

# CALL OF DUTY

*Image Owned by Activision*

## Does Profit Produce Quality?

### Visualizing Call of Duty Data

By: Jesse C. Pacheco

If a company manufactures a product and sells millions of units year after year. Does that mean the product is well-made? We're learning that if a product brings in a large profit. That doesn't necessarily mean it's a well-made product. Look at designer fashion, automobiles, and alcohol. These industries make billions of dollars each year, but is the product any better than their "Non" luxury counterparts? We spend an exuberant amount of money on these products and others dream of being able to own any of these items.

The top reasons for people to spend their income on these objects are brand loyalty, the placebo effect, or status symbol. With this in mind, if a video game rise to the top of the selling charts, is it a video game worth your money and time?

One video game franchise has become a behemoth in the industry, Activision's Call of Duty. Whether you are a die-hard fan, or loath the series. Each year the new title ranks in millions of dollars from the games, and billions more in micro-transactions. At the franchise's start. It simulated World War II. Now has evolved into modern, space, and futuristic warfare.

The first title released in the year 2003. Selling 4.5 million copies which at the time was considered a successful launch. It also needs to be noted that this was before mainstream competitive online services for home consoles. The year before, Microsoft introduced their Xbox Live service allowing a wider range of audiences to compete on the internet. Wireless connectivity was in the infants' stages and the internet speeds were not robust as today's speeds. Before that, online play was an exclusive P.C. feature. There were consoles that attempted to connect to the internet but were severely limited in bandwidth and features.

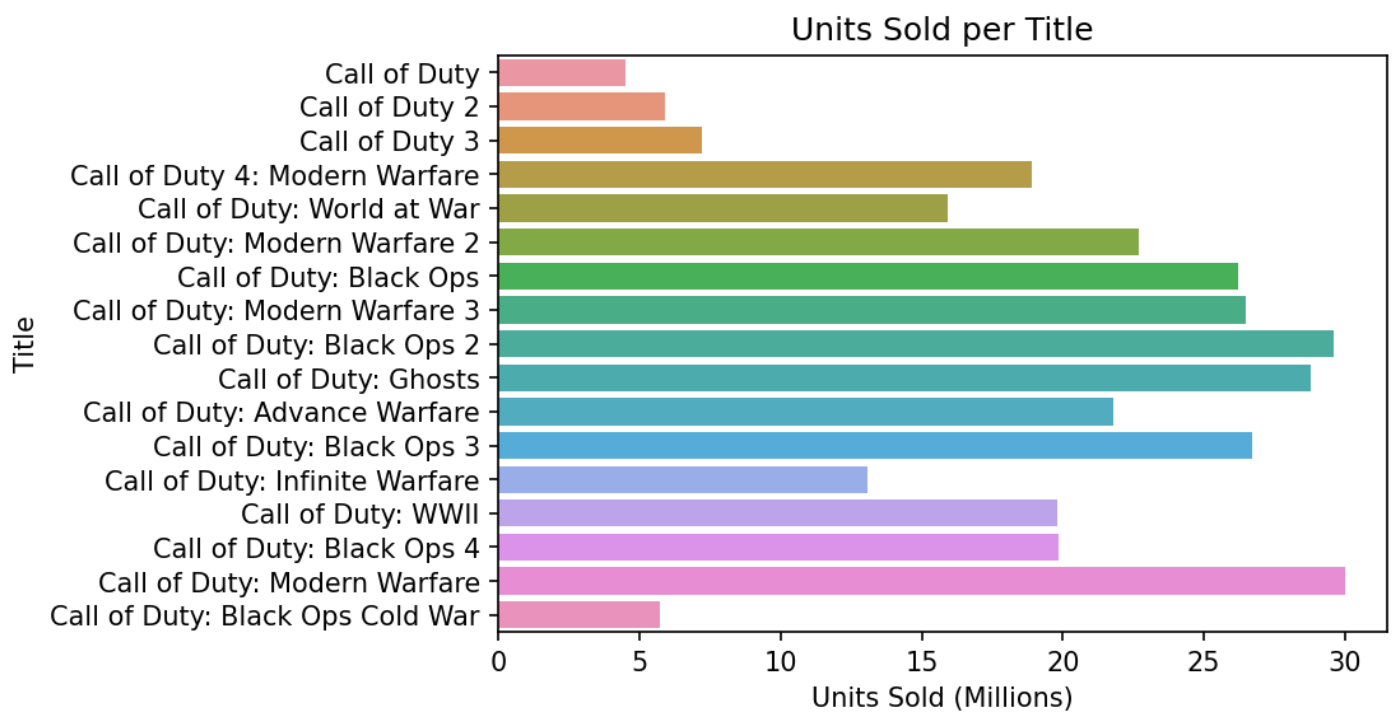
Once online play became mainstream, the Call of Duty series skyrocketed into popularity. Allowing players to compete alone, with friends, unlocking weapons, and weapon attachments. Players received personal aspiration for dedicating the time to rise through ranks and were able to flaunt their accomplishments with vanity items. In today's time, if a Call of Duty title released and sold 4.5 million copies, it would be considered a failure in the company's eye.

