, where players simply explain game mechanics, this theme is based on the belief that slot machine odds can be manipulated. Strategies were employed in 11 out of the 21 videos. The most common strategy is progressive betting, present in five videos. Progressive betting is the practice of increasing the amounts bet on each spin, in the hopes of winning more. For example, in the following excerpt, one YouTuber explains that he is using progressive betting to try to end a losing streak:

> Player: "Alright. We're still on that initial ticket of 2,000, [We can see that he has a credit of $972.80] we got another bonus. Still down though, we got on a $25 bet on a dollar denom. We've been

changing the denoms up like crazy, trying to get something to hit." (Video 2)

The player describes changing the denomination of his bets for every spin, "trying to get something to hit". Here, changing the bet amounts is presented as a proactive strategy that players can use to trigger more frequent jackpots. He implies that the opposite—not changing the bet amount—would not be as effective. Other strategies present in our sample include switching machines when one machine is not paying out or playing a "backup spin" after winning big, to avoid missing another win.

Content creators *anthropomorphize their machines* by pleading, thanking, and generally talking to them as if this could influence the odds of winning. For example, in the following excerpt, a YouTuber has just triggered a bonus on the game *Buffalo Grand* and pleads the machine to give her the grand jackpot:

> [A giant wheel of fortune fills up the screen. […]]
>
> Player: "Can we get a gold piece of the pie before we get games, please?"
>
> [She spins the wheel. […] It lands on "12 FREE GAMES"]
>
> Player: "12 games. All right. You know what we need to do, Buffalo." (Video 6)

Here, the player asks the slot machine to land on the grand jackpot, then tells it "You know what we need to do, Buffalo." She uses the pronoun 'we' as if the machine were a teammate, helping her beat the odds.

Slot machines are also discussed in the videos as if they could form affective bonds with the player. For example, one couple states that a machine must not like them because they are not landing on extra bonus games. After a series of bonus games, they win $864:

> Player 1: "Let's do a couple here while we're ahead." […]
>
> [They play two spins, but they do not win any bonuses or 'free' games.]
>
> P1: "Nothing, it doesn't like this."
>
> P2: "Not in the slightest, no."
>
> [On the next spin, a golden drum appears on the reels. If they get three golden drums, they trigger a bonus game with bigger prizes.]
>
> P1: "Oh, we want the golden drums at $10."
>
> [They play two more spins, but they do not get more golden drums.]

P2: "Two more. Oh. Last one. No. It hated that." (Video 21)

In this excerpt, the two players narrate the gameplay as if the machine were displeased with their actions: "it doesn't like this." The machines are portrayed as having agency in determining who gets to win.

Another way players anthropomorphize slot machines in these videos is through the discourse of fairness. The players in our sample often suggest that, if they invest enough time and money in a slot machine, then it must let them win some of the money back. This can be seen in a video where a couple triggers a bonus game after a long losing streak.

[The machine displays an animation of falling coins, along with celebratory music. […]]

P1: "Finally."

P2: "Finally. Five different casinos [he laughs]." (Video 18)

The players explain that they have been to five different casinos before winning. They express their relief—"Finally!", suggesting that they were expecting to win at some point. The idea of fairness appears here as the belief that players should win something if they keep trying. Additionally, this excerpt is taken from a video that only showcases bonus games. Not only does this video portray winning as inevitable, but the time and money spent to reach the bonuses are edited out of the video.

By attributing feelings and intentions to slot machines, content creators—intentionally or not—position the slot machine as a character in the game, sometimes as an opponent, sometimes as an ally. This helps to add a sense of continuity and a storyline to a game based on random occurrences. However, their gameplay commentary shatters any illusion that the viewer is playing the slot machine alone. This echoes Gekker's (2018, p. 231) reflection that LP producers sometimes act less as a proxy, and more as an "emotional compass for the spectator". Instead, gameplay commentaries allow viewers to step outside of the interactive control loops that characterize slot machine design. The commentary also brings a social and performative dimension to slot machine play and gives viewers a glimpse into the gambling style of another player.

Video Format

This section focuses on slot machine video post-production. These videos are media objects created to be uploaded to a social media platform that rewards viewer retention. Content creators have a vested interest in creating videos that are entertaining and engaging, which they do by transforming their footage of slot machine play through editing, ad placements, and so on.

