Reception Studies

The Sims modding as a way for women to approach and learn IT

Abstract

Modding represents an important part of many well-known video games and it is often used as a way to teach, or self-teach, IT and coding, and the EA's The Sims franchise makes no exception.

This paper analyses how game modding, with a particular attention to The Sims, can be used as a precious mean to make IT more approachable and appealing for young girls and older women.

Different observations and self-observations are conducted, including an analysis of which skills are needed to engage into modding.

Many stories and researches are taken as examples to highlight the usefulness of this method to learn IT, or at least develop an interest in this field.

Finally, it is concluded that using The Sims modding to make IT accessible to girls and women seems to be a very valuable mean to develop new interests and learn new important skills useful to computer-related activities or careers, whether technical or artistic oriented.

1. Introduction

Even though in the UK 46% of gamers are women (Luke, 2018), only 14% of games jobs are held by women (Ramanan, 2017).

These numbers are worrying, especially considering that the percentage of women in tech jobs is expected to decline even more by 2025 (Morris, 2017).

It becomes obvious that a solution to this huge gender gap must be found. However, even though many associations to facilitate this process exist (Women in Tech) (Wise Campaign) (Girls Who Code), there are no direct ways to find an effective solution, as the reason of the problem itself seems to originate from many different issues. The most popular opinion supports the theory that this issue originates from childhood, as the "the home computers for boys and not girls is a compelling theory" (Elizabeth, 2017) or "that boys are being nudged

down certain career paths and girls down others" (Khan, 2017). But also stereotypes and the need to adhere to socially-acceptable manners also seem to influence young girls' decisions, as computer-related activities, especially programming, are seen as "something overtly masculine and geeky" (Vu, 2017). Therefore, the need to find a solution becomes even more compelling considering how deeply-rooted into young girls' minds these thoughts are.

As women, of all ages, enjoy playing video games as much as men, video games themselves can become a powerful mean to invert the trend just described. However, starting to create video games from scratch might seem a quite scary and difficult task, especially to young girls. Even though there are many workshops and clubs that point at making this approach straightforward and easy to understand (ComputerXplorers), there is still a strong "school-related" aspect that might induce youngsters to feel forced to adapt to a specific teaching scheme, creating oppositions to the learning process (Hayes & King, 2009).

This is where modding becomes handy. Unlike creating video games from scratch, "modders" can work on small aspects of existing games, from their gameplay to their graphics. For this reason, girls and women can potentially work on their favourite games, making the whole creative and technical learning process much more approachable and scalable.

Therefore, this paper focuses on modding as a way to make girls and women's interest towards IT grow, but also to improve their logic and computing skills. The EA's The Sims franchise is used as main example for this approach, and this choice is extensively explained in the following sections of the document.

2. The Sims and Modding

In this section, both the game and approach choices are further analysed, in relation to female audience's game trends.

2.1. Learning Approach Choice

As already discussed before, modding represents a unique and invaluable learning approach that very much differs from video game creation from scratch.

2.2. Game Choice

The EA's The Sims franchise has sold almost 200 million copies (Wikipedia - The Sims) and, in 2014, around 57% of The Sims players were women (Harwell, 2014).

Even though it might be easy to identify the reasons of this success amongst the female audience in the game's resemblance to a "dollhouse" (Schiesel, 2006), this is not the whole

truth. Hayes and King have identified other aspects to women's affinity to this game in particular (Hayes & King, 2009): even considering The Sims as a real-life simulation where players have to build families, it's also true that most of the users find unconventional ways to play the game, such as creating fantasy or sci-fi environments that involve vampires, aliens and many other features that go beyond the very traditional and wrongly stereotyped female-like family simulation game (Hayes, 2011).

- La comunità è piena di mod e content creati da utenti -> the sims è flessibile e highly customisable
- La comunità supporta I newbie
- Comunità femminile e aperta -> meno harrassment come già successo altrove

2.3. Stories and researches

3. The Sims' Community opinions

4. Self-Observations

5. Reflections and Conclusion

6. Future Work

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