I will visualize the franchise in graphs that display the sales, ratings, and player count. Then offer possible conclusions.

## THE PROFIT

Profit is considered to be an exact indicator that a product is worth the money to spend on. It shows that consumers are willing to spend their hard-earned money to get the product. The colorful visual below presents the number of units sold from

each title.



Statistics are from statista.com | Cold War was recorded from January 2021

Fig. A

From Call of Duty 3 to Call of Duty 4 the sold units doubled. The main attribute for the hike is Infinite Ward strayed from tradition. They created a new setting within the modern world, modern weapons, and high-tech military devices. Alongside the features mentioned it also crafted a new immersive storyline, iconic characters that have echoed throughout the franchise. Characters including Captain Price, Soap, and Ghost.

Each year, a new title is released and sells millions of copies. For a while, the trend consisted of the current title selling more than the last title. The release of Black Ops II begins the decline of sales They were still monstrous, but less than the last title. Projecting a steady decline. Until 2019, when Modern Warfare released.

## THE RATINGS

A product's ratings are the strongest indicator of the product's integrity. It gives the consumer insight into the product and indicates the favorable and disliked features, which could sway a consumer's decision to buy the product. The line graph presented below shows the ratings for each game, from each game console.

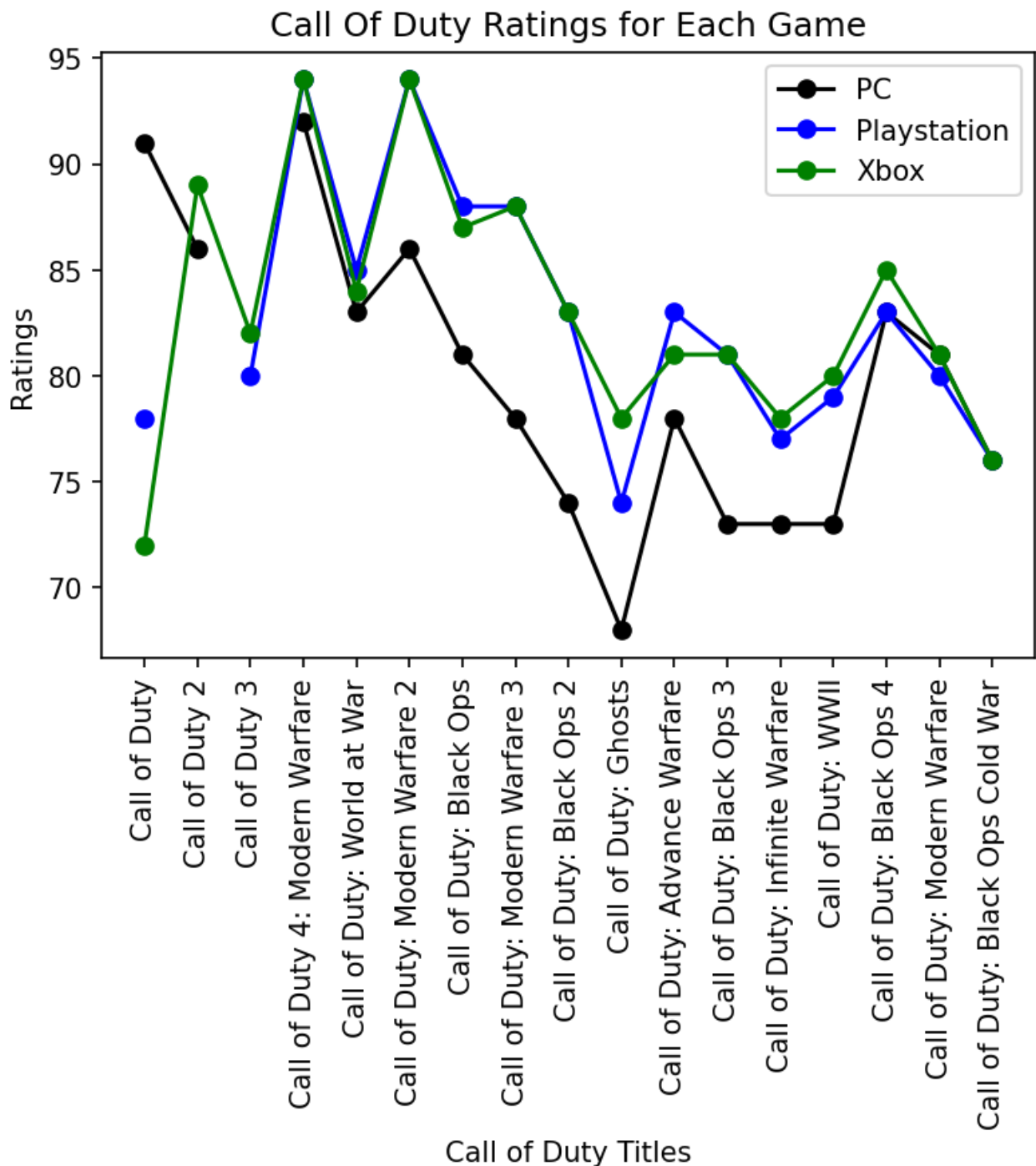


Fig. B

The lowest rated game in the entire franchise is Ghosts. It has gained the reputation as the worst title in the series. Yet, it's third in the units sold with 28 million. With that statistic, it should have a higher rating. Why is there such a divide?

The long "hype" from developers and representatives for the title. They talked about the new features and promised it to be the best to date. With the addition of the release of the next-generation consoles. The new title would change the face of the franchise.

On the other side of the spectrum, 2019's Modern Warfare is the highest-selling title to date with 30 million units. With the earlier trend, it would constitute it having the highest rating. Instead, it hovers above 81/100. The second highest title Black Ops II has a rating of 84/100. The third highest-selling title Ghosts was around the rating of 74/100.

