



# How Predatory Monetization Designs Manifest in Child-Friendly Video Games

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# ROBLOX



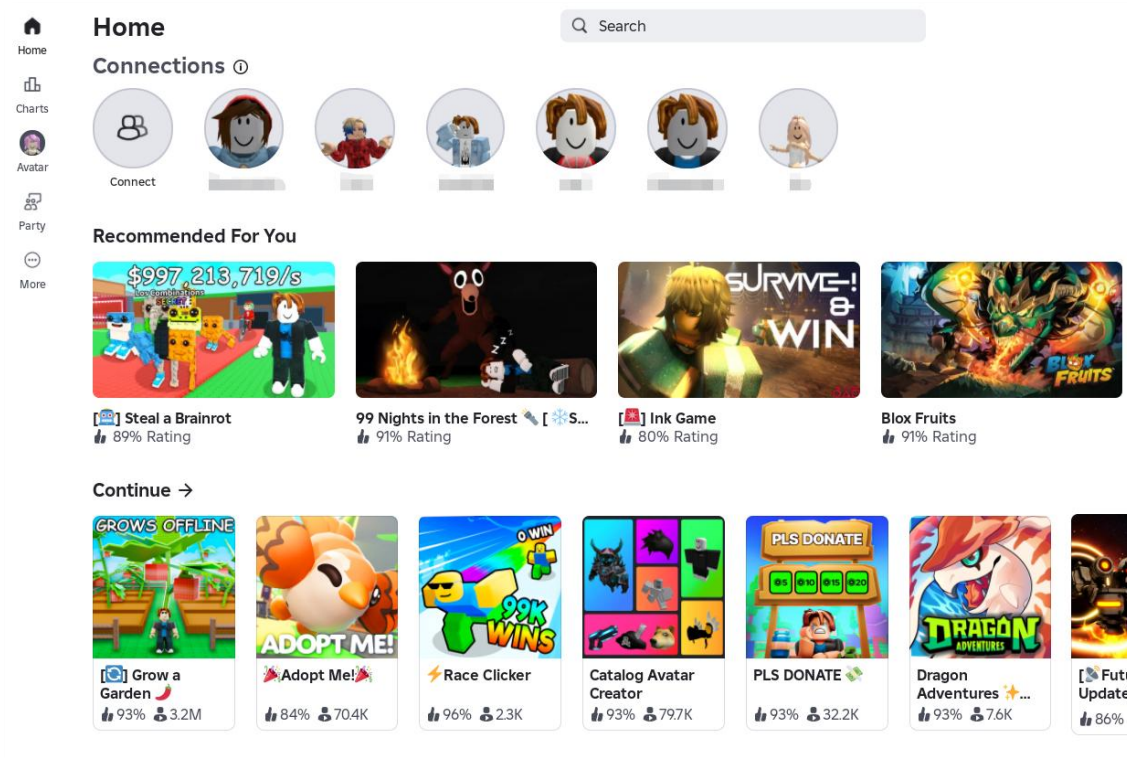
Game Developers  
9.5 million



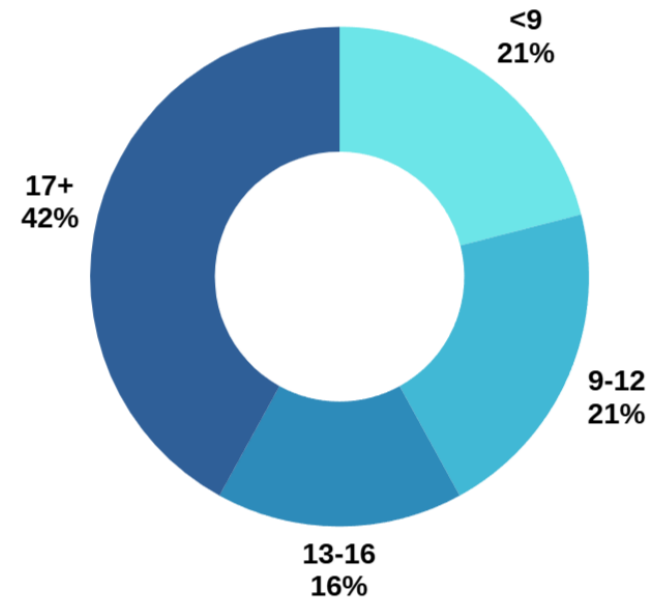
Daily active players  
85.3 million



Particularly young user base



5.3 million active games



# Child Safety on Roblox: Financial Security and Digital Autonomy



Credit: Getty Images

In the first half of 2024, Roblox users purchased **\$1.88 billion** worth of Robux, the platform's virtual currency.

