VISUAL IDENTITY AND GAMBLING IN THE COUNTER-STRIKE LOOT-BOX ECOSYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the visual culture of the Counter-Strike loot box ecosystem, defined as the set of images, game mechanics and marketing strategies associated with it. The analysis reveals the potential risks posed by the visual culture of this ecosystem, particularly in relation to the whitewashing of problematic practices and the use of casino game mechanics in a video game that is accessible to minors. The paper concludes by demonstrating how the visual identity of a product can influence the impact of its practices on vulnerable populations.

1. Introduction

The objective of advertising is to capture the attention of consumers and persuade them to purchase a product. This is achieved through a variety of media, including videos, advertisements on YouTube and Twitch, social media posts, and other forms of communication. In this context, the visual identity of a product or service can influence the consumer's perception and decision about whether or not to purchase it.

The term "visual identity" refers to the visual representation of a brand, in this case, the opening pages of loot boxes. It encompasses various elements, including the logo, colours, typography, and other graphic elements that differentiate it. In other words, visual identity is the face of a brand, and its importance lies in its ability to create a strong emotional connection with the target audience. The establishment of a coherent visual identity by a brand or service results in greater product recognition and desirability for consumers, with the effect being particularly pronounced when the target audience is underage. (Caldevilla Domínguez, 2009)

The Counter-Strike video game series is one of the longest-running sagas in the esports industry. A skin in this context refers to the appearance of the player's weapon or character within the game. While it does not confer any competitive advantage, the concept is simply to add clothing and accessories to one's avatar in a different manner than the default. Loot boxes are packs of skins that users pay to open and receive a random skin, with values ranging from a few cents to thousands of euros (the rarest being worth over $400,000). Loot boxes have been a common feature for Counter-Strike players since 2013. The substantial market of hundreds of millions of dollars dedicated to loot boxes within this specific video game, estimated at over $1 billion last year, and the ease of access to buy-and-open pages with mechanics similar to those of a traditional casino have prompted international concern (Spicer et al., 2022).

This paper analyses the visual culture (images, mechanics, marketing) of the Counter-Strike video game loot box ecosystem and its potential to act as a vector of entry into gambling for minors due to the whitening of the visual culture associated with video games. This paper analyses the visual identity of the main actors involved and how the problem of the use of casino mechanics is infantilised by means of an apparently innocuous narrative and placing on stage, which bypasses current regulations to remain in illegal territory. The results indicate that the creators of this video game content on streaming platforms such as YouTube and Twitch, as well as on cash-opening pages, have attempted to whitewash unregulated gambling. This has been achieved through the use of a visual culture associated with video games. Finally, the consequences that this type of covert gambling mechanics can have on young generations of players and how visual identity can influence the impact of this type of practices on at-risk populations are discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

Recent studies have indicated that pathological gambling problems in young people have been increasing, particularly at the online level. Currently, the percentage of adolescents at risk of problem gambling (8.3%) is higher than that of adults (2.2%) in 2023. (Brime et al., 2023)

In Spain, in 2022, 4.5% of the population aged 15 to 64 reported having gambled during that year, almost double that of 2018. Among young people, the prevalence is higher, with the percentage decreasing as their age increases. The highest amount of money spent in a single day is in the €6 to €30 range. In the 14-18 age range, the prevalence of online gambling has increased in recent years (10.7% in 2023 compared to 9.4% in 2021). This prevalence increases with increasing age. The preferred online games are sports betting and video games for both boys and girls. (Brime et al., 2023)..

These facts have prompted the necessity to regulate this market. In the case of Spain, the current legislation regulating gambling is set out in Law 13/2011 of 27 May 2011 on the Regulation of Gambling. Section IV of this legislation regulates activities related to online gambling and other telematic media.

With regard to the consumption of video games, according to Brime et al. (2023), 83.1% of students aged 14-18 report having played video games in 2023. Of these, 96.2% were male, with a prevalence that also decreases with increasing age. Approximately 50% of students have played video games on a weekly basis in the last year. A total of 5.1% of students aged 14-18 years may be considered to have a possible video game addiction disorder, according to the scale based on DSM-5 criteria (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). In this context, the authors (Kristiansen & Severin, 2020) conducted a series of surveys of minors on loot boxes and video games, with the results indicating that 45.6% of participants had used them in the previous year.

