

# In what ways does the ever-increasing power creep in the Digimon TCG franchise affect the psychology of its players?

Andrej Erdelsky  
guserdelan@student.gu.se  
University of Gothenburg  
Gothenburg, Sweden

Alexandre Monteiro  
gusmonalb@student.gu.se  
University of Gothenburg  
Gothenburg, Sweden



Figure 1: Digimon TCG logo.

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the consequences of power creep in the Digimon TCG on the player's psychology. At a time where this TCG is expanding rapidly it is important to assess what the impact of constantly introducing stronger mechanics into the game has on its players. By incorporating references, other studies and a survey conducted on the Digimon TCG community, the paper aims to understand the repercussions of power creep in the players mindset.

## CCS CONCEPTS

• Applied computing → Computer games.

## KEYWORDS

TCG, Card Games, Power Creep, Player Psychology

### ACM Reference Format:

Andrej Erdelsky and Alexandre Monteiro. 2018. In what ways does the ever-increasing power creep in the Digimon TCG franchise affect the psychology of its players?. In *Proceedings of The Second Introduction to Game Research Conference (IGRC '18)*. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 10 pages. <https://doi.org/XXXXXXX.XXXXXXX>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Digimon TCG is a game that originated in 1997 [1] but was reformulated and reintroduced in 2020. Inspiring itself from other TCGs, the Digimon TCG obtained its uniqueness from the beloved characters it brought back but, most importantly, the core mechanics it introduced. In this paper, we'll discuss the ever-increasing

power creep in this card game, how it's affecting its players psychology, and how that can affect the longevity of the game.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this paper, we'll talk a lot about the term "power creep" in the Digimon TCG, but what exactly is power creep? Well, perhaps it would be better to start with a definition of power. David Mannström [8], someone who made a thesis about the topic of power creep in the Pokemon TCG (trading card game), says that "it can be concluded that power can be defined as the players' ability to affect what happens in the game or the game environment itself". This shall be the definition used for power within the context of this paper, as it encompasses the necessary elements we'll deal with.

Knowing what power is about, we can reflect on what Andrei Dobra [2], a journalist, describes as power creep: "Power creep appears when the game becomes unbalanced due to new content that constantly introduces new things and has the potential to lead to other modifications made to existing items or heroes". So, we shall define power creep as the gap generated by new content released at a rapid pace that makes the older content more insignificant due to the mechanics that it brings, mechanics capable of affecting the game and the game environment in a much more significant way that make the older content pale in comparison; in other words, it introduces a much higher power level.

### 2.1 Game Mechanics and the impact on human psychology

As mentioned earlier, this game introduced game mechanics that made it unique to other TCGs. Let's then explore some of them a bit and see how they interact with the way players feel.

*Memory counter*, a really well-designed resource based on Ryan Miller's Chrono Clash system [9], commonly regarded as the best core mechanic in the game (a sentiment that the YouTuber/researcher East talks more in depth about in an analysis he makes [3]), affects the actions players can perform in each turn. It is the currency one must pay to play cards. As long as you have memory, your turn

Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Copyrights for components of this work owned by others than ACM must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, or republish, to post on servers or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee. Request permissions from [permissions@acm.org](mailto:permissions@acm.org).

IGRC '18, October 16–18, 2023, Gothenburg, SE

© 2018 Association for Computing Machinery.

ACM ISBN 978-x-xxxx-xxxx-x/YY/MM...\$15.00

<https://doi.org/XXXXXXX.XXXXXXX>

will not end; however, after it passes a certain threshold, the turn will pass, and the opponent will get the excess memory you spent to work with. This creates a back-and-forth that makes players excited but also cautious about what and when to play.

*Securities*, the players “life”, usually face down five cards that the opponent must destroy to win the game. This creates some RNG in the game that can lead to counterattacks. The happiness and thrill you get from being in a losing position, getting security attacked by the opponent, and that card being revealed as something that completely changes the tides of the game is immense. This unpredictability makes the game interesting for players.

*Combos*, being a super heavy combo game with multiple playstyles and the ability to evolve into any Digimon higher level and with the same color (unlike Pokemon, Digimon don’t have fixed evolution lines, within certain rules, anything goes!) not only keeps the players engaged, but being able to perform a combo on an opponent gives the player a sense of thrill and an adrenaline rush.

## 2.2 Power creep and the negative impact on human psychology

**2.2.1 In General.** As players that love the game and the community, power creep, a move made, in our opinion, to facilitate the appeal to newer players (which only need to buy a recent deck to be meta), ruins the game in the long run. As dedicated players see their decks and efforts become meaningless after a new expansion drops, this makes players feel like their efforts and investments into making a deck have become obsolete, which, in turn, leads them to not want to play anymore.

Luiethepanda [7], a Digimon YouTuber, shares the same sentiment; he quit the game in a previous expansion as he felt demotivated due to seeing the game trade skill-based plays for extremely overpowered plays that required almost no effort by the player.

