



2018 classification survey report: loot boxes and simulated gambling in games

Background

In October and November 2018 the department conducted a quantitative research project, involving an online survey of over 2000 parents on a range of classification issues (n= 2,018). Respondent characteristics were as follows:

- parents of children in age segments: 4–5 years, 6–8 years, 9–12 years, 13–14 years, 15–17 years
- mixture of socioeconomic status, geographic location and cultural backgrounds
- minimum quotas in relation to media use, to ensure users of mobile and console/PC games, film and online content
- Screeners for classification use: those who ‘never’ use classification excluded (leaving those who rarely, sometimes and often use classification) to enable informed consideration of classification response across topics covered.

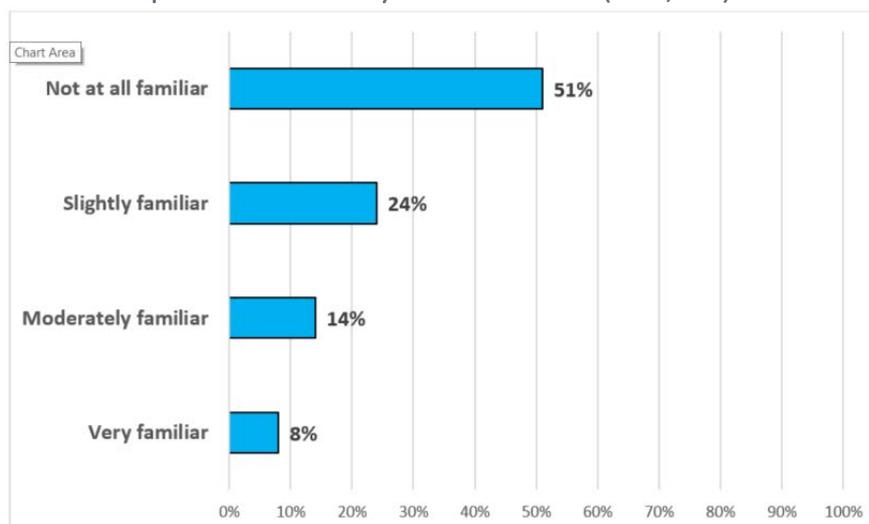
The following is an extract of the survey results relating to loot boxes and simulated gambling, which supplements the findings of the qualitative research commissioned from Whereto Research Based Consulting, titled *Computer Games Content Research: January 2019*.

Loot boxes

Familiarity with loot boxes

Familiarity with loot boxes among the sample was very limited. Approximately half the respondents (51%) were unfamiliar with loot boxes and a further 24% were only slightly familiar with them (see Table 1).

Table 1: respondent familiarity with loot boxes (n= 2,018)



Source: Department of Communications and the Arts parent survey, October 2018.



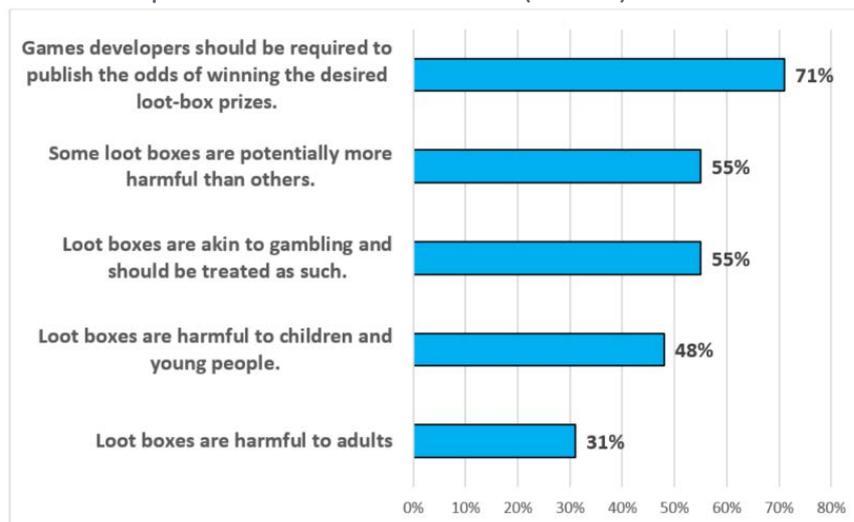
Perceptions of loot boxes

Among those parents who had some familiarity with loot boxes:

- a majority (71%) agreed that game developers should publish the odds of winning loot boxes
- just over half (55%) agreed that loot boxes were akin to gambling and should be treated as such
- the same percentage (55%) also believed that some loot boxes were potentially more harmful than others
- smaller percentages agreed loot boxes were harmful to children (48%) and adults (31%).

See Table 2 below.

