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Advocates call on FTC to investigate manipulative design abuses in popular FIFA game

Groups say FIFA: Ultimate Team preys on children's vulnerability with loot boxes, "funny money"

BOSTON and WASHINGTON, DC – Thursday, June 2, 2022 – Today, advocacy groups Fairplay and Center for Digital Democracy (CDD) led a coalition of 15 advocacy groups in calling on the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate video game company Electronic Arts (EA) for unfairly exploiting young users in EA's massively popular game, FIFA: Ultimate Team. In a [letter](#) sent to the FTC, the advocates described how the use of loot boxes and virtual currency in FIFA: Ultimate Team exploits the many children who play the game, especially given their undeveloped financial literacy skills and poor understanding of the odds of receiving the most desirable loot box items.

Citing the Norwegian Consumer Council's recent report, *Insert Coin: How the Gaming Industry Exploits Consumers Using Lootboxes*, the advocates' letter details how FIFA: Ultimate Team encourages gamers to engage in a constant stream of microtransactions as they play the game. Users are able to buy FIFA points, a virtual in-game currency, which can then be used to purchase loot boxes called FIFA packs containing mystery team kits; badges; and player cards for soccer players who can be added to a gamer's team.

In their letter, the advocates noted the game's use of manipulative design abuses such as "lightning round" sales of premium packs to promote the purchase of FIFA packs, which children are particularly vulnerable to. The advocates also cite the use of virtual currency in the game, which obscures the actual cost of FIFA packs to adult users, let alone children. Additionally, the actual probability of unlocking the best loot box prizes in FIFA: Ultimate Team is practically inscrutable to anyone who is not an expert in statistics, according to the advocates and the NCC report. In order to unlock a specific desirable player in the game, users would have to pay around \$14,000 or spend three years continuously playing the game.

"By relentlessly marketing pay-to-win loot boxes, EA is exploiting children's desire to compete with their friends, despite the fact that most adults, let alone kids, could not determine their odds of receiving a highly coveted card or what cards cost in real money. The FTC must use its power to investigate these design abuses and determine just how many kids and teens are being fleeced by EA." **Josh Golin, Executive Director, Fairplay**

"Lootboxes, virtual currencies, and other gaming features are often designed deceptively, aiming to exploit players' known vulnerabilities. Due to their unique developmental needs, children and teens are particularly harmed. Their time and attention is stolen from them, they're financially exploited, and are purposely socialized to adopt gambling-like behaviors. Online gaming is a key online space where children and teens gather in millions, and regulators must act to protect them from these harmful practices." **Katharina Kopp, Deputy Director, Center for Digital Democracy**

"As illustrated in our report, FIFA: Ultimate Team uses aggressive in-game marketing and exploits gamers' cognitive biases - adults and children alike - to manipulate them into spending

large sums of money. Children especially are vulnerable to EA's distortion of real-world value of its loot boxes and the complex, misleading probabilities given to describe the odds of receiving top prizes. We join our US partners in urging the Federal Trade Commission to investigate these troubling practices." **Finn Lützow-Holm Myrstad, Digital Policy Director, Norwegian Consumer Council**

"The greed of these video game companies is a key reason why we're seeing a new epidemic of child gambling in our families. Thanks to this report, the FTC has more than enough facts to take decisive action to protect our kids from these predatory business practices." **Les Bernal, National Director of Stop Predatory Gambling and the Campaign for Gambling-Free Kids**

"Exploiting consumers, especially children, by manipulating them into buying loot boxes that, in reality, rarely contain the coveted items they are seeking, is a deceptive marketing practice that causes real harm and needs to stop. TINA.org strongly urges the FTC to take action." **Laura Smith, Legal Director at TINA.org**

Advocacy groups signing today's FTC complaint include Fairplay; the Center for Digital Democracy; Campaign for Accountability; Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development; Common Sense Media; Consumer Federation of America; Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC); Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc.; Massachusetts Council on Gaming and Health; National Council on Problem Gambling; Parent Coalition for Student Privacy; Public Citizen; Stop Predatory Gambling and the Campaign for Gambling-Free Kids; TINA.org (Truth in Advertising, Inc.); U.S. PIRG

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