This system relies on dopamine. When you enter the game and get a new strong deck, you feel amazing; however, after a few months of playing, you lose this feeling, and you start to become apathetic to playing the game. To chase this high, you need to be constantly buying newer stuff and abandoning stuff that you like.

This also raises monetary concerns, as even though this TCG is considered one of the cheapest, an average deck is never going to be below 50 euros, and with the deck’s lifespan being constantly reduced, it becomes increasingly harder to recommend the game to a friend. It almost makes you feel guilty for trying to get a friend into a hobby that is fun but very expensive in the long term. This sentiment is also shared by David Mannström [8], as he says “(...) worth considering that making older content weaker systematically is not good for the developer’s goodwill, as players will not want to spend money on content that will be replaced once the next new thing is released”. Currently, there’s a contrast between the influx of new players getting into the game due to the ease of buying a recent deck that is good and the current players not being able to get more people into the game due to the short lifespan of decks.

**2.2.2 At a Competitive Level.** Peter Vorder [10], a researcher, describes social competition as “a process that develops through competitive actions performed by individuals or social entities in order to maintain their own interests to the disadvantage of others”, so

we can clearly see competition as something where human psychology plays a big role. In a study Peter Vorder conducted about the competition in the video game “Tomb Raider”, they present this graph that showcases the enjoyment someone gets in relation to the competition it offers, where we can clearly see the connection between them:

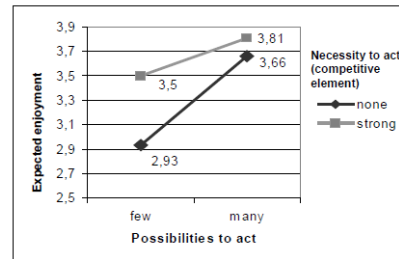


Figure 1. Influence of the presence of a competitive element and of number of possibilities to act on expected enjoyment (rated on a ten-item scale ranging from 1 (low enjoyment) to 5 (very intense enjoyment) of playing a verbally depicted game situation (N = 349; see [6] for details).

## Figure 2: Q8 Answers

Peter Vorder, in the topic of human psychology and competition, also says that it “effectively induces situations of social competition, which can be instrumentalized by the user in order to maintain his or her self-esteem and to strive for positive moods”. Finally, Peter Vorder describes competitive players in three categories: competitive “(...) reflects the general tendency to maximize the own benefits in relation to the benefits obtained by others (ego minus other = max)”, individualist “(...) reflects the general tendency to maximize one’s own benefits (ego = max)” and cooperative “(...) to care about both one’s own as well as the benefits of the other (ego plus other = max)”. So, knowing that competition can be used as an instrument to increase one’s mental state, let’s try to understand the negative effect of the Digimon power creep in the competitive scene.

In a competitive match, power creep can be catastrophic to the players psychology. Let’s say that two friends are playing against each other. One of them, being a competitive or even individualist player, will always choose to use the best possible decks. On the other hand, friend B might be interested in playing older decks that have interesting mechanics for them. A will always win in the scenario, and as he boosts his own ego and gets more and more happy, the opposite will happen to friend B, who is looking to try his deck but can’t do anything with it as the power gap between the decks is too big. This will make B sad and demotivated to play with A again, which can even lead (in more extreme cases) to their friendship ending. The existence of this power gap can manipulate people into only wanting to use the best stuff while making them blind to the social interaction part of the game. This phenomenon can be tied to the concept of the magic circle [4] and the moral dissociation it creates in people while playing a game. Player A will only see victory in his eyes, regardless of what he has to employ on player B, potentially cutting player B’s fun altogether from the game.

**2.2.3 Power creep viewed in a positive light.** Up to this point, we talked mostly about the negative psychological consequences and viewpoints people have about power creep; however, we feel like it's important to include different perspectives on the topic.

HeroicBarret [5], a reddit user, says, "As long as it is done at a reasonable pace, power creep can be good as it keeps players engaged at a reasonable pace. Power creep can be good as it keeps players engaged in the meta (...) The meta gets stale if things are meta for too long," which is a very fair argument to make, as the constant evolution of the meta is a key factor for the longevity of any TCG. However, we would argue that the meta can evolve without the necessity of power creep, as you can still introduce very strong new things that can have certain downsides to them to keep them balanced with the game overall.

WakeoftheStorm [11], a reddit user, says that "(...) they're missing something else that we would argue far outweighs the downside of power creep: older content becomes progressively more accessible." And this is a good argument in terms of monetary concerns; however, even if the older content becomes more accessible, if everyone is using the newer, more powerful decks, a player that buys older decks will never be able to use them in a productive way as the newer stuff is that much better.

## 2.3 Power creep in relation to living card games

The Digimon card game is considered a "trading card game", often abbreviated as the TCG acronym. As Hodge et al. [6] define, "TCGs are characterized by players purchasing booster packs of cards containing a random set of cards and then trading or purchasing cards to build their desired decks." This means that there is an inherent amount of luck when investing in TCGs because players are never guaranteed the cards they need in their decks, which exponentially increases the price of certain cards because of their rarity in relation to their necessity for certain decks. This aspect of gambling in the business of Digimon cards causes a lot of frustration in players when power creep is introduced to the game because there is a high chance that their investment in the game is going to be irrelevant because of new expansion releases, and now they need to rely on luck or second-hand markets with expensive cards to stay properly relevant in the game.