# Previous Work and Research Gap



Reported prominent categories of predatory monetization designs such as loot boxes<sup>1</sup>



Explored player experiences and concerns of predatory monetization



How game developers perceive and implement these predatory monetization designs

<sup>1</sup>Loot boxes refer to in-game items that contain randomized rewards



RQ1: How do Roblox developers perceive predatory monetization practices?

RQ2: How are predatory monetization designs manifested within Roblox games?

# Methodology



**Semi-structured interviews** with 20 Roblox developers

Game development experiences on Roblox and monetization strategies

**Inductive thematic analysis**



**Walkthrough** of 30 systematically selected **“suitable for all ages”** Roblox games

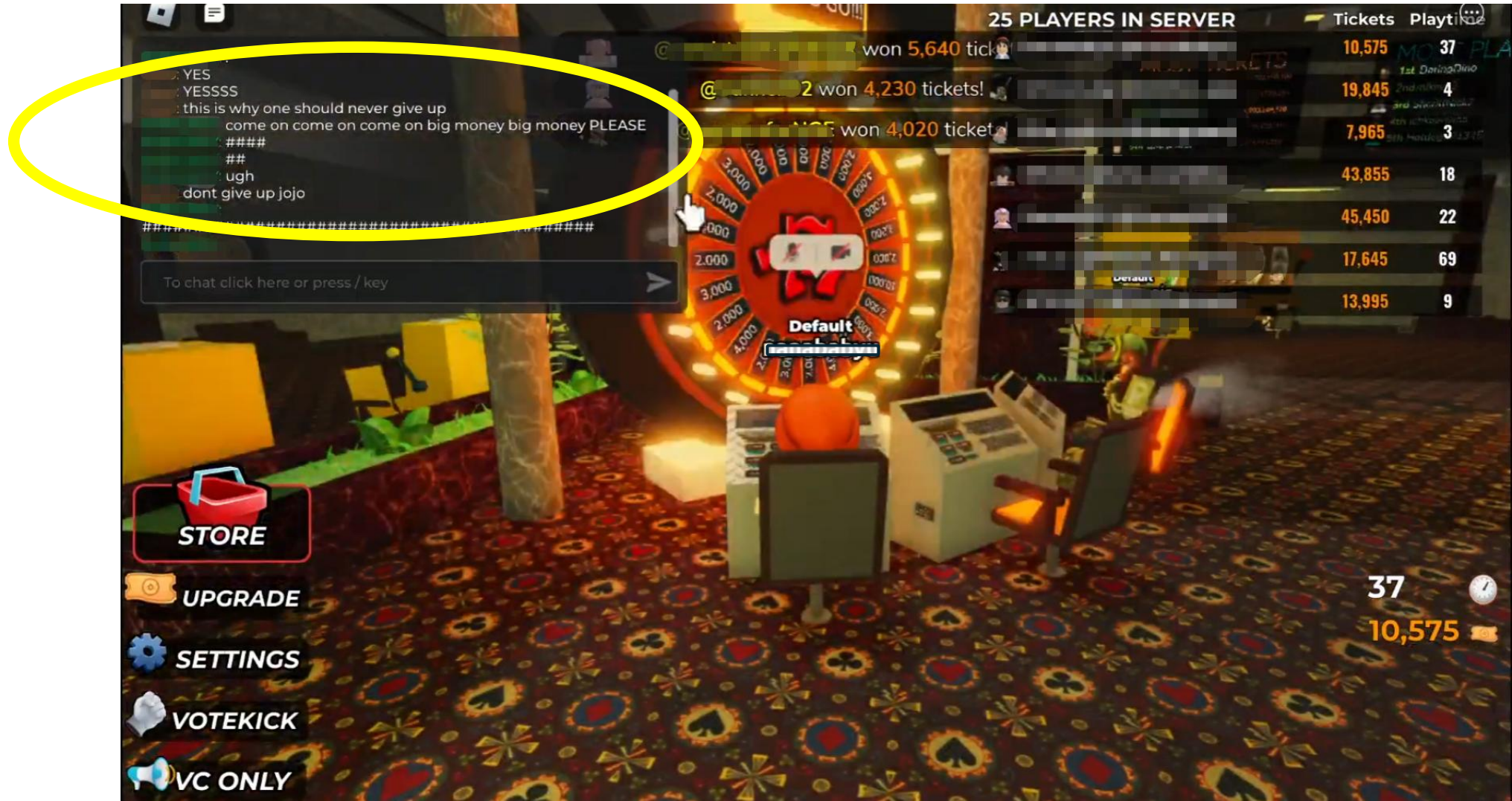
In-game elements and interactions designed to drive spending