Subsequently, we will examine the Counter-Strike video game, its loot boxes, and the main agents of the ecosystem that will allow us to analyse its visual identity.

2.1. Counter-Strike

The video game Counter-Strike can be considered a cultural phenomenon that has shaped the history of video games. Developed in 1999 as a modification (mod) of the Half-Life game by Minh Le and Jess Cliffe, Counter-Strike was soon noted for its team-based gameplay as opposed to the pure action approach of most shooters at the time. The incorporation of these tactical elements swiftly attracted the attention of the gaming community and Valve Corporation, the company behind Half-Life, which acquired the game and employed its creators. (Cliffe, 2000)

With Valve's backing, Counter-Strike evolved into new updates in the form of standalone games such as Counter-Strike: Condition Zero, Counter-Strike: Source and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO) introduced technical improvements and adaptations to new player trends. (Rizani & Iida, 2018) In particular, CS:GO marked a turning point by introducing matchmaking and skins, which transformed not only the gameplay but also the economic model of the game. This transformation will be discussed throughout this paper. The previous year saw the release of a new iteration of this franchise, Counter-Strike 2. This maintains the elements of CS:GO with graphical improvements and retains the skin system popularised by its previous version. The mechanics of the game are straightforward. There are two teams of five players, one of which is the terrorist team whose objective is to plant a bomb at either point A or B on the map. The other team is the police (counter-terrorist) team, whose mission is to stop the terrorists. This can be achieved by eliminating the entire enemy team or by defusing the bomb before it explodes.

The impact of Counter-Strike extends beyond the digital entertainment realm. It is evident that Counter-Strike has played a pivotal role in the development of eSports. Tournaments such as the ESL Pro League and the Majors have attracted millions of spectators and offered millions in prize money, contributing to the professionalisation and legitimisation of eSports. (Gasparetto & Safronov, 2023) Furthermore, Counter-Strike continues to retain a significant player base. According to data from Steam Charts (Steam Charts, n.d.), Counter-Strike 2 is the second most played game.

2.2. Skins and Loot Boxes in Counter-Strike

Loot boxes are boxes within a video game that the player pays to open in order to randomly obtain items (skills, avatars, etc.). They are usually found in the form of cards, boxes or chests. These items can provide competitive advantages or simply be aesthetic. (Griffiths, 2018).

In the case of the video game Counter-Strike, loot boxes are boxes of different typology whose prices range from 30 cents to 10 euros. In order to purchase a loot box, it is necessary to buy a key, whose price also varies from 2.50 euros for the standard key to more than 17 euros for some specific boxes. Each box contains 18 items or skins, which are visual additions to the game with no associated competitive advantage. The skins have different degrees of rarity, with the colours blue, purple, pink, red, red and yellow representing the rarest to the most common. The economic value of the skins also varies, with the probability of obtaining each type of skin following a descending probability distribution as the value and rarity of the skin increases.

The system is complex to quantify at an economic level due to the lack of transparency surrounding the percentages of obtaining the different categories of skin within a box. Valve has made public the percentages of obtaining the different categories of skin within a box (80% blue, 16% purple, 3% pink, 0.64% red and 0.26% yellow), however, this information has been made public due to the Chinese regulation that forces companies to make public the percentages of obtaining different categories of items. The value of each loot box category is determined by the texture pattern or the use that a known professional player can give to it. Consequently, the range of prices that two skins can reach within the same category can be several orders of magnitude different (Nguyen, 2022).

2.3. Main Actors in the Ecosystem

It has been demonstrated that the fundamental unit within the loot boxes of the Counter-Strike video game is the skin, which can be purchased individually or in the form of a box. Upon opening the box, one of the

skins is obtained. From this point onwards, an ecosystem is constructed, which will be analysed below, involving various actors at different levels.