When it comes to collectible card games, there is also another business model that exists called the "living card game," or LCG for short. As Hodge et al. [6] again define, "In LCGs, players customize a deck of cards ready for play. New cards are released in fixed card distributions (i.e., packs with fixed contents). Non-randomized expansion packs are released monthly, containing specific cards to supplement the existing pool, along with deluxe expansion packs released periodically that contain powerful new cards." This means that this business model is fairer to players and their investment because of the certainty of obtaining the cards they need. By removing the luck aspect of obtaining cards, some of the frustration of power creep can be alleviated because everyone has the same access to the cards in a fixed manner.

By abandoning the addictive nature of randomness and gambling in card acquisition, LCG players can focus solely on building decks and their theory-crafting. In this transition, however, the game loses competitiveness because all the players have direct access to the

same sets of cards [6], making the meta stagnant compared to TCGs like Digimon. Because of this, LCGs have close to no competitive tournament scene, which alienates a large subset of players. That being said, TCGs like Digimon can cause a lot of frustration when taken seriously. As Hodge et al. puts it [6], "Although the random release model (...) is undoubtedly more lucrative, it can generate negative sentiment among the players and community as it forces purchases of new cards when old cards are retired or changed and players report a feeling of "pay-to-win." " As has been demonstrated in this section, the choice of maintaining a TCG or LCG business model is a difficult one in terms of player engagement and creating revenue.

## 3 RESEARCH

In an attempt to dig deeper into the topic and try to understand how the community truly feels about it, we decided it would be best if we conducted a survey with the members of the community. With this information, we would be one step closer to arriving at a satisfying answer to the research question, or perhaps even discover something unexpected up until this point.

### 3.1 The Structure

Before we look at the results and analyze them, let's first explain how we structured the survey (done as a Google Form) and the reasoning behind the questions. The form had three main parts, each with a specific goal.

The first part had the goal of understanding who the demography that took the poll was, so with that objective, we had the following questions:

- (Q1) How did you find the Digimon TCG? (To better understand how players learned about this TCG) consider the following possible answers (players could choose more than one option):
  - A friend recommended me
  - I liked the Digimon franchise already so I naturally found it
  - I like TCGs already so I naturally found it
  - Other
- (Q2) How long have you been playing the game? (To better understand the experience the players had with the game) give the following possible answers:
  - < 3 months
  - 3 - 6 months
  - 6 - 12 months
  - 1+ year(s)
- (Q3) How do you see yourself in the playing scene? (To better understand what type of players we're answering the form) with the following metric:
  - Choosing from 1 to 5, 1 means the player only used off-meta decks (non-meta), and 5 means they only used meta decks.

The second part of the form was to check if players believed there existed power creep in the game and, if so, how prevalent it was. These are the questions:

- (Q4) Do you think there's power creep in the Digimon TCG (to better understand if players truly thought there was

power creep in the TCG), a yes/no question where upon choosing “yes” players would get the following question:

- (Q4.1) How prevalent do you think power creep is in the Digimon TCG? A 1 to 5 question where 1 meant they thought it was almost non-existent and 5 meant they thought it was very prevalent

- (Q5) Do you think most decks lifespan in the meta is too short? (To better understand how players felt about releasing cards and new metas in short periods of time.)

The third and final part of the form focused on how players felt about power creep and its related topics in the TCG. It had the following questions:

- (Q6) How does the introduction of a new set of cards affect you buying decks? (to better understand the impact of new cards being constantly introduced and its consequences in terms of financial investment) It had the following possible answers:
  - It increases my desire to buy decks. Which then had the following question, (Q6.1) Why did it increase? With the following possible answers: (players could pick more than one)
    - \* Because I like the new mechanics being introduced
    - \* Because it's easier to get into the competitive scene
    - \* Because I like stomping on other decks
    - \* Other
  - It decreases my desire to buy decks. Which then had the following question, (Q6.2) Why did it decrease? With the following possible answers: (players could pick more than one)
    - \* Because I don't feel like constantly spending money to stay meta relevant
    - \* Because I don't have an interest in constantly learning new decks
    - \* Because I like my old decks and want to continue using them
    - \* Because I don't like the direction the game is going with the newer mechanics and play-styles
    - \* Other
  - I'm neutral, it doesn't affect. Which then had the following question, (Q6.3) Why didn't it affect you? With a short-answer text box.
- (Q7) How do you feel playing a meta deck against someone playing with an off-meta deck? (to better understand the perspective of someone that uses meta decks against weaker ones) We had the following possible answers:
  - I feel excited. Which then had the following question, (Q7.1) Why do you feel excited? With the following possible answers: (players could pick more than one)
    - \* Because my odds of winning are higher
    - \* Because I feel superior to my opponent
    - \* Because I like my opponent to feel useless
    - \* Other
  - I feel frustrated. Which then had the following question, (Q7.2) Why do you feel frustrated? With the following possible answers: (players could pick more than one)
    - \* Because the game seems to always end too quickly

- \* Because it feels unfair
- \* Because often it's not skill-based, the win is mostly dependent on the power of the deck
- \* Because it's not fun, as it's not challenging
- \* Other

- I have mixed feelings. Which then had the following question, (Q7.3) Why do you have mixed feelings? With a long-answer text box.
- I fell indifferent.