**Bottom-up analysis**




Source: Ethnographic data collected by our research team

Description: A virtual casino with interactive slot machines where players can win prizes and buy “luck-enhancing” passes with Robux to boost their odds.



Source: Ethnographic data collected by our research team



RQ1: How do Roblox developers perceive predatory monetization practices?

- Profit-Driven Mindset of Developers
- Exploiting Kids' Vulnerability for Financial Gains

# Exploiting Kids' Naivety and Vulnerability



**Kids are kids and they will buy whatever.** And I feel like a lot of developers kind of **exploit that**, and will just put as much stuff in their game as possible, knowing that kids will click on it and will probably buy it. (P7)




# Exploiting Kids' Naivety and Vulnerability

“

I do think the entire cog **pushes child gambling** and they aren't doing anything about it [...] So if [implementing gambling-like systems] is the norm, it's hard to get on your high horse and say 'this is not OK' **when everyone does it** [...] But you literally have the direct, gotcha systems and **you know this when you're doing the psychological things**. (P4)

”

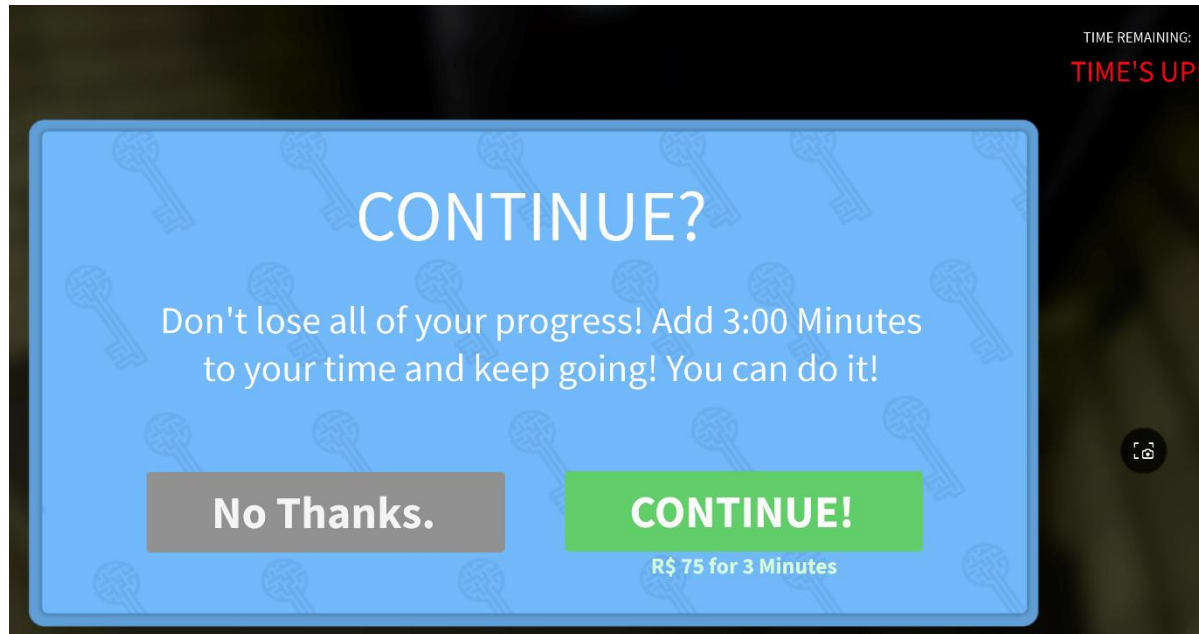


RQ2: How are predatory monetization designs manifested within Roblox games?