Firstly, there is the developer of the game itself, Valve Corporation. Valve Corporation is a significant company in the video game market. It was founded by Gabe Newell and Mike Harrington and is the proprietor of Steam, a digital distribution platform for video games that has become the dominant platform for the distribution of PC games. Steam also offers support tools to the community of players and developers. As previously stated, the Counter-Strike skin market is worth a considerable amount of money, exceeding $1 billion in 2023 (Khan, 2024). It is the only entity with the authority to create, remove, or modify skins, thereby exerting complete control over the market.

Secondly, we have the non-professional players, namely the majority of players who engage in video gaming on a daily basis. This demographic is the primary consumer of loot boxes and skins (or the primary source of revenue for the companies that offer them through games of chance on the box-opening pages).

Thirdly, there are professional players, who, although in some cases purchase their own skins, most of the time use skins that have been gifted to them with the intention of promoting their intrinsic value or to create a particular type of skin combination (gloves + knife + main weapon) in order to offer specific products to websites selling or gambling skins.

Fourthly, there are skin trading websites. These are third-party websites external to the developer Valve that facilitate the purchase of skins or boxes on a secondary market. Table 1 presents a list of the most prominent Counter-Strike loot box websites, ranked according to their web traffic. For each website, a check was conducted to ascertain whether they could be accessed by any user via a virtual private network (VPN) with only their Steam ID (i.e. their account) without requiring access control restrictions for minors or the provision of know your customer (KYC) verification, which is essential in services that include monetary transactions. It is important to note that the creation of a Steam account is entirely free of charge, and that anyone over the age of 13 is permitted to do so. However, there are currently no methods in place for verifying the age of account holders.

Table 1. Main gambling websites Counter-Strike loot boxes

Page	Monthly visits January 2024	Access via Steam ID
Csgoroll.com	4.3M	Yes
Skin.club/en	3.7M	No
Key-drop.com	3.6M	Yes
Clash.gg	2.3M	No
Hellcase.com	2.2M	Yes
Csgoempire.com	1.8M	(blocked after ID access until KYC)
Farmskins.com	672.1K	No

Source: https://www.similarweb.com/

Finally, there are the content creators, who act as the new ambassadors of this type of platform. Their audience is the main target of the loot box opening pages. For some time now, content creators on YouTube or Twitch have been sponsored by various gambling sites, using them in their live shows without warning their audience of the economic consequences of their activities. Among the content creators related to Counter-Strike skins with the greatest impact are Anomaly (with 2.8 million followers on Twitch and 3.2 million subscribers on YouTube) and StaXx (with 2.2 million followers on Twitch and 5.77 million subscribers on YouTube, which is the subject of this study.

3. Methodology

The prototype pages chosen for analysis were csgoroll.com and Skin.club/en. The selection criteria were based on popularity, design, and relevance in terms of content and audience within the loot box opening pages. Furthermore, two of the most popular Spanish Counter-Strike streamers were selected: FlipiN and sTaXx. Both individuals have a considerable following and viewership among the Spanish-speaking

audience, and they are sponsored by numerous box-opening sites. This strategic selection allows for a comparative analysis and a deeper understanding of the visual identity given to this market on social media.

The objective of the visual content analysis was to identify and examine in detail the key components of the visual identity of the web pages and streamers with respect to loot boxes and their association with video games. With regard to web pages, aspects such as colour scheme, typography, use of images and graphics, layout of elements on the page and visual consistency across the site were examined. In the case of streamers, elements such as the design of their channels, the graphic presentation during broadcasts, the use of visual elements to interact with the audience and the visual cohesion between their streaming content and the gambling of the loot boxes were analysed. This was done in accordance with methodologies previously employed in similar studies, such as those conducted by Blas and Vozmediano (2015).

4. Results

In June 2022, the Preliminary Draft Law regulating random reward mechanisms associated with interactive entertainment software products, i.e. loot boxes, was published. The purpose of the bill was to impose obligations on those who offer these products. However, at the time of writing this article, its approval is still pending, so the current regulation is still being used, which in the case of loot boxes is an unlawful framework.