- (Q8) How do you feel playing an off-meta deck against someone playing with a meta deck? (to better understand the perspective of someone that uses weaker decks against meta ones) We had the following possible answers:

- I feel excited. Which then had the following question, (Q8.1) Why do you feel excited? With the following possible answers: (players could pick more than one)

- \* Because I like using an off-meta/weaker deck to beat a meta deck;

- \* Other

- I feel frustrated. Which then had the following question, (Q8.2) Why do you feel frustrated? With the following possible answers: (players could pick more than one)

- \* Because I invest time and/or money into my deck and when I play it against a meta deck I can't use any of it's cool/interesting mechanics/combos

- \* Because the game seems to always end too quickly

- \* Because there's very little opportunities for counter-plays

- \* Because often it's not skill-based, the win is mostly dependent on the power of the deck

- \* Because it feels unfair

- \* Other

- I have mixed feelings. Which then had the following question, (Q7.3) Why do you have mixed feelings? With a long-answer text box.

- I fell indifferent.

### 3.2 Results and analysis

The form was sent to multiple Digimon TCG discord groups and subreddits, and at the point we closed the poll, 312 people had answered, a significant number of people for our quantitative research.

312 responses

[Link to Sheets](#)

Not accepting responses

Message for respondents

This form is no longer accepting answers, thx for all the help :)

Figure 3: Total Responses of the form

How did you find the Digimon TCG?

312 responses

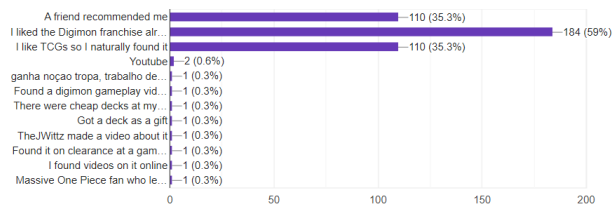


Figure 4: Q1 Answers

*Analysis:* Most players who answered the form seem to have been playing the game for a year or longer (62.2%), followed by those who played from 6 to 12 months (17.9%), less than 3 months (10.3%), and 3 to 6 months (17.9%). Results were a bit surprising on this one; it goes somewhat against our previous theory of the game's player base becoming more and more about new players as older ones leave due to disliking the state of the game and its power creep. That said, it is important to note that it's more likely for veteran players to be on these Discord servers or subreddits than recently started players.

How long have you been playing the game?

312 responses

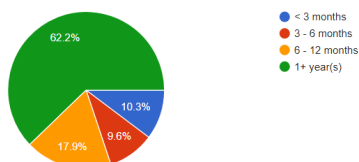


Figure 5: Q2 Answers

*Analysis:* Most players who answered the form seem to have been playing the game for a year or longer (62.2%), followed by those who played from 6 to 12 months (17.9%), less than 3 months (10.3%), and 3 to 6 months (17.9%). Results were a bit surprising on this one; it goes somewhat against our previous theory of the game's player base becoming more and more about new players as older ones leave due to disliking the state of the game and its power creep. That said, it is important to note that it's more likely for veteran players to be on these Discord servers or subreddits than recently started players.

How do you see yourself in the playing scene?

312 responses

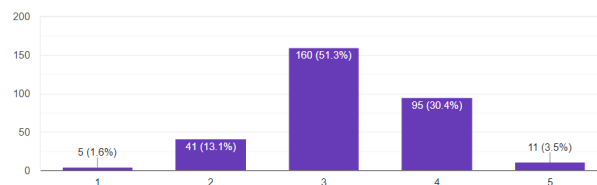


Figure 6: Q3 Answers

*Analysis:* Most players seem to consider themselves in the middle of using meta and off-meta decks (51.3%), with the balance tipping more towards those who use mostly meta decks (30.4%) vs. those who use mostly off-meta decks (13.1%). Results were within expectations; it supports our theory of players inclining themselves more towards using meta or at least more powerful decks in contrast to using weaker but potentially more fun stuff

Do you think there's power creep in the Digimon TCG?

312 responses

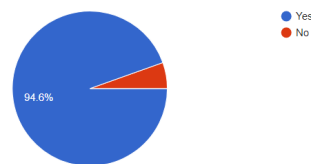


Figure 7: Q4 Answers

*Analysis:* Most players (94.6%) do believe there's power creep in the TCG as expected; however, it is interesting to consider those 5.4% that don't believe there is as well.

How prevalent do you think power creep is in the Digimon TCG?