By editing their footage, content creators further manipulate how slot machine gambling is represented. In ten out of the 21 sample videos, all the gameplay is edited out, except for the bonus games. Bonus games are typically triggered by landing on a combination of special tiles. This unlocks a series of free spins on reels with extra animations, music, and sometimes mini games. The bonus-game-only videos focus solely on what are arguably the most exciting parts of slot machine gambling. Bonus-only videos could be the result of casino restrictions,[3] but they may also be the result of YouTubers only selecting the most exciting moments of their session.

Some videos of the sample use editing to tell a story about the game. For example, one YouTuber uses editing to help explain why she switched slot machines in the middle of a video, by including a clip of herself complaining about the first machine "not liking her" and being "called" by the second (Video 20). When editing the video, the YouTuber decided to include the moment where she complains about her first machine, helping to create a narrative for the viewer, stringing otherwise unrelated actions together.

By deciding what to include and what to exclude, content creators shape slot machine videos to better respond to the demands of YouTube's media economy. This highlights the importance of thinking about post-production processes in the transformation of raw footage into media objects created for consumption by a viewer.

YouTubers who are part of the Partner Program can choose how many ads play on their videos, and when they should be placed (YouTube Creators, 2020). These choices are not disclosed to viewers, so we cannot assert with certainty whether any ads in the sample videos were intentionally placed by the content creator or automatically placed by YouTube. However, we did notice that in eight of the 21 videos, mid-roll ads appeared before an exciting moment in the videos, such as triggering bonus rounds or winning a jackpot. For example, in a video featuring the game *Cleopatra 2*, the content creator wins 12 free spins. He plays the first spin, but before the viewer can see the outcome of the spin, an unskippable 15-second ad interrupts the video, forcing the viewer to wait before they can see the player win an extra 12 spins, an exciting moment in the game. Another example of suspense-building ad placement appears in a video about the game *Fu Fu Fu*. In this game, bonus rounds are randomly triggered by "wild shower" events:

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[3] One YouTuber in our sample explains that the casino in which he films only allows him to record bonus rounds.

[After a few spins, the machine shows a "WILD SHOWER" notification.]

Player: "Wild shower! [Wild tiles flying in from the top of the screen start filling up the grid.] Now some of these wilds actually have multipliers in them, that's where the big money is."

[He spins the reels but does not win much from this].

Player: "All right it was something."

[He spins the reels again. Before we can see the outcome of his spin, a midroll ad for cereal starts playing. It is unskippable. When we get back to the video, the player gets a "WILD SHOWER" notification again. […] He wins 9730 credits.] (Video 12)

Here, the ad is placed before an uncommon event: triggering a second bonus round in a row. It is placed during the second wild shower reel spin, moments before the player wins some credits. Whether these ads are manually placed by content creators, or automatically by the platform, they often appear during moments when viewers may be less inclined to click away. Placing the ads during exciting moments can help retain viewers—and ad revenue.

Gekker (2018) notes that YouTube videos are media objects with a set temporality, but their temporality is also manipulated in other ways. Editing and ad placements are two ways that YouTubers can change the pace of their original footage. They can build up the suspense with ads or skip over uneventful moments by editing them out. While this can make videos more entertaining, it also affects the representation of slot machine gambling. Without regulation, YouTubers/YouTube can edit videos however they choose, and do not have to disclose how much time spent on the device they cut out from the final video, nor the amount of money gambled.

Audience

Slot machine videos are not live broadcasts, so the audience is absent when players film their videos. In the previous section, we saw how slot machine videos were transformed for an anticipated audience. In this section, we focus on the interactions between the audience and the YouTubers in the video comment section.

We recorded the usernames of the top commenters in our sample (n=186). 48 of these usernames contained words like "slots", "jackpot", or "Vegas." Some commenters had slot machine YouTube channels of their own, so it is possible that their comments served as promotion for their own channel. Usernames with slot machine themes could also suggest that commenters wanted their usernames to reflect their interest in slot machines to others. These usernames

indicate that some viewers of slot machine videos are gamblers themselves.

YouTubers sometimes interact directly with their viewers in the comment section of their videos. For example, one YouTuber who did not speak during the video was very active in the comment section. They had replied to every comment left on their video (13 total comments) at the time of data collection. Most comments are congratulatory, wishing the YouTuber good luck, while YouTubers often thank the commenters for watching:

Commenter: "Wow, you were on fire! I don't do well on the Buffalo anymore! The Timberwolf treated you very well also, congrats. Continued good luck my friend […]."