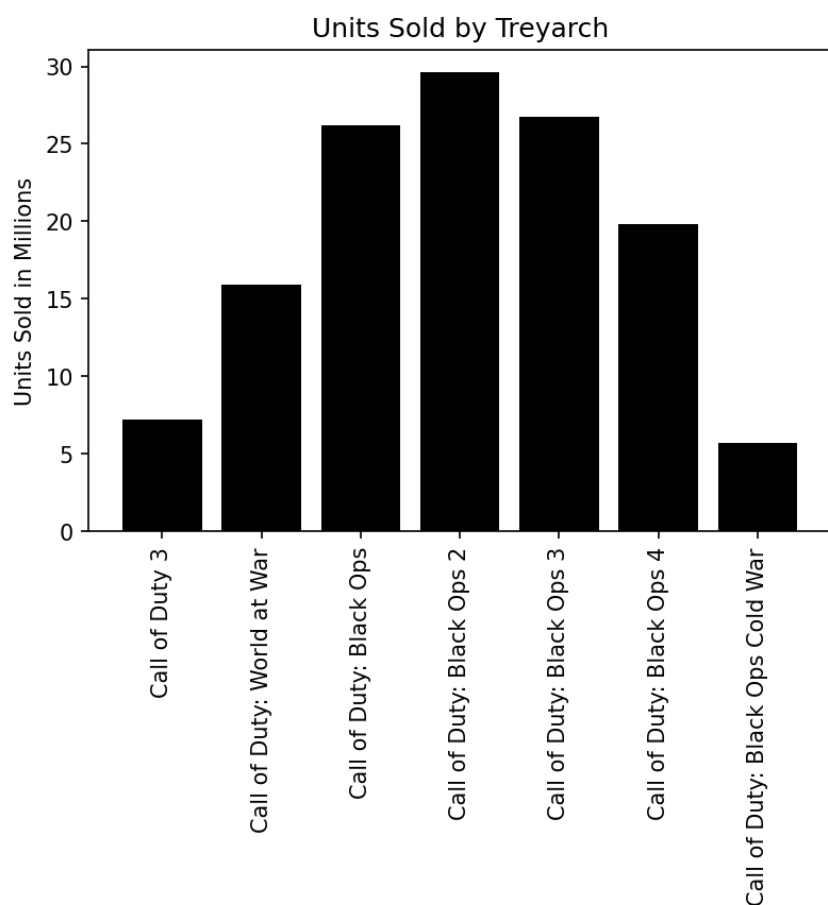
Now the highest-rated games Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare and its sequel Modern Warfare 2 came in at 94/100. Yet, sold

18 million and 22.7 million. The next title after Modern Warfare 2, Black Ops sold a little more than Modern Warfare 2 at 26.2 million but garnered a lower rating than the past titles.

Titles that sold high amounts of units, were rated less than their past titles. The simple explanation could be with the success of the fourth and sixth titles. It threw the series into mainstream popularity. Afterward, the series followed the same cookie-cutter design for the next releases. Also, the series used the same core engine. Over time there were improvements upon the engine that focused more on smoother textures and robust details, but little about the gameplay.

## THE RATINGS AND PROFIT BY EACH DEVELOPER

*-The ratings displayed are the PlayStation version. There's no specific reason for this choice.*



The bar graph reveals that there's a continued rise in sales. Then peaks at Black Ops II, but the rating peak at Black Ops. This shows that the game quality after Black Ops suffered. Dropping 5 points, where it continues to hover for the future titles and then dropping again.

While the sale statistics show that fans were expecting the sequel to Black Ops to be better in quality, but became disappointed. Hence, the uptick in sales with Black Ops II and then lowers. Black Ops III continues to show a downward trend with sales and ratings. With Black Ops IIII, the game was well-received by critics, but the sales declined. Even though the ratings are the same as Black Ops II, it sold far fewer units.

**In total Treyarch has sold 131 million units.**

The bar graph reveals that Infinite Ward titles continued to rise in sales. Then takes a harsh

dip with Infinite Warfare. The line graph depicts that the rating spike at Modern Warfare (2008) plateaus with Modern Warfare 2. Then drops until it hits rock bottom with Ghosts. Then rises through the next two titles. This shows that there were high expectations for Ghosts from the fans, but they were disappointed with the finished product. This disappointment bled into Infinite Warfare and other titles.