This illicit scenario can be observed from the outset in the video game itself. The player is able to purchase boxes and keys with money from their Steam account. The description of the boxes indicates the skins they contain but does not specify the probability of obtaining each one. Once a key has been acquired to open a box, a roulette wheel appears after the opening animation (Figure 1). The skins appear fleetingly, including the most expensive ones, to create anxiety and excitement in the player while a sound very similar to those produced by slot machines is played. Finally, the player's skin appears on the screen accompanied by an impact sound to cause a dopamine release in the player. The player is able to ascertain the appearance of the skin on their character immediately and is presented with the option to purchase the box and key combination once more, thus continuing the game. At no point is the player informed of the amount of money they have spent, the probability of acquiring a specific skin, or even their Steam account balance (it is necessary to navigate through several menus to ascertain this information). The balance is only revealed when the funds available to purchase a skin are insufficient. The player is then presented with a range of options for depositing money, including PayPal, VISA, Paysafecard, Skrill and MasterCard. Furthermore, as will be discussed later, cryptocurrencies are incorporated into this list of deposit methods. To ascertain the total expenditure incurred during gaming sessions, it is necessary to navigate to Steam Support, select My Account, and then Data related to my Steam account. This will reveal the total amount of money deposited in the Steam account. However, this figure represents the sum of all funds spent on game purchases, Steam devices, and other items, including skins. Consequently, it is not possible to determine the expenditure on skins in isolation.

**Figure 1.** In-game box opening animation
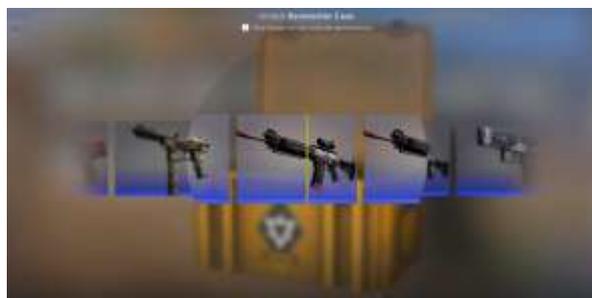
Source: Author, 2024

This paper examines two websites with considerable traffic: Csgoroll.com and Skin.club/en.

The Csgoroll.com homepage presents a static display of the most popular skins available for purchase (Figure 2). It also highlights the ability to set a price range, both maximum and minimum, with the option to sort the skins according to preference and thus obtain them quickly. A news item about the recent

partnership with the G2 esports team is prominently featured on the homepage. This visually presented news seeks to establish an emotional connection with the community, encourage active participation and link the image of a player's favourite team with their commercial activity. This is similar to the way in which different casino operators do with football teams.

Figure 2. Csgoroll.com Home Page
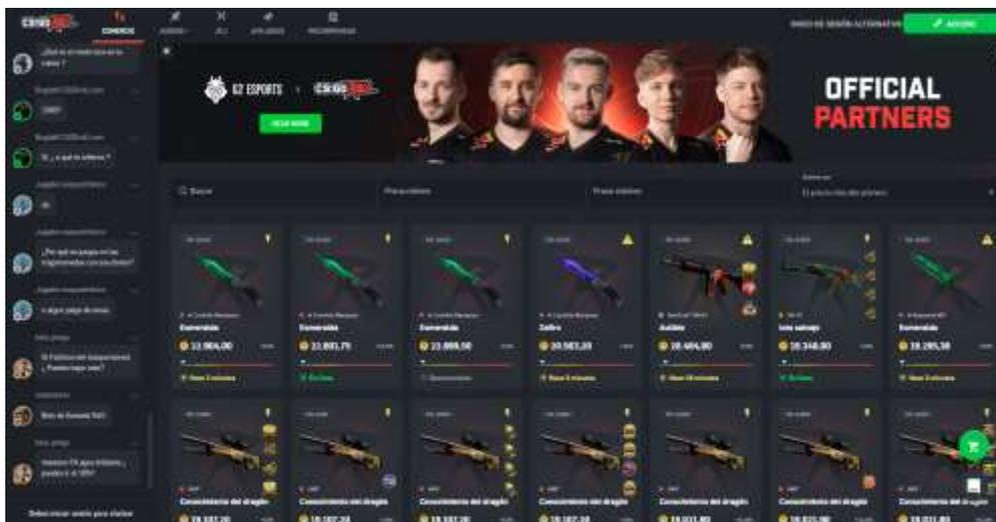
Source: Csgoroll.com

The main menu bar on the website (Figure 3) offers a selection of options that facilitate active player interaction. These include "Commerce" (the main page described above), Games, JCJ, Affiliates and Rewards. This design strategy is fundamentally aimed at encouraging user engagement and providing a holistic experience.