295 responses

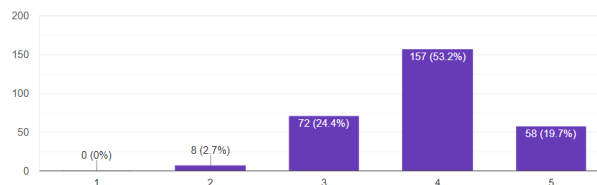


Figure 8: Q4.1 Answers

*Analysis:* Results are again consistent with our theory, where 97.3% of players believe power creep is, at least, semi or very prevalent within the TCG.



Do you think the most decks lifespan in the meta is too short?

312 responses

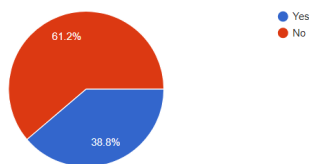


Figure 9: Q5 Answers

*Analysis:* From this point on, the results start getting really interesting to us. These results were very surprising; we believed most players would think that the meta deck's lifespan was too short (a consequence of the rapid power creep spreading in the TCG); however, the majority (61.2%) don't find the meta's lifespan too short, and this will be clearer in the results of the next question.

How does the introduction of a new set of cards affect you buying decks?

312 responses

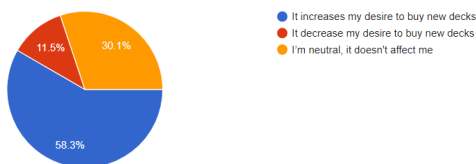


Figure 10: Q6 Answers

*Analysis:* As expected from the last question's results and somewhat unexpected by us and our theory, the introduction of new sets of cards leaves most players (58.3%) with the desire to buy new decks. We suspected it would be more balanced to display the contrast between people who love to follow the meta and create more powerful decks and those who don't like the introduction of new sets of cards because it might make their current decks less useful. Perhaps we forgot to consider how new sets of cards can also be used to improve older decks, or that not every new card in a new set is going to be overpowered. We're going to delve deeper into the reasons why in the following questions, but before that, it's also important to mention how 30.1% of people seem to be unaffected by the impact of the introduction of newer cards in buying decks.

Why did it increase?

182 responses

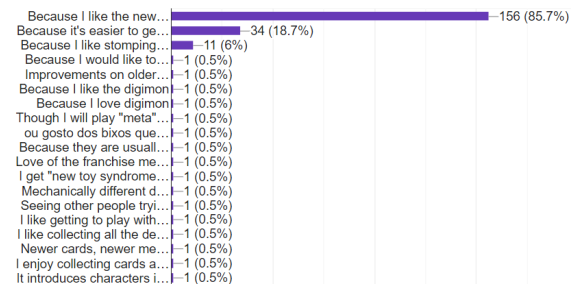


Figure 11: Q6.1 Answers

*Analysis:* Most players (85.7%) increased their desire to buy new decks when new sets of cards are introduced because they liked the new mechanics being introduced, followed by 18.7%, who increased their desire because it's easier to get into the competitive scene. Both these results were somewhat expected but in the "Others" sections, some compelling reasons emerged, such as because it improves older decks (supporting what was said in Q6), because not all new cards introduced are going to be for meta purposes, but can in fact make fun off-meta decks (also in tune with what we said in Q6), because they see others trying the newer stuff and they want to try it as well, because it introduces Digimon's not previously in the TCG that they like or because they just like collecting cards in general (there were many more responses but for the sake of keeping the document concise, we chose the ones that represent the players perspectives the most)

Why did it decrease?

36 responses

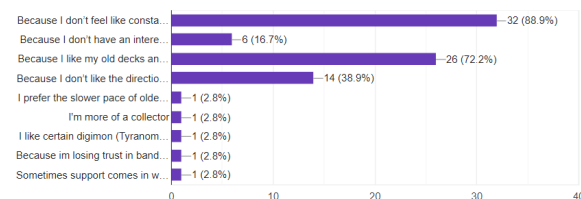


Figure 12: Q6.2 Answers

*Analysis:* Most players (88.9%) who answered that it decreased their desire to buy new decks had a problem with the financial investment needed to stay meta relevant, followed by players who just want to continue to use their older decks (72.2%) and those who don't like the design direction the game is taking (38.9%). We also got other intriguing answers like players who like the pace of older decks (something that is intrinsically correlated with power creep and the accelerating game pace it brings) and players who are just losing trust in the parent company, Bandai, which seems to have stopped trying to appeal to normal people but only cater for Digimon nostalgia-driven fans (an interesting take as it kind of contradicts our theory of power creep and stronger mechanics

being used as a way to lure in new players, who only need to buy newer decks to get into the game).

Why didn't it affect you?