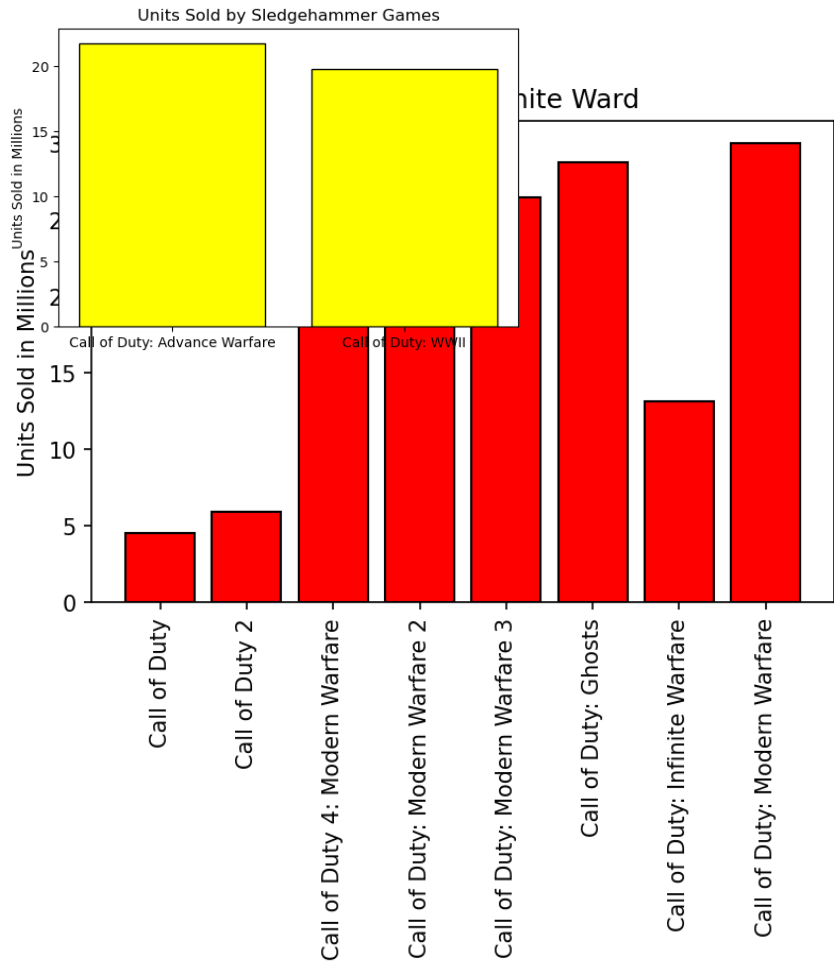
Another possible reason for the nosedive in ratings and sales is the harsh departure of Infinite Ward President Jason West and CEO Vince Zampella. There's a long and lengthy story for the reason of their departure, but I am going to abridge it. Jason and Vince negotiated with Activision about their contract. They promised to deliver Modern Warfare 2 in 2009 in exchange for large bonuses and creative control of the series. The corporation agreed with the terms but added the clause that if they were fired. The rights of the series fall back to Activision.

With no surprise, Activision tried to find anything that could end their contracts. They went with the reason of "Insubordination". Which the pair lost all rights to the series and financial bonuses they were promised. In the end, the pair would win a lawsuit against the corporation and receive what they were owed. With the settlement money, they created their

own studio and released a new series which have garnered favorable reviews.

After Jason and Vince were out of the studio the next release (Modern Warfare 3) sold more copies than the last but gained a less rating. The next title sold even more, but the rating plummeted through the floor. This could be caused by the fact that employees in Infinite Ward left after the incident. Some found work, others joined their former bosses in the new company. Infinite Ward had a skeleton crew. Activision hired another studio to fill in the gaps which lead to cookie-cutter gameplay. Ultimately leading to the fans becoming fatigued of the series.