Figure 3. Main menu bar on Csgoroll.com

Source: Csgoroll.com

The Games section is presented as a gateway to various interactive experiences. This approach seeks to provide additional entertainment and encourage users to stay on the platform and explore its many facets. Figure 4 illustrates the menu, which includes mini-games such as Rollo, Crash and Boom, Plinkó, Crash and Dice and Unboxing. The upper part immediately captures the attention with its interactive approach. Furthermore, the various skins available in the boxes offered by the site are presented successively on the screen in the form of a real-time prize display, known as a live drop. This visually appealing element guides the viewer's eye to this section of the interface. The presentation of other players' gains serves to encourage the viewer to consume and spend money on obtaining the boxes, as it reinforces the thought "It's happening to others all the time, so why shouldn't it happen to me?"

Figure 4. ''Games'' menu on Csgoroll.com

Source: Csgoroll.com

The platform features a highly interactive menu called "Case Battles" (a mistranslation of case battles, which should be box battles). This dynamic menu constantly displays the various battles in progress, providing users with an exciting and ever-changing experience. In this mode, two players open boxes and the one who gets the most valuable skins also gets to keep the other player's skins, encouraging competitiveness.

Additionally, an affiliate menu is available, which encourages users to invite friends by providing them with a personal code. This code offers a percentage of profit for each cash deposit made by those who use it. From a branding perspective, this section is carefully designed to evoke an emotional connection and highlight the lucrative aspect of membership. The visual elements, which are mainly centred on the graphical representation of gold coins, visually reinforce the idea of profit and rewards. The use of gold as a visual element not only symbolises wealth and value, but also creates a direct association with the potential profits that users can earn through the affiliate programme.

The platform's revenue management tools provide detailed breakdowns of user habits on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. These analytics reveal valuable information about the most popular games, the busiest days, winnings performance, and monthly revenue estimates (not actual, but projections). With this information, the site encourages its players to research strategies to increase their profits, despite the fact that the games rely entirely on chance. This site does not operate with real money, but with credits purchased with real money called coins, thus circumventing the regulations that affect traditional gambling sites. Furthermore, the platform offers a loan service of up to 800 coins, which makes it easy for users to repay the loan as their winnings rise, creating an ecosystem designed to hook users into playing and keep them in a constant search for instant gratification. It should be noted that any minor with a Steam account can log in to these sites and commence playing with real money, which is disguised as these coins.

In terms of design, the website is presented in a predominantly black tone, enhanced with the red, green and yellow colours of the coins. From a colour psychology point of view, this strategic choice of colours seeks to evoke a sense of urgency, excitement and value, which are fundamental elements in gambling environments. Thus, red suggests urgency and passion, creating a sense of dynamism on the platform. Green, often associated with prosperity and growth, conveys a sense of positive development in the platform's transactions and activities. The yellow of the coins, on the other hand, brings a touch of brightness and highlights, reinforcing the importance of transactions and earning rewards. The choice of gold and yellow tones within the colour palette further reinforces the connection between wealth and financial success.

Having completed the analysis of the visual identity of Csgoroll.com and its game dynamics, we now turn to the analysis of the Skin.club/en site. This platform, like its predecessor, has an interactive and attractive interface. Upon accessing Skin.club/en, the top section immediately captures the attention with its interactive approach (Figure 5). Similarly, there is a real-time display of prizes, also known as a live drop. Upon clicking on one of these prizes, the prize in question is presented in an enlarged size, with the name of the box and its price displayed.