90 responses

- because I have my decks and unless support comes out for my decks, it doesn't pay for me to buy anything, unless I really like the deck or card.
- I've experienced other TCGs, so I understand that some power creep actually enables prior decks and archetypes that previously underperformed.
- It varies from set and if anything actually piqued my interest
- i mostly will get a playset of each card anyway so it doesnt matter if the cards are rn particular good or bad
- I only play archetypes that I enjoy regardless of competitive viability. So I'll typically only buy a new set of cards if there's a new archetype that interests me or if it contains cards that I can use to upgrade pre-existing decks that I own.
- I only go for new support of my previous decks or if it's a new take or introduction of my favorite digimons

Figure 13: Q6.3 Answers

**Analysis:** On this question (players that didn't get affected), we got a myriad of answers, so let's highlight a couple: some are only interested in cards that affect their current decks or that interest them, so not all sets of new cards are going to be relevant, and some acknowledge that this introduces a certain needed power creep as it enables older decks that under-performed to revive in a powerful form.

How do you feel playing a meta deck against someone playing with an off-meta deck?

312 responses

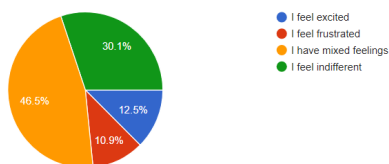


Figure 14: Q7 Answers

**Analysis:** These results were somewhat in line with our expectations, as most players who use meta decks against off-meta ones have mixed feelings (46.5%), followed by those who feel indifferent (30.1%), those who feel excited (12.5%), and those who feel frustrated (10.9%). Let's examine this further in the follow-up questions.

Why do you feel excited?

39 responses

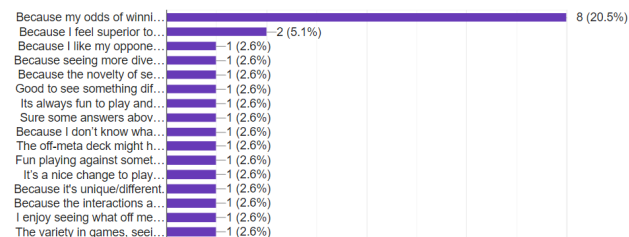


Figure 15: Q7.1 Answers

**Analysis:** Of those who feel excited, most (20.5%) say it's because the odds of them winning are higher, which is understandable from a competitive standpoint. 5.1% of players like feeling superior to their opponents, and others have very fascinating takes on the topic, like: because they're playing with someone who they know will have to play in a more creative or daring way to win, so therefore it's an engaging match (sort of contradicting our theory that playing against someone with weaker decks is less engaging due to lack of challenge) or because it's fun to see the match-up between the decks.

Why do you feel frustrated?

34 responses

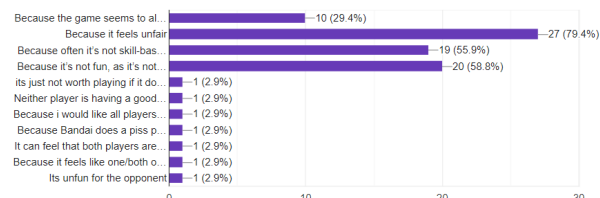


Figure 16: Q7.2 Answers

**Analysis:** Most players (79.4%) who feel frustrated about this match-up agree that it feels unfair. A good portion also feel frustrated because it's often not skill-based, but it's more about the power of each deck (55.9%) or also because it's not as fun of a match-up as there isn't much challenge (58.8%). Some players also commented in "Others" that Bandai does not do a good job at providing tools to off-meta decks to close the power gap between them and meta decks. The results here were within our expectations.

Why do you have mixed feelings?

135 responses

- I always feel bad about taking meta decks and facing someone who is using a deck for fun or off meta. Most times the match would end on my favour but it does not feel satisfying nor fun.
- because I feel good about playing with my meta deck, but I feel bad that a player who plays off meta doesn't have any chance against meta decks, it's just unfair
- Depending on how the non meta deck is both built and created (main strategy of the deck, etc), it can devolve into either a stomp with no real showcase of skill from either opponent or an excruciatingly drawn out game due to one of the decks either completely countering the other or having a specific card or staple that flogates any interesting interactions
- On the current meta playing a ShineGrey match is just plain unfair and sad
- well it can be very one sided or a fun showcase of the off-meta deck's capabilities

Figure 17: Q7.3 Answers

*Analysis:* From players who have mixed feelings about the match-up, we got responses such as: because they feel good playing with a meta deck but at the same time feel bad for the other player who's playing in disadvantage; because it can either devolve into a game of stomping on the opponent (which is unfun) or it could turn out to be a brilliantly played game where the player with the off-deck showcases incredible skill in an attempt to close the power gap; in tournaments it's good as it's most likely an easy win, but at the same time it's annoying seeing the opponent not being able to do anything.

How do you feel playing an off-meta deck against someone playing with a meta deck?

312 responses

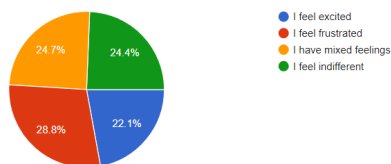


Figure 18: Q8 Answers

*Analysis:* For this question about utilizing an off-meta deck against a meta one, we were once again surprised by the results. We expected most players to feel frustrated, but the results are peculiarly evenly spread, with the majority being frustrated (28.8%) but still very close to the other possible answers, with an average of around 24% for each one. Let's find out why in the follow-up questions.

