Design Research

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Part 1: Design Research Summary

The first method of data collection that we decided to use was an observation. For this endeavor we each attended Grand Prix Denver, one of the largest Magic: The Gathering tournaments of the year. At this event, we each participated in several separate tournaments to spread our data collection across the largest group of people possible. One of the things that we were looking to learn is how competitive the average player is. Through this study we learned that there is a rather wide spectrum of competition through the magic community. The general competitive nature of players varied a great deal by the event they were enrolled in, and we believe that this data collection may have skewed our results as it is generally only the more competitive players who choose to attend the grand prix. We also used this opportunity to learn about the typical needs of a game of magic. For example, I discovered that many of the players used to utilize dice as their primary method of keeping track of health, but that the rules of the game have recently changed to disallow the use of dice for this purpose because of how often tables can be accidentally shaken. This provides us with an excellent opportunity to replace this purpose with an app. Another thing that we hoped to learn from our observation was how receptive most magic players would be to an app designed to assist them. We discovered that large portion of Magic players are young people who have an affinity for technology, providing a prime user group for our application.

A photo from grand prix Denver 2018

Photograph courtesy of Wizards of the Coast at www.magic.wizards.com

However, as referenced above, there is as wide spectrum of levels of competitiveness across the player base and despite the affinity towards technology it seems that not everyone prioritizes the process of improving their game.

Our observation data suggests that there is a large portion of the Magic: The Gathering community that would not be interested in using our app. In other words, to many people it is just a game to be enjoyed every so often. This is critical information as it will inform how we set up the app. Perhaps there are features or design elements we could incorporate to bring these more casual players into the fold.

The second method of data collection we did was to conduct one on one interviews with four Magic: The Gathering players. Both of us conducted two interviews each. We tried to get a broader cross cut of demographics for our interview subjects. Two of the interview subjects were younger in their early twenties. Two of them were older in their early thirties. There were children at the Grand Prix. however we decided not to interview children as they are less likely to be able to control the amount of time and money they put into the game and as such may not be capable of improving their game as much as individuals who are not dependent on their parents. This was an active decision we made and as such affects the data we collected, we are missing a portion of the community. Our interview data agreed with our observation data in the fact that there are a wide variety of types of players and player motivations across players of the game. As such we will need to make decisions about how large a swath of these differing interests we will cater to. There does seem to be interest in our idea as multiple interviewees expressed frustration that they have to use Google Sheets or Excel spreadsheets to keep track of their win rate. The main frustration centered around the fact that while these softwares offer all the functionality of keeping track of win rates, the data input and visualization is all manual because the softwares are not created specifically for keeping track of and analyzing Magic win rates. As such we know we will need to put some focus on making this process easier in our app. My favorite quote from the interviews comes from James, a veteran of the game, when responding to the question of why he plays Magic, "Magic makes me better at life. The game is all about decision making and I use the strategies I've cultivated in Magic and apply them to making decisions in my real life." James went on to describe that his strategy is all about making the best decision with the information he has and then not getting bent out of shape when he still fails despite making the best decision. Essentially, he is saying that he doesn't think back and say he made the wrong decision because the results didn't end up in his favor, the decision was still the correct one with the information available. This was a somewhat profound answer and one I did not expect. This really showed us that Magic: The Gathering is not a purely entertainment endeavour and that we need to keep that in mind when designing the app and find ways to allow the app to help people in more than just improving their Magic game.

Part 2: Group Reflection

Meeting Information:
Date: Thursday, October 25th
Time: 12:20pm-12:40pm
Location: Engineering Center coffee shop

- **Do your findings agree? Disagree?**
  Our findings agree, there is wide variation in motivations, prioritization, and desire in regards to people improving their Magic game. Generally speaking, people play the game for different reasons. Many use it as entertainment and many use it in an obsessive way that does not look like entertainment from the outside.
- **What decisions can you make based on this data?**
  One decision we can make based on this data is about which features to include in our app. Essentially, the decision is, do we try to make an app that caters to as many in the spectrum, i.e. try to entice both the hyper competitive and the the uber casual players or choose to focus only on the competitive players who are truly invested in improving their game?
- **Were some data collection methods more or less useful than the others? Why?**
  The interview was more useful than the observation. While the observation did get our feet wet in the community, there is an upper limit on the amount and quality of data that can be collected. At a certain point, more observation doesn't push the needle in understanding the community and its needs. The interview allowed us to go into more detail and get better in depth data.
- **If you think more data collection would help, what else would you want to know?**
  For the time being we do not believe we need more data collection. We feel we have a good grasp of the Magic: The Gathering community based off the data we have already collected.

Part 3: Appendix

Below is the list of interview questions we posed to the four participants:

- When did you start playing Magic?
  - Have you taken any breaks since starting?
    - If yes, how long of breaks?
- Why do you play Magic?
  - What is your favorite aspect of the game?
  - What is your least favorite aspect of the game?

- Do you attend more competitive events such as Grand Prixs?
  - If yes, to play in the main event or side events?
  - If no, why not?
- How competitive would you say you are in relation to Magic: The Gathering?
- What formats of Magic do you enjoy playing?
  - Why not play other formats?
- How well do you usually do at these tournaments?
  - What is your win percentage?
- Do you feel you are improving at the game?
  - If yes, what has led to you gaining the most improvement?
  - If no, why do you feel you are not improving?
- Is improving your game a priority?
  - If yes, what practices or techniques do you employ in trying to improve?
    - Do you utilize and technology to aid your improvement?
      - If yes, what technologies?
        - What are some limitations of that technology?
        - What are some benefits/why do you like this technology?
      - If no, is there anything stopping you from using technology/ why do you not?
  - If no, why not?
- Do you feel like improving your game is a feasible task to undertake?
  - Ask for them to expand, looking for inconsistencies and reinforcement from their earlier answers.

Part 4: Contribution Report

Completed via the survey link in the assignment writeup.