Figure 5. Live Drops in Skin.club/en
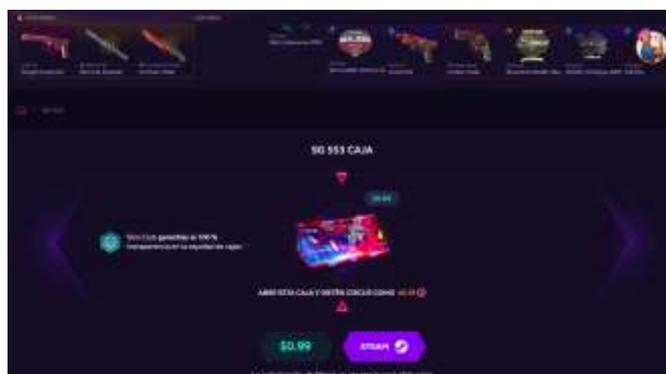
Source: Skin.club/en

Concurrently, a promotional image of an ongoing event is displayed on the main screen (Figure 6), indicating the time remaining for its conclusion. This is done with the intention of generating greater urgency in the player, stimulating them not to miss an event nearing completion. In this case, it is a matter of exchanging special coins generated during the event for real skins (real money).

Figure 6. Skin.club/en home screen event
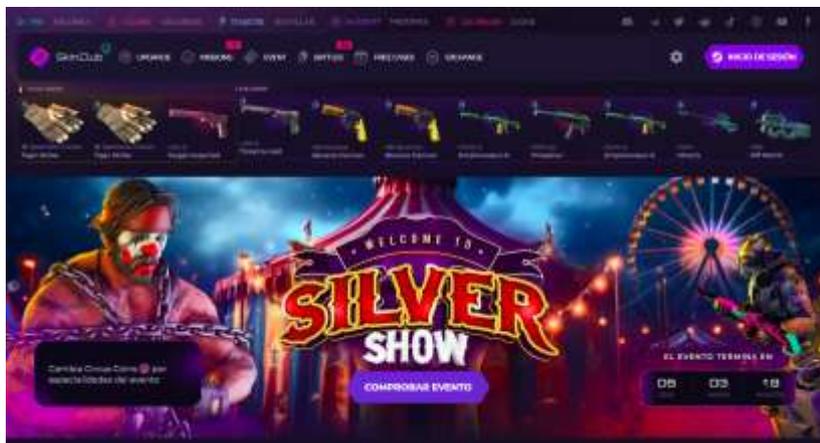
Source: Skin.club/en

This type of activity, which offers substantial rewards in exchange for a constant investment in boxes, is prominently displayed on the Skin.club/en home screen.

The event is presented in a visually appealing manner, using a colour palette of pinks, purples and greens, and the mechanics of how to earn points are clearly outlined through the Check event option and scrolling down. The images in the instructions on how much money to spend seek to minimise the monetary importance and focus on the playful experience (Figure 7). The idea that "points are saved for the next event, so now you can save up for better prizes" is constantly reinforced, encouraging the player to participate in future events.

Figure 7. Skin.club/en event instructions

Source: Skin.club/en

The marketplace section (Figure 8) presents a visual representation of the available skins for purchase. The skins are positioned against a background that employs striking colours, complementary combinations (orange, violet and green) and the triadic colour combination of red, yellow and blue, which collectively create a sense of depth within the image. It is important to reiterate that these games are accessible to all children.

Figure 8. Skin.club/en marketplace
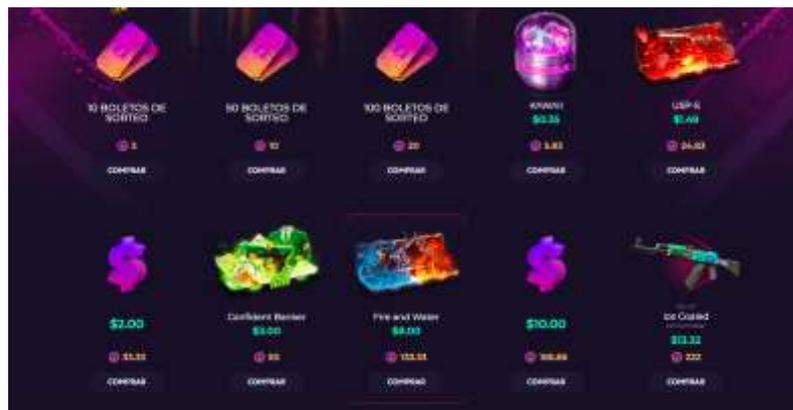
Source: Skin.club/en

Conversely, at the pinnacle of the interface (Figure 9), another bar is displayed, indicating the number of users currently online for each option within the main menu. This feature furnishes immediate feedback on community activity, enabling users to discern which sections are most popular in real time. This not only enhances the user experience by providing a dynamic view, but also encourages interaction by creating a sense of an active community.