Why do you feel excited?

69 responses

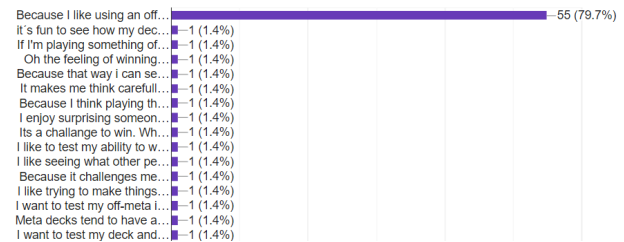


Figure 19: Q8.1 Answers

*Analysis:* The large majority here (79.7%) said it was because they liked using an off-meta-deck to beat a meta one, so the thrill of winning an uphill battle seems to be the most popular reason. We also got answers about how sometimes an off-meta deck's main mechanics and combos can directly counter some meta deck's play style, which results in the off-meta deck winning; this is also a perspective we hadn't considered.

Why do you feel frustrated?

90 responses

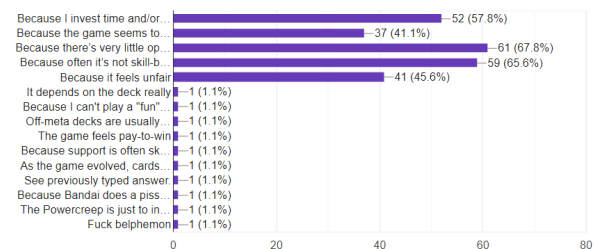


Figure 20: Q8.2 Answers

*Analysis:* For players who feel frustrated about the match-up, it seems the common reasons are: very few opportunities for counter-plays (67.8%), barely any actual player skill involved (65.6%), it feels unfair (45.6%), the games seem to end up too quickly (41.1%), and the time they invested in learning their off-meta deck seems useless when they can't do anything during a match (57.8%). This all supports our theory of the impact of power creep on player's minds, especially when they're on the weaker side.



Why do you have mixed feelings?

70 responses

It can go both ways, Digimon has an heavy luck component because searchers could not land on what you want or security isn't balanced, as such some times playing off meta isn't rewarding enough because you know if it was a normal game you'd lose, but at the same time losing doesn't feel as good as off meta because you know your deck is powerless against the other's power

Enjoy the challenge but some meta decks are too oppressive and it's noticable

Because I feel im being harsh

porque has vezes has decks que as mecanica são horríveis e parece que estou a partir os dedos do pe um a um

Sometimes its just fine, no problem, but other times you feel like you don't have a chance.

I admit I have a losing streak and I hate if it is because they just have a better deck and I had no chance of winning.

**Figure 21: Q8.3 Answers**

*Analysis:* In the mixed feelings about the match-up section, we got quite a few compelling reasons, such as: luck (RNG) is an important factor that sometimes can make even the most powerful decks lose to weaker ones; depending on the actual mechanics of the opponents meta decks, it can still be a fun match-up; the chance of winning gives them an adrenaline rush; and regardless of winning or losing, they like seeing the interaction between the two decks.

### 3.3 Data Crosscheck

Having gone over the data we collected through the survey, let's try to make correlations between them and certain topics directly related to our research question.

**3.3.1 What does the experience of using meta decks and the experience of using off-meta decks tell us about the general levels of frustration and excitement in players?** On the topic of using meta decks, based on the data obtained, frustration and excitement are affected, but the level to which they're affected depends mainly on two key factors: the opponent's decks and the setting in which the game is played. Players who use meta decks can feel frustrated when paired against an opponent that possesses a deck vastly inferior to their own, removing all forms of challenge in the game. The same applies for a player using an off-meta deck, often times becoming frustrated due to thinking that the match is unfair. Players will also experience different levels of frustration and excitement depending on the setting, meaning if they're playing in a competitive setting, they're less likely to feel frustrated (and more likely to be excited) while using a meta deck as it increases their chances of winning; however, in a casual setting, they might feel frustrated as they probably cannot perform an even match against an opponent that has an off-meta deck, potentially ruining the fun for both players involved. Again, vice versa applies to a player utilizing an off-meta deck.

**3.3.2 What's the correlation between a players skill level and meta deck use?** Based on the data collected, we found that a lot of players felt that meta decks could potentially remove a lot of the skill level needed to win a game. However, this is not such a black-and-white topic as it depends on a couple of variables: the match-up and the synergy of the opposing decks. Contrary to what we believed and supported by the data collected, an off-meta can constantly

win against a meta one, but for this to happen, the off-meta deck must contain mechanics that directly counter the ones from the meta deck. The strategy discussed nonetheless has the flaw of only working when fighting a specific meta deck that gets countered by the players off-meta one. This is a big part of the reason why meta decks are "meta", It's because they possess multiple tools in their armory that allow them to adapt and take advantage of a vast amount of situations.