- Exploiting Cognitive Biases Through UI Design
- Overloading Players with Complex Decisions
- Obscuring Purchase Information
- Embedding Psychological Tactics

All Ages Suitable for everyone

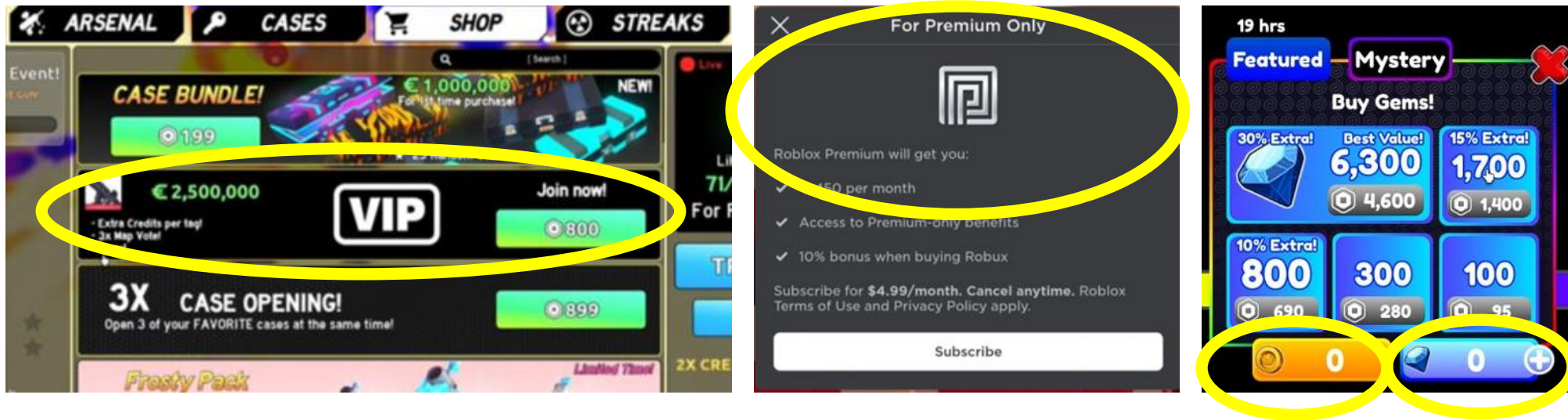
# Exploiting Cognitive Biases Through UI Design



**False hierarchies:** prioritizes one option, leading players to perceive it as the only or best choice

Developers use **visual hierarchy** to **subtly steer** players toward spending money

# Overloading Players with Complex Purchase Decisions



**Layered currencies and membership systems** overwhelm players with multiple, often confusing, purchase decisions.

**Complex web of options:** Robux, Coins, Gems, game-specific VIP, and Roblox Premium membership...

# Obscuring Purchase Information -> Uninformed Spending



Hiding the **probability players can get for each item** in loot boxes.

Leaves players to make decisions without a full understanding of their chances, encouraging **risk without adequate information**

Link to this video:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/15aJiohBy9moAJHAYKVcLGO5VpVr\\_kITI/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/15aJiohBy9moAJHAYKVcLGO5VpVr_kITI/view?usp=sharing)