**In total Infinite Ward has sold 150 million units.**

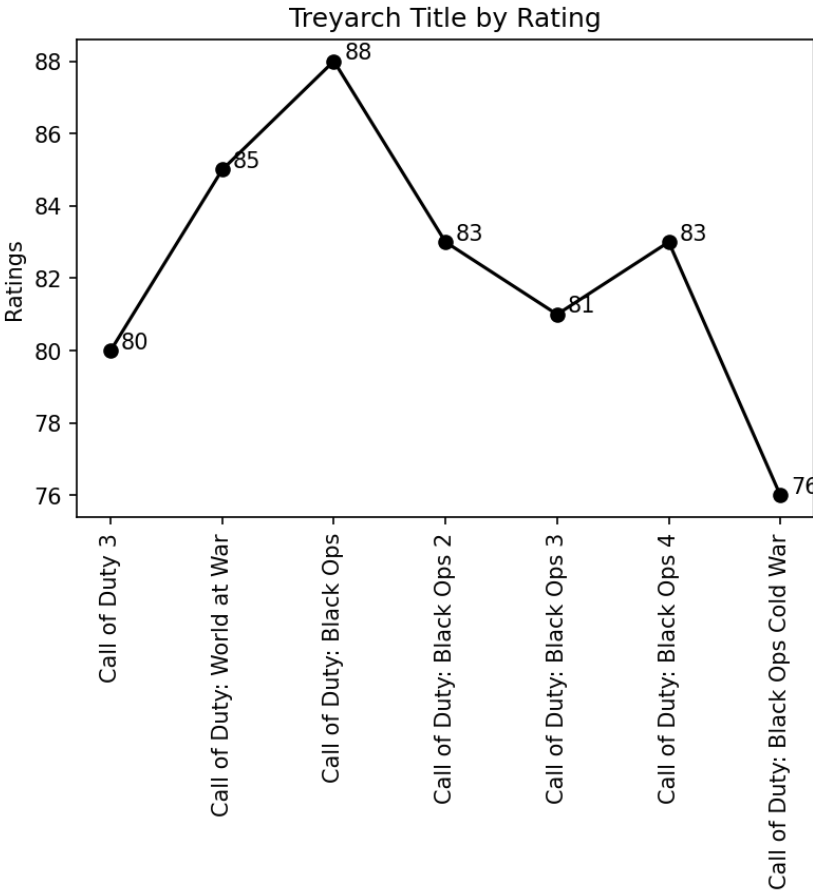


Up until 2014, there were two studios creating Call of Duty titles. Each year Infinite Ward releases their title then Treyarch. Activision hired Sledgehammer games to the annual release, but being able to give the studios more time to develop their titles. This developer has sold two titles so far. Advance Warfare earned an 83 rating and WWII earned a 79 rating with the third title in current development.

**In total Sledgehammer Games has sold 41 million units.**

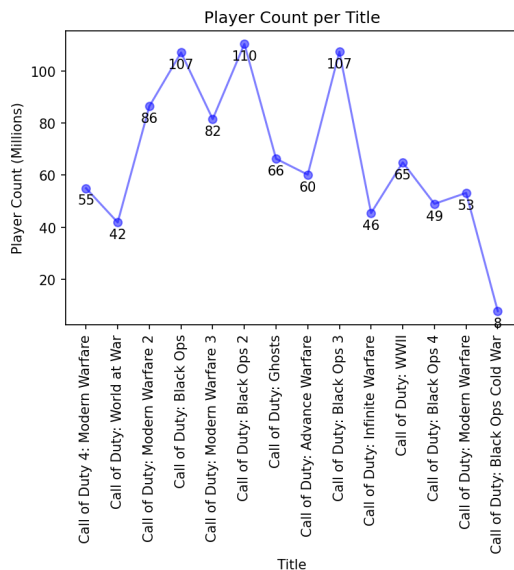
*The franchise in total has sold over 323 million units.*

*Which equals to about \$19,376,770,000 (Given each title sells at \$59.99).*



# THE RETENTION

Another measure of success would be the number of players that are online at the time of release. There have been games that were released ten plus years ago but still, have a dedicated online player base. This could show that even after the hype and excitement that it still offers the player enjoyment through their world.