YouTuber: "Thank you my friend!! It was a hot machine!! I was just lucky!! Thank you for watching and commenting!! I appreciate it. Have a great evening […]." (Comment section, video 13)

The commenter in this excerpt has some experience with the game featured in the video ("I don't do well on the Buffalo anymore!"). Commenters often relate their own experiences as gamblers. Their language often resembles the slot machine gameplay commentaries: personal strategies, anthropomorphizing the machine ("the Timberwolf treated you very well also"), and references to luck and fairness.

Some viewers left comments thanking YouTubers for explaining game features, especially when they showcased newer games. For example, one viewer left the following comment on a video about the slot machine *Timber Wolf*:

Commenter: "Thanks for sharing and demonstrating most features on this Timber Wolf new game. I start to like it already although it seems tough to win big […]" (Comment section, video 3)

The commenter qualifies the slot machine video as a demonstration that has helped them assess whether they would enjoy playing *Timber Wolf* ("I start to like it already") as well as its apparent payout rate ("it seems tough to win big"). The comment sections suggest that some viewers learn about newer slot machines and their features from these videos.

The comments also show that some viewers are familiar with the strategies employed by the YouTubers. For example, the following comment was left under a video about the game *Rising Fortunes*. When the bonus round is triggered on *Rising Fortunes*, players are given the choice between winning a pre-determined number of credits ('Top Feature') or playing free games in the hopes of increasing their prize. The creators in this

excerpt always chose the Top Feature. One commenter congratulated them:

> Commenter: "Glad you pick the Top feature! Exciting bonuses congratulations […]"

> YouTuber's reply: "Thanks, Guys! We learned our lesson choosing the free games lol" (Comment section, video 18)

In this exchange, we can see that both the commenter and the YouTuber imply that the pre-determined credits are the better choice, showing familiarity with the game and the strategies to use.

Commentors express their appreciation for YouTubers and their gameplay commentary by thanking, congratulating, and wishing them luck. Slot machine video comments show that viewers do not just watch these videos for their instructional and strategic components, but they enjoy watching others play as well. This finding challenges scholars' characterization of slot machine gambling as a solitary activity, where gamblers' only input is to push a button (Schüll, 2012). Slot machine videos remove this input yet offer a different interactive possibility: commenting on another player's actions. Gekker (2018) argues that comments on LPs indicate that viewers step outside of control loops by reflecting on video game practices. While we agree, we also found that by encompassing YouTube videos and their comment sections in the same analytical unit, the social dimension of slot machine videos complicates the notion of interpassivity on social media. Just as gamblification blurs the boundaries between gambling and non-gambling activities, social media platforms blur the distinction between interactive and interpassive activities. The viewer experience of slot machine videos is largely interpassive, delegating the pleasure of gambling to the YouTuber, yet viewers can scrutinize the YouTuber's gameplay and share their experiences with a community of peers—thus actively engaging in gambling-adjacent practices.

Discussion

Slot machine videos on YouTube entertain viewers, while generating revenue for the platform through advertisements. They also indirectly promote EGM companies, casinos, and the gambling industry more broadly. Despite this—and perhaps because viewers are not plugging credits into their computers as they consume them—slot machine videos escape governmental regulation and raise several issues.

First, slot machine videos feature "gambling-themed content" (Abarbanel et al., 2016) and are a form of gamblified media. However, unlike gamblified media on display within casinos, bars, or on platforms licensed by governmental operators, gambling-related UGC is not restricted to adults on YouTube and is potentially broadcast to youth audiences (Nicoll & Johnson, 2019)

who may be particularly receptive to discourses that provide strategies to beat slot machine odds. And, as researchers have noted, youth are at elevated risk of experiencing gambling-related harm (Abarbanel et al., 2013; Dixon et al., 2013; Hahmann & Monson, 2021).

Second, YouTubers and YouTube manipulate representations of slot machine gameplay through editing and advertisement placement. We surmised that these manipulations make the viewing experience more enticing, maximizing viewer engagement with the platform and its advertisers—similarly to how slot machine design maximizes time on device (Schüll, 2012). Slot machine videos also obscure key aspects of slot machine play often required by responsible gambling measures, such as money lost, odds of winning or time on device.

Responsible gambling measures remain the dominant response to gambling harm reduction, despite criticism of their individualistic approach and poor operational efficacy (Hancock & Smith, 2017; Reynolds et al., 2020). To the extent that slot machine videos eschew already tenuous harm-reduction strategies and represent an idealized version of slot machine play, slot machine videos may also discourage viewers from applying responsible gambling measures to their own gambling sessions (e.g., placing limits on the amount of time and money spent gambling).