# Embedding Psychological Tactics to Nudge Purchases

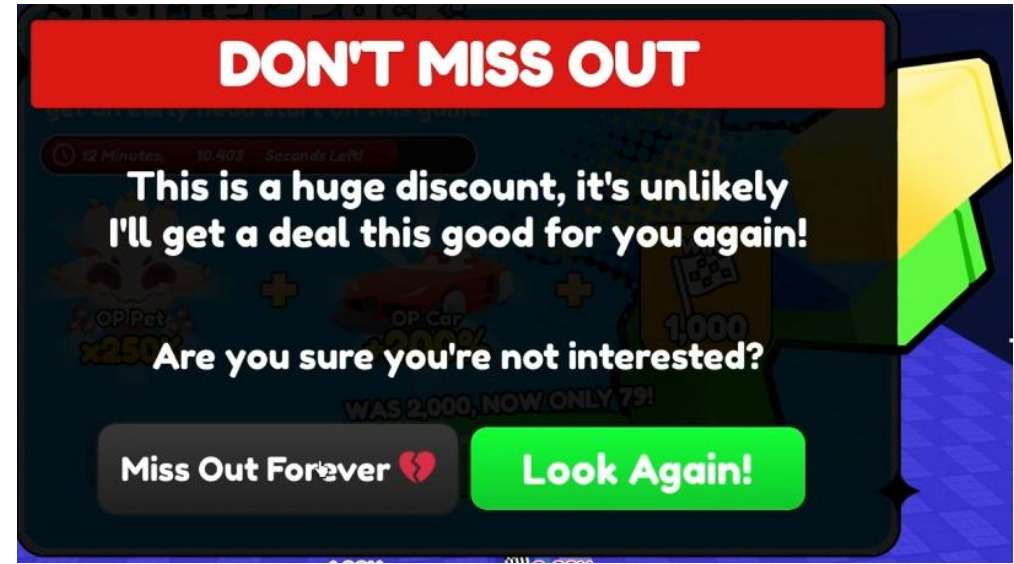


Link to this video: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/124-IUEAPPcAeJHpJ5ja5oxNVhFuH5-pZ/view?usp=sharing>

# Embedding Psychological Tactics to Nudge Purchases

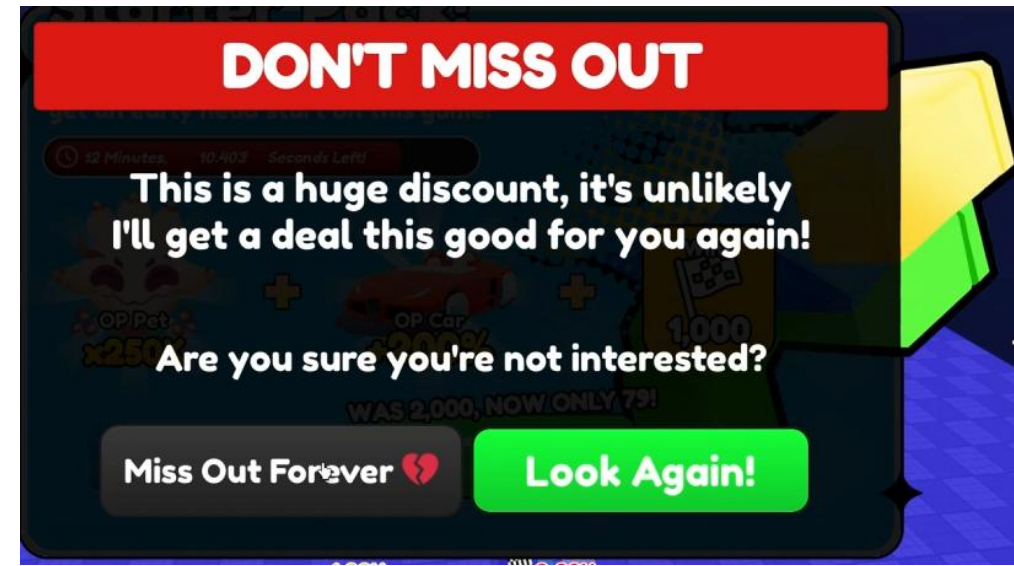


**Fear of missing out:** the anxiety or regret a person feels when they perceive they are missing out on an opportunity



**Loss aversion:** a cognitive bias where people fear losing something more than they value gaining

# Embedding Psychological Tactics to Nudge Purchases



Particularly powerful when **targeted at children**, who are **developmentally more susceptible to:**



- Emotional Triggers
- Impulsive Decision-making
- Peer Pressure
- ...

# Discussion



## Deliberate Orchestration of Predatory Monetization Designs

Reveal systemic design practices that threaten children's **financial security** and **digital autonomy**



## Need for Ethical Game Design and Regulatory Measures

Platform governance, external regulations, and resilience among young players

# Thanks!



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