

What Makes Video Games So Attractive?

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Video games have been in existence for more than 30 years, which is already a cultural practice for generations of people. Starting in the 80s, the quality of video games kept improving along with the evolutionary platforms, such as evolved from a small computer into a home computer; from handheld game console to home video game console. Every evolution of the video games was a huge success on both business and popularity; no matter which type of video game was existing, or what platform they were using, video games are usually popular with the market and the public. With a short but rich history of development, video games are influencing the world by their diversification. Video games can reflect histories, present different culture phenomena, even provide prospects to the future of the world visually. The expansive content span of video games can build collective connections worldwide; people are treating video games as a common topic, which can cross cultures and races. Video games became a more advanced interactive entertainment today. A lot of people are playing them as a normal relax way. Either the PC platform or the mobile phone platform, markets of video games grow enormously along with the increase amounts of players. It shows that more people are finding video games are interesting to play and able to bring enjoyment. Some people even award video games as a special and modern art. All these compliments started when more people found video

games attractive. Moreover, most people who play video games never thought about why they want to play them. In other words, most of the players did not seek for the reason to video games being attractive to them. With the influence of video games getting broader at present, there is a necessity to look deep into the reason behind video games' attractiveness. A video game is composed of different elements: story, environment, character and art design of buildings, etc. By reviewing each element separately without the framework of video games, all of them seem attractive enough; however, dismantling video games to review the nature of the components is not a correct way to analyse them. The analyzation of attractiveness on video games should be done by considering the whole as an unbreakable body. In that body, different elements are impacting each other, the relationships among them cannot be divided. To learn more about video games, a new perspective for people to explore on had been revealed: what was generated from video games——the combination of elements from different areas?

Emotional Experience Makes Video Games Attractive

Emotional attachment is an indispensable part for video games to provide a virtual experience to let people escape from reality. With this purpose, emotional experience is becoming an important consideration during game design process.

There are different elements in leading positions in video games, which are being able

to provide immersive emotional experiences. Penny Baillie-de Byl states, “The uses of emotions in game design were coded according to their functional use; narrative, interface, the player’s avatar or non-player characters (NPCs)” (2015, p.6-7). By defining natural and complicated interactive emotions, different ways to design those elements for building video games’ framework were discovered to create emotion engagements for the players.

Players can easily immerse into a video game while they are generating an emotional response to it. Therefore, most of the attractive video games today are focusing on leading players to generate emotions with finely designed elements. Byl points out that the total immersion of a player is related to the feelings of focus, involvement and enjoyment which equate to a mental state of flow (2015, p.3). The design process on emotion triggers in video games through different elements must be fluent enough to let the players experience the natural flow of emotions without realizing they were being led intentionally by the game design. Byl also states that “a player’s emotional experience builds in-line with the layers of the framework providing players with learning experiences and memories that persist for remainder of their gameplay” (2015, p.13). By using strategies on designing different elements to form a framework in video games, it is necessary to let players believe the emotions they generated were real. The sense of emotions can create a strong

connection between the players' mind and the unrealistic scenes, stories and characters. Only when players get into the mental flow during the gameplay, can they have a profound experience by going through the carefully designed level of emotion proximity on elements like the narrative, NPCs, etc, which also let s players realize the emotions they have generated as a reaction to the gameplay, creating long-lasting memories that are implanted in their minds. The emotional experience is essential to let the players immerse into the gameplay. Furthermore, the players can receive strong feedback from the gameplay by recalling the memory, and they will have a slight illusion about what they had experienced was true. Using emotion to strengthen the interactivity of video games is one of the reasons that make it attractive to people.

Learning Curve Makes Video Games Attractive

The learning curve is a graph that represents people's learning rate through the process in gaining new experiences, which is important to video games to lead the players keep playing. Lydia Nicholas states that "there is a beauty, unique to gaming, in a perfectly shaped learning curve" (2018, p.1). Applying the relationship between learning curve, and the reward loop on different elements in video games are essential for keeping video games attractive. Another concept raised by Nicholas is that the scale between the unreality and verisimilitude in video games is a large part that

requires integration (2018, p.1). Video games are entertainment tools, which can fulfil people's imagination, and achieve human's interaction with art at the same time.

