

Research Presentation

COMP230

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Killing People in Video Games

- Many video games depict violence, often against other people.
- Over 25 percent of the best selling games in 2017 were classed as Shooters, which is a typically violent genre. [1]
- With over 2.2 billion gamers worldwide in 2017, games have the ability to reach a huge audience. [2]

- Ongoing debate about the psychological impact that violence in video games can have on players, which is itself related to the greater issue of violence in media in general. [3]
- Video games can desensitise their audience to violence, thereby making them less disinclined to towards it. [4]
- Violent video games can increase levels of aggression in players. [5]

Relevance in the Games Industry

Several aspects of these issues are of particular relevance to the games industry:

- The legality of games regarding their violent content - some games are banned or heavily censored. (e.g. Manhunt 2, Postal 2)
- Morality of working for or endorsing a company that produces violent content.
- Responsibility as an independent developer.

Is it Ethical to Give Players the Ability to Kill People in a Video Game?

- To what extent is it ethical to create games that allow or encourage acts of violence against human characters?
- Where does responsibility for the violent content of a video game lie? With the player for choosing to engage with it, or the developers for providing the means for the player to experience it?

Discussion

- Violent games have been prevalent in our culture in forms such as rugby and hockey for over a hundred years. The risk of games must be balanced against their value as forms of entertainment, training and revenue. [6]
- Violence and competitiveness are two separate components of games that are often closely linked. There is evidence that the competitive nature of games can have a far greater effect on player aggression than violent content. [7]
- Despite this, playing violent video games has been linked to short term effects such as increases in pro-violent attitudes [5]

Discussion Continued

- The values expressed by the game can change the way in which its violent content is perceived. [8]
- Should developers therefore have a moral obligation to portray violence in a weighty and non-trivial fashion?
- Argument that players can perform violent or immoral acts in a video game without endorsing those actions themselves. [9]

Difficulties

- Morality and ethics are both subjective and hard to quantify.
- Difficult to measure effects of video games on players' aggression or reaction to violence.

References I

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