Figure 9. Main menu bar in Skin.club/en

Source: Skin.club/en

The upgrade process involves selecting a skin from one's inventory, selecting the desired skin, and then activating the upgrade. The probability of success is based on the price ratio, encouraging users to select skins with closer values to increase the chances of a successful upgrade. This game has a gambling component in that users can lose their entire balance on the page in an instant. Missions challenge users to complete tasks to earn free boxes. Battles are the crate battles that have already been seen on the other site. Exchange allows the exchange of skins between users, with a fixed fee for the site.

The presentation of the menu bar in a closed format creates an immersive and engaging environment. Navigating through these options not only involves functional actions, but also immerses the user in an interactive narrative that keeps them engaged. This approach not only facilitates navigation, but also emotionally connects users to the platform, offering an experience similar to the excitement of a well-designed video game.

The Skin.Club logo displays a Provably Fair (PF) seal, a demonstrably cryptographic fairness technology that ensures that online casinos play fairly. The platform aims to highlight its commitment to fairness by providing users with the security and peace of mind needed to participate in the platform's activities, with the intention of creating a fair and trustworthy gaming environment for all participants. In other words, the site does not hide its gambling component despite the fact that for legal purposes they are exclusively exchange sites.

Colour theory, an essential component of design and branding, is a prominent feature of this platform. The choice of purple and purple as primary colours evokes connotations of luxury, mystery and creativity. These tones, when combined with secondary colours such as blue, orange, yellow and green, contribute to a vibrant and balanced palette that also communicates emotion. The decision to create a visual and narrative experience that resembles the structure of a game contributes to the user's immersion in the storytelling. This approach not only seeks to highlight the narrative of the game, but also to engage the user and temporarily divert their attention away from the monetary value of the transactions.

Despite their distinct differences, Csgoroll.com and Skin.club/en share several similarities that highlight the fundamental essence of gambling in their box game mechanics. Both platforms incorporate elements of interactivity for their users, encouraging active participation through real-time events, chats and games. In terms of the user interface, both platforms feature intuitive and accessible designs, although they adopt distinctive stylistic approaches. Both platforms are concerned with providing users with an attractive and functional experience, facilitating navigation and use of their services.

Having completed a comprehensive examination of the loot box gambling platforms, we now turn our attention to two of the most prominent Spanish Counter-Strike streamers, FlipiN and sTaXx. A closer examination of the strategies employed by FlipiN and sTaXx reveals a shared approach to engaging their audiences in the context of loot box opening.

FlipiN's strategy is to portray the experience as authentic and accessible, conveying the excitement and uncertainty inherent in the process. It encourages active participation by offering deposit bonus discount codes during its broadcasts, strengthening ties with its community. The apparent disregard for financial losses on the part of FlipiN contributes to a relaxed atmosphere, removing the perceived barrier between the viewer and the gambling action. Nevertheless, the gambling platform is confident in the legitimacy of its events, as the funds it handles are not its own but provided by the site. This fact has never been verified, but other streamers, such as xQc, have previously acknowledged that this is a common practice among such sites. (Ledohowski, 2022). The streamers' unwavering pursuit of the optimal skins, even in the face of potential losses (financial), exemplifies their resolve and dedication, suggesting that the experience transcends mere material gain. The meticulous incorporation of details, such as donning a Christmas hat during the Christmas season and creating an immersive auditory environment, enhances the authenticity of the depicted setting, enabling the audience to empathize with the streamers' experiences. The selection of music adds a further emotional layer, intensifying the viewers' engagement.