When learning curves were hidden in video games, and being able to let players experience it, a reward loop was created. Nicholas provided her own experience from the discussion of the extreme difficult gothic role-playing game Bloodborne about how the challenging, brutal fights were designed to produce cycles of struggle, satisfaction and pride in its players (2018, p.1). Why would players keep playing the game if it is remarkably hard? The concept of reward loop had shown its importance here. Every time the players fail at some point during the gameplay, such as boss fight, or being killed by opponent NPCs, they will gain experience from it. When they face the same obstacle again, there will be two situations: either they learned enough to overcome the obstacle, or what they learned is still insufficient. Thus, players will struggle at certain points but keep gaining experience about how to get over it. A good gameplay design will be able to let players keep acquiring new experience while they experience the obstacles repeatedly. In the reward loop of emotions, the longer the players took to adapt, the stronger their excitement, joy and sense of accomplishment. Nicholas points out that different social factors, like gender, sexuality, class etc., are affecting how people create video games and what the players experience (2018, p.1). All players know that video games are unreal, but they can still sense reality from

them. Integrating certain elements from practice, such as real histories and types of art into the build-up scenes, imaginary characters, even along the narrative can bring an authentic experience to players. The strong ecstatic emotions and letting players have an experience that mixes perfectly with both verisimilitude and unreality makes video games attractive.

Interactive Narrative Makes Video Games Attractive

Designing gameplay narrative interactively is useful in contributing to the gameplay. Since narrative techniques are getting mature in the industry, like interactive dialog, movie narrative, Computer-generated imagery (CGI), etc., most of the interactivity of video games is from the narrative. Grant Tavinor points out that the most interesting part of playing a video game is the players exploring the interactive potential of a video game that will lead them to discover the content and meaning of it, so-called “interpretative performance” (2017, p.27). Apart from depending on narrative, an interpretive performance should also be done in video games for leading players to interpret the game content in a correct and helpful way for the game story.

A successful interactive and interpretative video game narrative can always lead to the desire of exploration. Tavinor states that “game players often go beyond what is

necessary to produce an instance of the game, exploring and experimenting with the game to tease out content that might cast further light on the meaning of the work or its interactive structure” (2017, p.27). If designers want to increase the interactivity of narrative, they can hide some clues or certain contents inside the game, even the endings of the story. Most of the good narrative video games today require the player to play the game multiple times to experience the full game content by providing different choices on the narrative. With a good balance between the elements designed to be hidden and those designed to be shown, players would like to play the game repeatedly to discover the unshown plots and easter eggs. With players being able to choose how the story develops, they can experience the full narrative by themselves and discovering the true part of the story by putting all the clues that they found together. The players’ sense of accomplishment is also being fulfilled by interacting with the narrative during gameplay. By having interpretative design on narrative, the interactivity of video games can be fully exerted.

Engagement Makes Video Games Attractive

The main idea of designing a video game is to engage players, and the best way to achieve that is through gameplay. Michele Dickey reveals that “elements of interactive design include the various dimensions of a setting, the roles and characters within a game environment, and ‘hooks’ that afford actions and feedback to the

players” (2005, p.75). Different strategies and techniques are being applied to help with interactive design today, which intends to create a learning environment to engage players via the gameplay.

Engagement level of video games is dependent on the effect of the integration and composition of different elements. Dickey says that understanding the role of narrative and aspects of interactive design in popular video games can provide precious message to design engaging learning environments (2005, p.72). Provides a learning environment for the players in video games means that a relative new environment is designed for them to explore and interact with; meanwhile, having enough level of identification. Hence, the game environment shall neither be obscure and leaves the players confused or difficult to adapt to the game nor providing experience that they are too familiar with and make them feel no novelty to stimulate their exploring desire. Different elements constitute the environment that formed in video games, for instance, narrative and gameplay; both are the elements that players are familiar with, but how are they able to create a learning environment for players?

The narrative ways have kept innovating, from using the perspective of cameras to play to the mature usage of film narrative. Various storytelling techniques would help to create an intuitive visualized new experience. During the gameplay, players will experience different scenarios. Reasonably speculating the art design that fits the

games' world view settings, imaginary scenes and buildings will blend fantasy with reality. With that, players can gain the emotional experience from the world full of exaggerated imagination, which is impossible for them to achieve in real life. A successful learning environment in video games can convince players to immerse their senses to the game, and a willingness to learn from the will designed gameplay.

Conclusion

Video games are the only kind of art that can interact with people. From the evolution history of video games, every generation had succeeded on both market and people; the reason behind their success is the nature of attractiveness. All the visually presented elements are functioned for creating mental and emotional experiences for the players. Different combination of components in video games would be able to provide various experience for players, so the level of attractiveness depends on the way of integration between elements. Finding the relationship between different components that build video games is an important research direction for further seeking the reason of their attractiveness in the future when technology is more advanced.

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