

Video Games Like Fortnite and Minecraft Face Lawsuits Over Addiction Issues

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In brief

A growing wave of lawsuits targets major video game companies like Epic Games, Minecraft, and Roblox over claims that features such as loot boxes and microtransactions are deliberately designed to foster addiction, especially among young players.

Video games have come a long way from the pixelated adventures of the early 2000s. Games like Fortnite, Minecraft, and Roblox are not just played but lived, streamed, and even monetized. For many young people, gaming is a central part of their identity and daily routine.

But as the hours logged inside these digital worlds increase, so do concerns from health experts and parents alike. What was once considered harmless entertainment is now under legal and psychological scrutiny. A growing number of lawsuits claim some of the most popular video games are deliberately designed to encourage addiction. Young users appear to be the primary targets.

Gaming Is Now the Norm, But Heavy Usage Raises Red Flags

Let's start by looking at how widespread gaming is among young people, using the UK as a prime example. According to a report by The Guardian, an astounding 88% of individuals aged 16 to 24 in the UK actively play video games. This tells us that gaming is not a fringe activity; it's part of everyday life for most young adults.

Now, this might seem harmless at first glance. After all, gaming can promote creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving. But dig deeper into usage patterns, and a more concerning picture starts to emerge.

Most young gamers play around 7.5 hours a week. But about 5% push that number to 20 hours or more weekly. That's nearly three hours a day.

For some, this level of engagement might reflect a passion or even a budding career path. But for others, it's where gaming begins to take precedence over everything else: school, sleep, social life, and even basic self-care.

This high-usage group faces a real risk of behavioral addiction. This risk increases with the game mechanics designed to keep players hooked.

Video Game Addiction and Mental Health: An Overlooked Connection

Beyond time spent gaming, there's growing concern about the emotional toll heavy gaming can take on young minds. The National Library of Medicine reports a clear link between video game addiction and mental health issues in youths. These include anxiety, mood disorders, and emotional dysfunction.

This isn't a vague association. Studies show teens with compulsive gaming often feel irritable, depressed, and socially withdrawn. Games may start as an escape from stress, but for some, they become the very source of it.

The situation intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. With schools closed and social lives on hold, many young people turned to gaming as a primary outlet for connection and distraction.

Between 2020 and 2022, clinicians and psychologists observed a notable spike in behavioral addiction symptoms tied to gaming. What began as a coping mechanism quickly escalated into something more compulsive and difficult to manage.

Loot Boxes: A Gateway to Gambling Behavior?

One of the most controversial game features now facing legal backlash is the loot box, TorHoerman Law notes. These are randomized virtual packages that players can purchase for the chance to win special items, sometimes powerful, sometimes just cosmetic.

While they may seem harmless, loot boxes mimic the exact behavioral mechanics found in slot machines. Players don't know what they're going to get, but the possibility of a high-value reward keeps them coming back and spending more.

A Drugwatch report highlights a new study linking loot boxes to addictive behavior. The study, soon to be published in *Computers in Human Behavior*, focuses on younger players. The randomness, the real money transactions, and the dopamine hits from scoring a rare item all contribute to a cycle that's hard to break.

What's more concerning is that many of these loot boxes appear in games marketed toward children and teens. The video game lawsuit claims these mechanics exploit young users. Their brains are still developing impulse control and risk awareness.

Microtransactions: The Business of Keeping Players Hooked

Loot boxes are just one part of a broader ecosystem of in-game spending. Enter microtransactions—small payments players make within a game to buy upgrades, exclusive content, or cosmetic enhancements.

In theory, these purchases are optional. But in reality, they often form the backbone of a game's monetization strategy. In many popular games, you can technically play for free. However, meaningful progress, competitive edge, or even the "cool" factor often requires real money.

Lawsuits argue that microtransactions are part of a strategic design that encourages excessive engagement and spending. Game developers are said to use persuasive interface designs, often referred to as "dark patterns," to subtly push players toward purchasing.

Epic Games and the \$245 Million Refund: A Wake-Up Call

One of the most notable recent actions involved Epic Games. They are the creators of Fortnite, a game loved by millions of young players worldwide.

In December last year, The New York Times reported that Epic Games agreed to pay up to \$245 million in consumer refunds. This came after a Federal Trade Commission (FTC) investigation. The FTC found the company used deceptive design practices to trick many users, especially children, into making in-game purchases.

These deceptive practices included "dark patterns," such as confusing menu layouts and accidental purchase flows. These made it hard for users to distinguish between actual gameplay and transactions. The FTC's intervention sent a strong message: gaming companies will be held accountable when their designs cross ethical boundaries.

What Parents and Players Need to Know

As the gaming industry continues to evolve, so too must our understanding of its psychological and financial implications. Here are some practical tips for families and gamers alike:

- Understand the game's business model. Is it free-to-play with microtransactions? Are loot boxes involved?
- Set clear boundaries. Use parental controls and time limits to reduce overuse.
- Talk about it. Discuss with children how game designs can manipulate behavior and encourage overspending.
- Watch for red flags. These include irritability when not gaming, secrecy about purchases, and declining interest in offline activities.

FAQs

Can video game addiction affect brain development in teenagers?

Yes. Teen brains are still maturing, especially in areas controlling impulse and risk. Excessive gaming can alter brain function, increasing vulnerability to addiction. This can impact decision-making and emotional regulation, making it harder for teens to control gaming habits and recognize negative consequences.

How do social features in games contribute to addiction?

Social features such as friend lists, chats, and team challenges foster a sense of belonging. Combined with peer pressure and fear of missing out, these elements increase playtime and dependency. As a result, young users find it difficult to stop gaming, even if they wish to.

How can parents start legal action if their child is addicted to a game?

Parents should first gather evidence of excessive gaming and financial harm. Consulting a lawyer who specializes in consumer protection or gaming law is important. The lawyer can guide on filing complaints or lawsuits against game companies for exploitative practices.

Conclusion

Overall, video games offer immense value- creativity, community, and even career opportunities. But as lawsuits pile up and research deepens, it's becoming clear that some aspects of the gaming industry need reform.

Addiction isn't always about substances. It can be about design, reward systems, and emotional manipulation. Until developers take full responsibility for their products' impact on young users, change won't happen. Parents, educators, and lawmakers will need to step in and push for healthier gaming environments.

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