In the case of sTaXx, the strategy is designed to minimise the perception of economic value and encourage spending among viewers. The light-hearted setting and checkout purchases are presented as "checkout time", avoiding explicit mentions of the actual cost involved. Furthermore, direct discount codes and deposit bonuses are provided in the video description, along with the opportunity to enter sweepstakes, which can be considered a collaboration between these sites and the content creators. Strategically, references to time-limited events are employed to generate a sense of urgency and encourage participation before the opportunities end. The buying and selling of skins becomes a constant practice, incentivising the sale of unwanted skins to accumulate funds and enhance future acquisitions. Both strategies share the normalisation and trivialisation of the act of spending considerable sums, creating an environment conducive for viewers to follow this example without concerns about the financial implications, even more so when the majority of these streamers' audiences are minors. Both creators create content that is exclusively focused on the opening of boxes, which they integrate into their usual gaming sessions within the video game itself.

5. Conclusions

As evidenced throughout the course of this investigation, the legality of the box-opening sites allows for the accessibility of these sites by any individual, including minors. This is achieved through the use of a Steam ID or an email address and the acceptance of a few basic terms and conditions, which then permits the opening of an account. Once this account has been established, numerous payment methods are available, including credit cards, cryptocurrencies, and other forms of digital currency, which can be used to deposit funds and commence gameplay without the necessity of any further verification.

All the actors involved in the loot box ecosystem (the video game itself, the box-opening websites and the content creators) are visually aligned with a style of their own, as if the boxes were an independent video game but with mechanics clearly similar to those of casino games. This visual gaming style is no coincidence. In addition to being more seductive for the target audience (mostly young men), it allows these sites to fit into a legal framework whereby they are called "skins for sale" and not gambling sites. This allows them to bypass any limitation or warning of problem gambling and, of course, not to apply the principles of responsible gambling such as consumer information, self-exclusion, KYC, etc. to prevent minors from playing on them.

As demonstrated by Zendle and Cairns (2018), there is a correlation between the amount of money spent on loot boxes (in various video games) and the severity of problem gambling. This relationship

was found to be stronger than the relationship between problem gambling and purchasing other in-game items with real money (in the case of Counter-Strike this would be purchasing skins directly), suggesting that the gambling-like characteristics of loot boxes are responsible for the observed relationship between problem gambling and spending on loot boxes. A review of the literature reveals a paucity of research on this topic within the Counter-Strike video game. One notable exception is a survey conducted by a well-known YouTuber on this video game, which included responses from over 9,000 users. The survey yielded concerning findings regarding the prevalence of loot box opening and other related activities outside of the video game itself. The survey also revealed that half of the respondents were under the age of 16 when they first accessed these sites, 76% had engaged in gambling in the past year, and 54% had been introduced to these sites by content creators. A third of respondents indicated that they had transitioned from their experience with box-opening sites to classic gambling sites after reaching the age of 18 (Houngoungagne, 2023). This suggests that these sites, through the use of a video game within a video game, are a vector for the younger population to engage in gambling.

From a legal standpoint, the solution is complex due to the numerous legal exceptions employed by these sites, including the use of tax havens as headquarters and the use of skins as a means of payment instead of actual currency. However, it can be effectively regulated through the implementation of a unified legal framework that governs the manner in which these pages or content creators display their products. The visual culture associated with gaming, as opposed to that of traditional gambling sites, engenders a sense of confidence in the underage public that can prove to be a significant risk factor due to the lack of self-control that this population is known to exhibit.

An analysis of the visual identity of the Csgoroll.com and Skin.club/en sites reveals that both exhibit attractive visual interfaces and strategies designed to maintain the user's attention through events, discounts and sweepstakes. Despite their differences in approach and style, they share a common basis in offering services centred on skins-based gambling, most notably the use of the Provably Fair certificate used in online casinos as a symbol of trust towards the consumer. Conversely, streamers with their narratives seek to connect emotionally with their audience, normalising spending without apparent concerns about financial loss. It is therefore necessary to highlight the problems of a camouflaged visual gaming identity on a covert gambling site, in order to reinforce the control of sponsorship policies of content creators on streaming platforms with these sites, given that they are the main entry vectors for gambling on minors through their audience.

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