

Analyzing AAA Game Ratings Trends from the 2000s and 2010s

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Introduction

Due to recent rhetoric and discussion plaguing the gaming industry regarding the decreasing quality of major titles, I decided to investigate whether this claim was true. To state my position on the matter, I am a staunch believer that as of lately, the overall quality of games has dipped. Many explanations and factors are cited when trying to explain this supposed trend, such as micro transactions, non-communicative developer studios, and overall corporate greed. However, before jumping on the bandwagon and falling victim to potential biases, I wanted to take a step back see how the overall rating of AAA games has played out over the last 2-1/2 decades.

Hypothesis Investigation

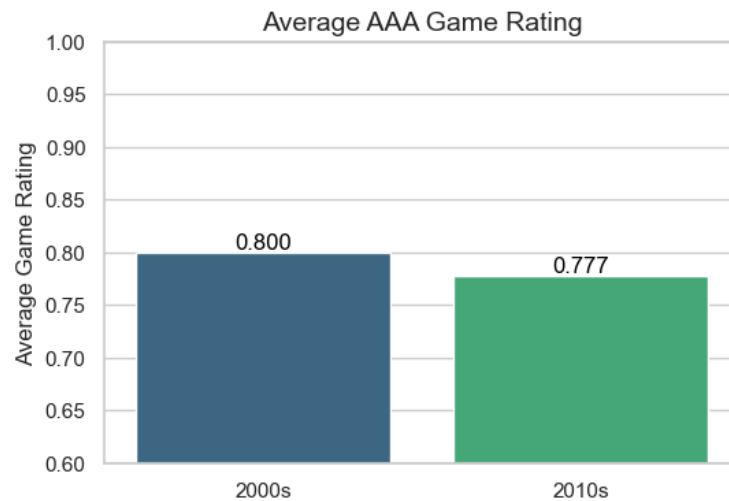


Figure 1: Average AAA Game Rating Comparison (2000s vs 2010s)

To answer this hypothesis, I gathered user rating data from Steam, along with Developer, Release Date, and Publisher information for popular AAA titles since 2000. One quirk I ran into while molding together a dataset for visualization, is what is considered a AAA game or studio? There is no hard-fast rule on this, so I scoured the internet to compile a list of 341 games that I found to be AAA worthy from 103 developers. As shown in Figure 1, the average game rating does not vary much from the 2000s to the 2010s. This contradicts my initial hypothesis as I would expect there to be a more stark difference between the average ratings for games.

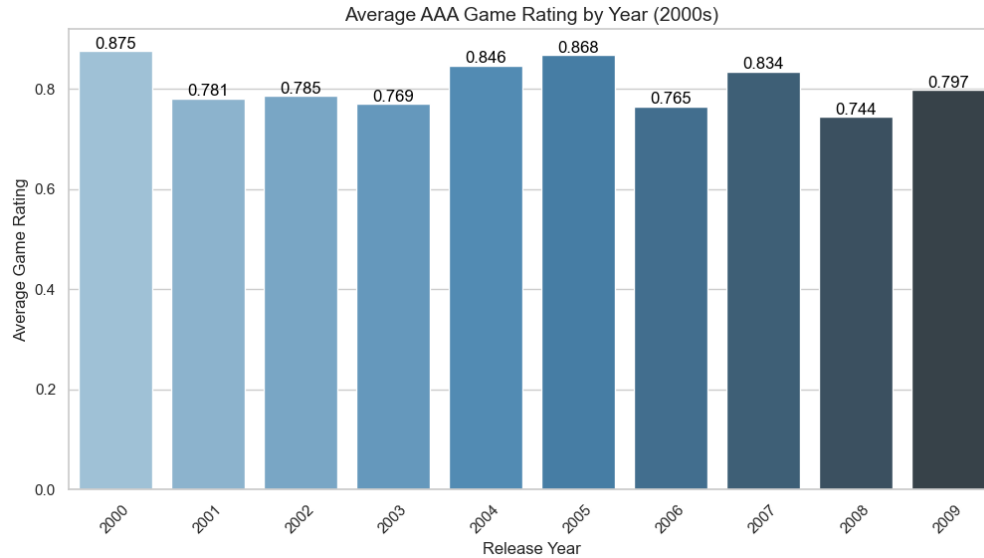


Figure 2: Mean Voted Up by Year (2000s AAA)

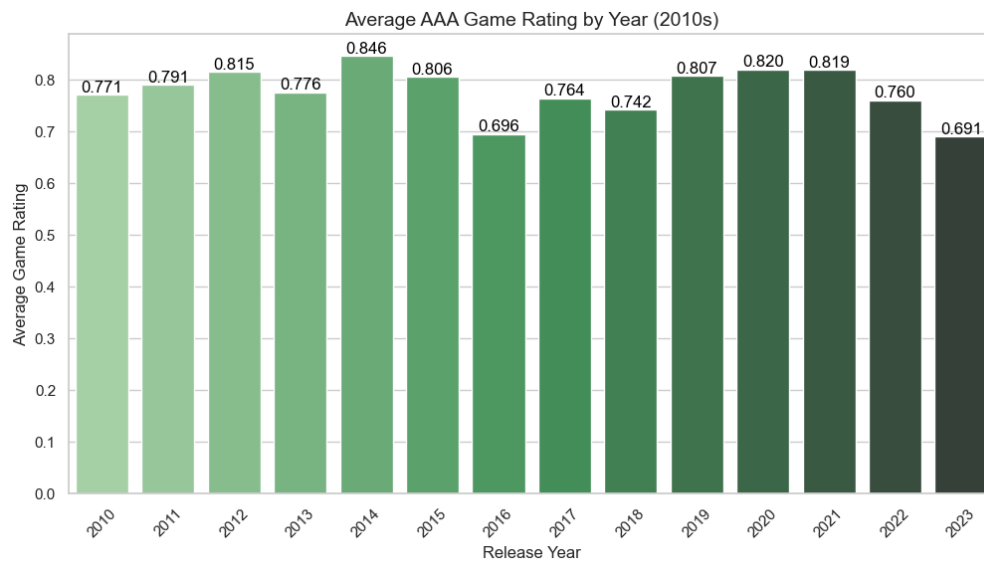


Figure 3: Mean Voted Up by Year (2010s AAA)

Conclusion

As shown in Figures 2 & 3 the average game rating by year doesn't follow a negative trend either, meaning the overall quality of AAA games hasn't significantly dropped from the 2000s to the 2010s, nor has it dropped year by year. However, looking at the 2010s graph, and more specifically 2021 to 2023 there is a pretty steady decline. This leads me to believe that some of the criticism of the gaming industry is due to recency bias. This clear trend in recent quality drop has many extrapolating that the gaming industry within the last decade has deteriorated, while in reality this is only a significant trend within the last 5ish years. For every No Man's Sky, there is a Mass Effect: Galaxy; showing that there are an equal number of flops between the 2000s and 2010s. Overall, it seems that the recent sharp decline in ratings is distorting the average consumer's mind regarding the quality of AAA titles across the 2010s.