Table 2: respondent views on loot boxes (n= 894)

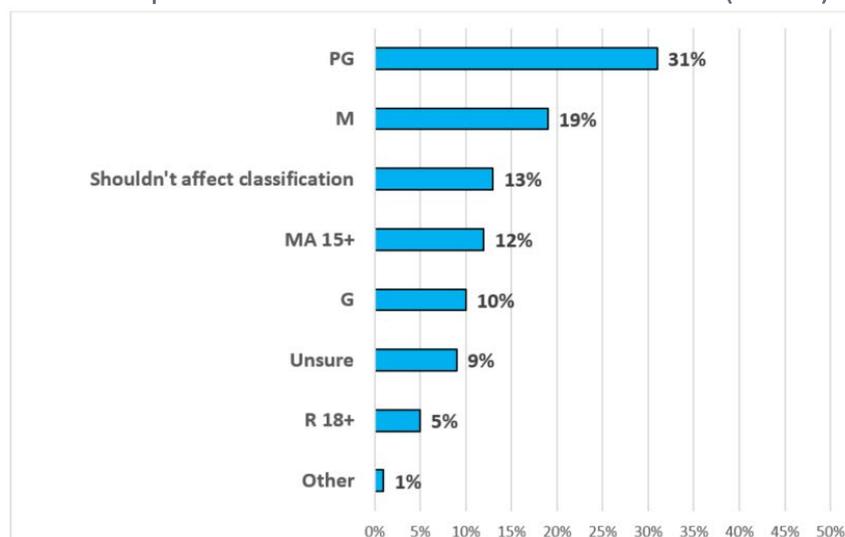


Source: Department of Communications and the Arts parent survey, October 2018.

Views on classification of games with loot boxes

When these parents were asked the lowest suitable classification for a game with loot boxes, results indicated few considered it necessary to restrict access to games purely due to the presence of loot boxes. Across the categories, only 12% said MA 15+ should be the lowest classification for such a game and only 5% chose R 18+, compared with 31% for PG (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: respondent views on classification of loot boxes (n= 894)



Source: Department of Communications and the Arts parent survey, October 2018.

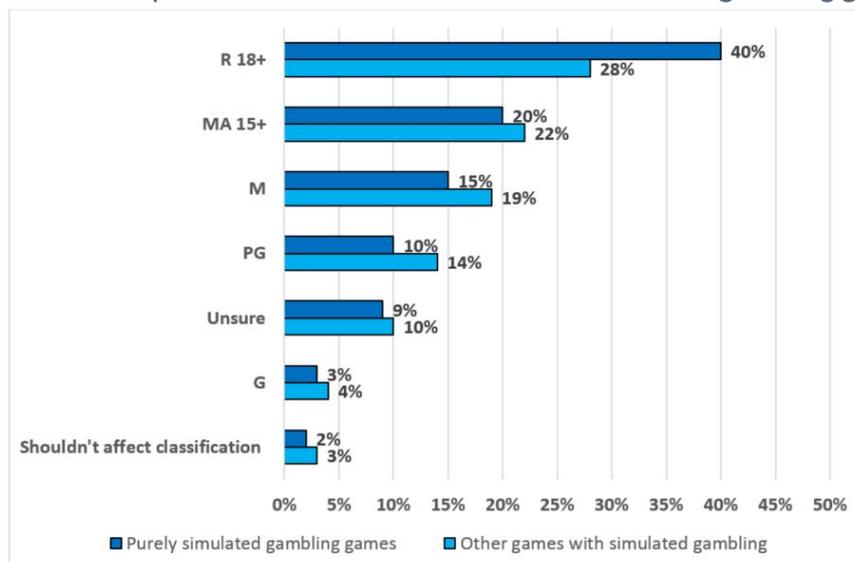


Views on games with simulated gambling

Parents were asked separately about interactive game content that simulated gambling, such as simulated 'slots' games, and games including simulated gambling content in combination with other kinds of play (e.g. puzzles or quests).

In relation to purely simulated gambling games, a substantial proportion of parents believed such games should be classified R 18+ (40%), while 20% or fewer thought these games should be given lower classifications. There was also support (though less pronounced) for restriction of games that included, but did not entirely consist of, simulated gambling content. See Table 4 below.

Table 4: respondent views on classification of simulated gambling games (n= 2,018)



Source: Department of Communications and the Arts parent survey, October 2018.

Key findings

Taken together, the key findings emerging from the qualitative research by Whereto consultants and the quantitative survey results include the following:

- Loot boxes are primarily of concern to regular adult gamers and parents of young gamers, while there is still a lack of awareness of them in the broader population. For example, half of the parents surveyed (51%) were 'not at all familiar' with loot boxes, while loot boxes were top of mind for gamers and parents of gamers who took part in the qualitative research.
- Some types of loot boxes are considered concerning to gamers and certain parents, while other loot boxes are less so. This was indicated in both qualitative and quantitative studies.
- The qualitative research indicates that concerns about some loot boxes primarily relate to a perception that these resemble gambling. Many gamers also have concerns about the fairness of loot boxes, particularly when they confer in-game advantages.
- In the qualitative research, the types of loot box identified as resembling gambling include those that can be purchased with 'real world' money (directly or with purchased in-game currency) and those where items of substantial value to players (such as tradeable items or in-game advantages) are at stake.

- There are varying views about an appropriate classification response to loot boxes. Gamers and parents of young gamers who took part in the qualitative research tend to believe that perceived 'gambling-like' loot boxes are suitable for mature or even adult audiences only and should be classified as such. In comparison, among the survey respondents views were more mixed. While about half (55%) agreed that 'loot boxes are akin to gambling and should be treated as such', the same percentage also agreed that 'some loot boxes are potentially more harmful than others'. When asked about a minimum classification for loot box games, only 5% indicated R 18+ and 12% indicated MA 15+.
- In comparison, the view that games which replicate casino style play are suitable only for mature or adult audiences was consistent across both studies.