Third, as content creators and viewers form a community around slot machine videos, comparing their experiences and strategies, slot machine play may take on spectator-sport-like properties. In addition to normalizing gambling experiences in everyday life, content creators create a sense of intimacy with their viewers (Hou, 2019; Raun, 2018), creating an environment where slot machine videos have the potential to be both a source of authentic game reviews, and a circumvential route for industry actors to connect with publics otherwise unreachable through overt advertising avenues (e.g., youth).

These issues alone warrant gambling regulators' attention, but they also highlight the need for new concepts and theoretical tools to make sense of the evolving reality of contemporary gambling consumption, notably the gamblification of media and practices outside of official gambling venues. Interpassivity offers a novel perspective on the gamblification of everyday life, by stepping outside of the gambling/non gambling dichotomy. Interpassivity reveals that slot machine videos may be reflective of a larger, Internet-mediated transformation in gambling culture, the ramifications of which we are only beginning to grasp.

In analyzing slot machine videos as interpassive media, we posit that viewers delegate gambling—a pleasurable activity—to the YouTuber. Slot machine videos provide more than entertainment: a shared gambling experience occurs as well. In a way, the viewer is gambling *through* the YouTuber. YouTube video affordances reconfigure the constraints of space, time,

economy, and social structure. One does not have to take a "late night galivant" to a casino or have money to plug into slot machines. Instead, one can simply lean into the experience of the spinning reels and sociality of asynchronous commentary by watching slot machine play from the comfort of one's home. There may not be the prospect of a monetary win; but neither is there the risk of monetary loss (nor other risks, such as being in contact with addictive substances within the casino environment, or those encountered by going out during the coronavirus pandemic). YouTube's affordances do mean, however, that time and valuable personal data is given away by spending time on YouTube (Postigo, 2016; Snircek, 2017).

Interpassivity and gamblification help us consider the shifting value proposition of gambling-related media and practices on social media platforms. While slot machines generate value for their hosting venues (brick-and-mortar casinos, online gambling sites), their re-mediation in YouTube videos adds another level of value that is tied to the advertisement revenue model supporting social media platforms—a model that harvests users' personal data. Interpassivity thus prompts us to consider how value is generated from the gamblification of everyday life. This observation supports Nicoll and Johnson's (2019) point that slot machines should be understood as media products within complex "media ecosystems" rather than stand-alone products that can be effectively regulated with tools like "information sheets and signage in venues".

While interpassivity helps us theorize slot machine videos, we suggest that the empirical study of these phenomena may also help theorize interpassivity. A potential research avenue for the theorization of interpassivity in gambling studies could be the delegation of activities that are pleasurable yet associated with the risk of addiction. Beyond misrepresentations of the odds of winning and the normalization of gambling, we question whether watching slot machine videos, a form of interpassive gambling, has a harmful potential that should be investigated. For policy makers, the intersections of interpassivity and addiction raise questions about the attribution of responsibility in the management and diffusion of gambling-related interpassive media.

Conclusion

Slot machine videos on YouTube are prime examples of how social media has handled gambling-related UGC. Without platform moderation, viewers are solely responsible for their gambling-related media consumption, exonerating stakeholders—platforms, EGM companies—from blame (Savard et al., 2022). This study builds on Nicoll and Johnson's (2019) observations about gambling content creators' tenuous relationship with industry actors. These videos raise questions about the place of social media and UGC in gambling promotion.

Featuring the first application of *interpassivity* to gambling research, this study also revealed how gambling is portrayed and consumed in social media contexts. This study introduces the concept of interpassive gambling, to reflect how the consumption of gambling-related media is a practice that calls into question the increasingly porous boundary between gambling and non-gambling activities. We call for further investigation into gamblified media and the role of content creators in the normalization of gambling activities.

Our study was based on a small sample of videos published over a one-month period. It relied on video comments rather than direct viewer feedback. We know little about the nature of the influence exerted by this emergent media. Thus, more research is needed to clarify the processes and underlying mechanics of interpassive gambling, and its effects in diverse audiences. Future research could focus on the reception of these videos by viewers. It could also focus on the growing role of gambling and gambling-like systems on other video sites such as Twitch (Arbanel & Johnson, 2020; Zendle, 2019).

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