The other variable important to take into account when discussing skill levels and meta deck use is the power of the individual cards included in the deck. From what we gathered, it seems as if there are three meta deck archetypes: those who are powerful because they have enough tools to deal with anything; those who are powerful because they contain specific cards that can change the tides of a game by themselves; and, finally, those who have a mix of the two previously discussed tactics. Unfortunately, certain cards are so potent by themselves that a player can be playing the meta deck in a very unoptimized way, full of mistakes and blunders, but as soon as they get that specific formidable card and play it, the stream of the game immediately changes, and they can almost immediately find themselves back in a winning position.

Both meta decks that employ strategies of having various tools and powerful cards and the ones mixing both have a direct correlation with players frustration in a match, more so the ones with the dominant cards. As we've found through the survey and by talking with people from the community, people usually get more frustrated when playing against a deck that has such cards, as they truly feel like the players skill is completely removed in those matches.

## 4 CONCLUSION

So, after everything that we've explored, let's go back to the research question and answer it. In what ways does the ever-increasing power creep in the Digimon TCG franchise affect the psychology of its players? As we've discussed in this research paper, this is not a straight-forward answer; players can be affected in the form of frustration, excitement, disappointment, happiness, or even a mix of multiple emotions due to power creep. Power creep, as has been proven in this paper, can both positively and negatively affect a player's psychology, depending on the situation in which it is employed. Factors like whether a player is playing competitively or casually, whether a player is playing with friends or with random people, can directly influence how someone feels about power creep.

It is also important to bring up that power creep can be a major contributor to preventing a game from becoming stale, and this, by consequence, keeps players more engaged, even by negatively affecting a player's mental state. Power creep can be used as a tool to capture players interest in the game. As it grows and becomes worse, players will talk more and more about it, creating a sort of firm grip on keeping the community interested in the game and its play scene. This, of course, can also have a fatalistic effect, as players will become tired of always being frustrated due to power creep and start abandoning the game. To combat this, we propose a rotation-based system that introduces formats to the game, where players can only play certain decks or until a certain expansion in

specific formats. This solution has been used in other card games to great effect, and this way players can choose to experience versions of the game they prefer in a more controlled, fair way, avoiding power creep and its effects on their mindset.

We have also researched different types of business models for card games, which can directly influence the psychology of players. The decision of the designers of the game then becomes a balance of player engagement, player satisfaction with the state of the game, as well as monetary gain when viewed as a product. LCGs and TCGs both have drawbacks and benefits; there is no solution that would satisfy everyone in this equation.

This research proves that the power creep present in the Digimon TCG has a profound effect on players psychology in a multitude of ways.

## REFERENCES

- [1] 2023. Digimon. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digimon#:~:text=The%20Digimon%20Collectible%20Card%20Game,1997%20and%20published%20by%20Bandai>.
- [2] Andrei Dobra. 2013. League of Legends Nerfs Are Made to Control Power Creep Level. (2013).
- [3] East. 2023. An Analysis of the Digimon Card Game. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJXytlIKdaE&ab\\_channel=East](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJXytlIKdaE&ab_channel=East)
- [4] Michael Heron. 2023. Experiential Perspective. [https://chalmers.instructure.com/courses/25158/files/2855275?module\\_item\\_id=394796](https://chalmers.instructure.com/courses/25158/files/2855275?module_item_id=394796)
- [5] HerroicBarret. 2020. Unpopular opinion. Power creep is fine and even healthy for a card game without rotation so long as it is done at a reasonable pace. [https://www.reddit.com/r/cardfightvanguard/comments/hr7xph/unpopular\\_opinion\\_power\\_creep\\_is\\_fine\\_and\\_even/](https://www.reddit.com/r/cardfightvanguard/comments/hr7xph/unpopular_opinion_power_creep_is_fine_and_even/)
- [6] Victoria J Hodge, Nick Sephton, Sam Devlin, Peter I Cowling, Nikolaos Goumarias, Jianhua Shao, Kieran Purvis, Ignazio Cabras, Kiran J Fernandes, and Feng Li. 2018. How the business model of customizable card games influences player engagement. *IEEE Transactions on Games* 11, 4 (2018), 374–385.
- [7] Luisthepanda. 2022. Digimon TCG - What happened to the game? [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2cVmySxboM&ab\\_channel=Luisthepanda](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2cVmySxboM&ab_channel=Luisthepanda)
- [8] David Mannström. 2022. Power creep in videogames, an analysis of the competitive scene in Pokémon games. (2022).
- [9] Ryan Miller. 2019. Chrono Clash System. <https://chronoclashsystem.com/en.php>
- [10] Peter Vorderer, Tilo Hartmann, and Christoph Klimmt. 2003. Explaining the enjoyment of playing video games: the role of competition. In *Proceedings of the second international conference on Entertainment computing*. 1–9.
- [11] WakeoftheStorm. 2022. Dear ZOS, Power Creep is a GOOD thing. [https://www.reddit.com/r/elderscrollsonline/comments/vyya87/dear\\_zos\\_power\\_creep\\_is\\_a\\_good\\_thing/](https://www.reddit.com/r/elderscrollsonline/comments/vyya87/dear_zos_power_creep_is_a_good_thing/)