

NINTENDO SWITCH

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INTRODUCTION

The videogame industry has always centred on innovation, as products are continually evolving to provide the best possible experience for consumers (Beattie, 2021). The demand for video game products is very large, with companies generating over \$155 billion in revenue as of 2020, catering to over two billion gamers across the world (Beattie, 2021). The field is dominated by industry giants Sony and Microsoft, developing sophisticated hardware and software for their dedicated customers (Srikant, 2021). However, the Japanese company Nintendo, has consistently remained relevant due to its more experimental, family-oriented approach to recreational gaming (Halse, 2020). This is embodied by their latest console instalment, the Nintendo Switch (Halse, 2020).

DESIGNER + DISCIPLINE

The concept of the Nintendo Switch began in 2012, soon after the release of Nintendo's previous console, the Wii U (Hester, 2017). Originally called 'NX' in development, the Switch's creation was headed by Yoshiaki Koizumi and Shinya Takahashi, as General Producer and General Manager of the



Entertainment Planning & Development Division at Nintendo, respectively (IGN, 2017). The two formed a design team of specialists from various disciplines, including both handheld and home console design (Nintendo Wiki, 2017). This promoted a higher chance of mixing the different ideas in order to fulfill their goals of creating "two detachable Joy-Con controllers, and a console made to be played both on a television and on the go" (Hester, 2017).

IMPORTANT PRECEDENTS + KEY FUNCTIONAL ATTRIBUTES

The Switch is the 8th major video game console developed by Nintendo, and was released in March of 2017 (Jeff, 2018). The product is a hybrid-console, operating in three distinct modes: TV mode, Tabletop mode and Handheld mode (Nintendo, 2017). This is due to the modularity of the design, as the Switch essentially consists of a tablet screen bounded by detachable Joy-Con controllers (Kelly, 2018). This screen can be seamlessly placed or removed from a TV dock, allowing for easy alternation between home and on-the-go use (Kelly, 2018). The console incorporates an "LCD touchscreen, with its generous 6.2-inch width the screen's protective covering is a layer of plastic instead of the glass usually found on smartphones and tablets. Not only does Nintendo's choice save costs but, most importantly, the screen will not shatter if it falls and hits the floor" (Alto, 2021). The Joy-Con

controllers, which can attach to the screen like a GamePad or used separately for multiplayer, also feature motion and button controls (Pierce, 2017) (Nintendo Wiki, 2021). The Switch is cartridge-based, "storing physical copies of games on Game Cards like the Nintendo DS and Nintendo 3DS lines; while continuing this tradition for handhelds, it notably breaks the trend of home consoles storing games on discs". However, the Nintendo Switch's software supports online gaming through Internet connectivity, as well as local wireless and hoc connectivity with other consoles (Jeff, 2018).

AESTHETIC QUALITIES

The Nintendo Switch is distinct and memorable due to its multipurpose design and colour scheme. Nintendo has previously used colour in order to emphasise important components of their consoles, notably with the Nintendo GameCube and Super Nintendo's multi-coloured buttons (Nintendo Wiki, 2021). This approach similarly inspired the Switch design, as the red and blue Joy-Con colours were considered an appealing way to distinguish multiple players using a controller each (IGN, 2017). Nintendo additionally created an alternative grey design of the Joy-Con, addressing gamers looking for a more sleek design (IGN, 2017). Furthermore, the marketing of the Switch incorporated the red of the Joy-Con, as well as their asymmetrical outlines, in both the advertising and logo of the Switch, creating a highly emblematic and iconic visual brand (Patry, 2021).

ENVIRONMENTAL ATTRIBUTES

In addressing their environmental policy, Nintendo endeavours to reduce their environmental impact through their design, manufacturing and post-sales stages of console development (Nintendo, 2021). The company selects materials that do not contain harmful chemical substances and abide by their environmentally-friendly 'Green Procurement Standard' (Nintendo, 2021). They further, "certify production partners and materials that meet these standards as 'Green Suppliers' and 'Green Parts' respectively" (Nintendo, 2021). The packaging of their products "uses recyclable materials, but it's worth noting that Nintendo does not state that it is utilising previously recycled materials for packaging, which is a norm in the industry" (Whitehead, 2021).

A study conducted in 2020, found that the Switch was the most energy-efficient, current generation console, "with a lifetime energy cost of about \$143.46" (Camacho, 2021). To

calculate this, the study measured, "active gaming power usage and standby power usage over a course of six to nine years, the average amount of time that the researchers figured consumers kept their consoles for before upgrading" (Camacho, 2021).

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

After the poor performance of the Wii U five years prior, the pressure for Nintendo to succeed with the Switch was paramount (Gilbert, 2017). Despite having a shaky launch, the console was a triumph, receiving critical acclaim and being the fastest selling console in Nintendo's history (Jeff, 2018).

The Switch has gone on to sell a total of \$89.04 million hardware sales and \$632.40 software sales, whilst also seeing a high attachment rate, as AAA titles such as Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, sold nearly as many copies as the actual system (Craddock, 2021) (Jeff, 2018). Similarly, a large spike in Nintendo's profits occurred during March 2020, due to the popularity of Animal Crossing: New Horizons during the COVID 19 pandemic (Craddock, 2021). Stuck at home due to Covid-19, "millions of people [turned] to video games for fun and safe social interaction, and a game that offers the comfort of a carefree existence in nature has proved especially appealing." (Macdonald, 2020)

The Switch has established an entire new generation of Nintendo fans and, "revitalized the company's nostalgia-fuelled brand in an era when video games feel ever more reliant on realistic depictions of gunplay and aping Hollywood-style blockbusters" (Statt, 2017). Furthermore, the Switch has succeeded in bridging the polarisation of gaming, allowing casual and competitive gameplay options to coexist on a single console (Jeff, 2018). The device additionally integrated Japanese culture, as, "in Japan, sitting down to game with friends was an integral part of social interaction whereas in the West, people want things that are on the game due to busier schedules" (Jeff, 2018).

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

During the Nintendo Switch's initial release, reviews wandered between, "cautious optimism and glowing praise, [with] the notion that Nintendo's latest hardware isn't quite ready always lurking in the background" (Handrahan, 2017). This criticism was valid, as users were unable to access the Switch's online service, however this issue has since been resolved with a patch released by Nintendo (Handrahan, 2017).

Another review saw the hardware of the Switch as a vast upgrade for handheld consoles, but comparatively falls short for home consoles when compared to the PS4 and Xbox One (Handrahan, 2017). This further links with a loss in graphical capabilities, as top-of-the-line third party games will experience a loss in visual quality or performance (Priday, 2021). Nevertheless, the cheaper hardware also means lower production costs and thus a more affordable price point for consumers (Beattie, 2021).



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