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CS 1010 – Intro to Interactive Entertainment
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Module 3 - Challenge: Understanding your Player, Machine, and Money

1. Go to <http://www.giantbomb.com/characters/> Filter the results by “most appearances” (filter is on the bottom right side of the screen).

Look at the first five pages of characters to find out which characters appear the most in video games. Then, answer the following questions.

a) What are some character groupings (similarities) you can derive from your analysis?

b) How do you think these various types of character groupings appeal to or target different player demographics (gender, age, etc.).

The character that has the most video game appearances wasn't a surprise to me. Mario is currently shown to have appeared in 278 games, which is almost a full hundred more than the runner up, which is Luigi (Mario's brother). Nintendo characters certainly hold the title for most iconic characters. Sega holds the 5th place character, Sonic, who is sandwiched between yet even more Nintendo characters. Aside from grouping characters by franchise, in this case Nintendo, there are also a large amount of superhero and comic book characters such as Batman, Superman, and Wolverine. Iconic pop culture characters are certainly represented by their large presence in video games.

The grouping of large Nintendo characters has always felt like a family-oriented demographic. Their target audience is largely casual players and children, which contribute to their popularity. The superhero and comic book characters would likely appeal to older children, teens, and adults who grew up with these heroes. Many of the games that feature this grouping of characters are fighting and adventure games that require a more dedicated player-base. I don't see either of these groups to be targeting a particular gender.

2. Describe your own play preferences according to VandenBerghe's five domains of play. Which genres of games do you prefer, and do those choices reflect your attitudes toward the domains?

In regard to VandenBerghe's five domains of play, I find some of my favorite games falling into the Threat domain (Resident Evil, Silent Hill, & Dark Souls). I thought this chapter was an interesting read, but I don't quite appreciate the psycho analysis of this study calling me as a player neurotic. I also felt that not Storytelling as mentioned category is a large oversight by VandenBerghe. I feel there are many games that I've played where my main drive is to see how a story concludes.

3) Find 10 random (varying demographics if possible) people to complete this quick survey. Then summarize the overall results and discuss some of the common trends (and/or outliers) you observed. What surprised you (or didn't)? How do these results compare to how you would have answered?

In the survey, my random demographic probably wasn't as random as it could be due to my social circle consisting mostly of people who view gaming in a positive light. Also, I didn't ask anyone to take the survey who didn't play games. One finding in the answers was that those who played the most were highly invested in online multiplayer games and receive a large part of their social interaction electronically. Another trend that was easy to identify in my surveys was a general dislike towards pay-to-win systems and micro transactions. I wasn't surprised by these results, and I share a similar sentiment.

4) Describe your own use of video games in the terms hardcore and casual. Discuss the different factors that go into your dedication and commitment to playing, and how you weigh the importance and reconcile with other responsibilities in your life.

I recently played through Dave the Diver, while I absolutely loved that game, it isn't my typical flavor of games that I would seek out. I would define that game as "casual", which is easy to pick-up, simple controls, can be segmented into small bites. Historically, I've spent the most time on "hardcore" games, which I would define as controls that are difficult to master and require a higher level of dedication and patience. Games that I would consider hardcore would be the souls-like games (eg. Dark Souls, Bloodborne, Sekiro, etc). As far as weighing the importance of these types of games with other responsibilities, I treat gaming as any other hobby that I am passionate about. Games are something that I play both to unwind as well as to chase the feeling of accomplishment from completing a challenge.

5) What are your thoughts, and opinions on gaming (the good, bad, and the ugly). Where does someone who plays casual Facebook games 4 hours a day fit in?

There are many good qualities about video games such as interactive storytelling, engaging challenges to the player, and a social platform that allows you to socialize with friends. The bad of videogaming is that it is easy to overspend time in these worlds. That, of course, can be said about any hobby and will ultimately be subjective to the person in question. The ugly, in my opinion, is the capitalization on gamers for micro transactions and pay-to-win mechanics. 4 hours a day playing Facebook games sounds like a lot of time to be spending on casual games that don't have story lines. Many of the games that I've seen on social media platforms are endless timesinks where you likely aren't engaging with other players on a social level, either. While there may be people who are able to manage this level of a hobby and still be functional, I'd argue that this is a higher example of game addiction and a person's quality of life would likely improve by dialing this back.

6) *Discuss the fanatical loyalty purchasers of particular machines (platforms or consoles) seem to show. Provide specific examples.*

The question seems to allude to the console wars where fans of a respective company would primarily play on machines made only from said company, primarily Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft. I don't have any personal examples that I can point to. I've purchased many different consoles because my primary drive has always been to experience a game.

7) Go to <https://www.mobygames.com/game/>. Note the number of platforms used over the years. Choose one that is no longer for sale and not part of a continuing product line such as the PlayStation or Xbox. Research its history and write a short summary explaining what happened to it or the company that made it.

The Atari 2600 was released in 1977 and is one of the first home video game consoles. The console had many arcade games with some of their most popular releases being Pitfall, Frogger, and Ms. Pac-Man. Games continued to be released on this console all the way until 1990 with Klax being the final game. Atari the company is no longer around as they were acquired by Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. Another interesting fact about the Atari company is that the arcade restaurant Chuck E. Cheese is a subsidiary company.

8) *What machines did you have as a child and which ones do you have access to now? Have your purchase/play patterns changed i.e.: increasing trend toward digital distribution and episodic delivery, and away from retail sales?) Do you consider yourself reflective of the normal gaming market? Explain.*

The first gaming consoles that I purchased was the Sega Saturn. A few years later I also purchased the Nintendo 64. As an adult my primary gaming console is the PS5 and I will occasionally play games on my PC as well. My play patterns are a bit more focused now. Mostly because of the limited amount of time that I have. Due to this, my gaming sessions are more focused than when I was younger and had more time to aimlessly play games. I try to get physical games whenever I can, but I also subscribe the PlayStation Network, where I am able to access the digital library for a yearly fee. I wouldn't consider myself to be a typical gamer as I will often wait for a game to go on sale before I acquire it. As such, I often don't keep up with newer releases and opt to play from my ever growing catalog of older games that I've collected.

9) Go http://www.vgchartz.com/analysis/platform_totals Note the relative hardware and software sales for a given platform between North America, Europe, and Japan. Compare the populations of these regions. What does this tell you about their buying patterns?

North American sales have topped all the major consoles that I have owned, with the exception of the Sega Saturn, which was largely consumed by the Japanese market. While I can't make much of a conclusion based off of just the worldwide sales, it makes sense that I would see the Sega Saturn have a much higher popularity in Japan just due to the number of titles that were made available in English vs Japanese.

10) Go to <http://store.steampowered.com/> Note the discounts available. Compare them with the prices offered in retail stores. Can retail continue to compete with Steam and other digital distribution methods? What does retail offer that digital distribution does not?

Steam has always reigned king with their ability to provide deep discounts to games. The distribution of digital games without the manufacturing/shipping concerns give an edge to Steam that retail stores can't compete with. However, retail offers physical games that allow for true ownership of the product. I also enjoy physical copies of games because I enjoy a collection that can be looked over manually. Digital games have no resale/regifting options.