*Statistics were recorded from gamstat.com | Cold War was recorded from January 2021*

Fig. C

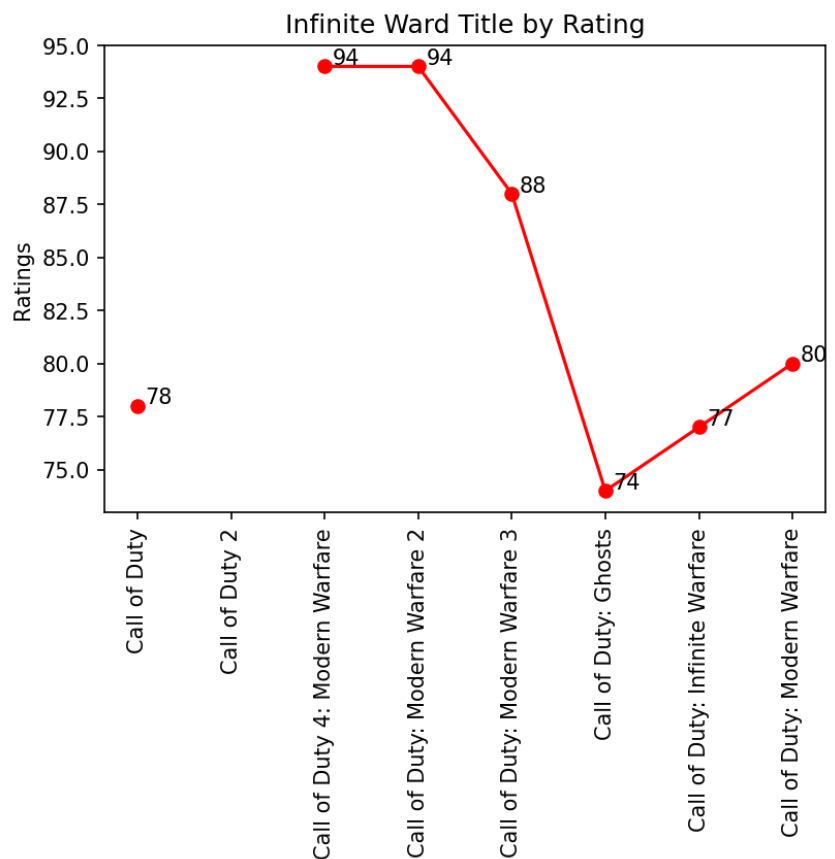
We can see there was a steady rise for online players until Black Ops. Then the next titles create valleys of inclining and declining. Black Ops II created the highest apex, then the count is never able to recover.

Looking at the graph, every title that is released by Treyarch brings in a large player base, but through the years, the series as a whole continues to bleed players, despite the number of units sold or high ratings.

Another addition to the downfall could attribute to the trailer for Infinite Warfare. As of today (May 2021), the video on YouTube has garnered 636,000 likes and 3.9 million dislikes. When it released, it gained less than favorable reviews. Another move that was not well-received by the fans at the time was the one way to get the remastered version of the masterpiece Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare is to buy the disliked game at a premium price.

The release of 2019's Modern Warfare excited fans with a new engine that was developed for the game. It felt different, it included new features that were not in the earlier titles. With no surprise, it exceeded the fan's expectations. It became the highest-selling title with 30 million units, passing Black Ops II which sold 29 million units. Black Ops II had a player base of 110 million. Modern Warfare (Not including Warzone) brought in 53 million players, less than half. The next title was developed by Treyarch did not use the new engine, which fans at once noticed and criticized.

The loss in players could be explained that after Ghosts, fans could have felt "cheated" giving in to the hype, spending their hard-earned money for a new game, but then disliking it. Which in turn set the precedent for the rest of the titles. The main attribution is fatigue. For a lot of players. It has become hard to justify the reason to drop \$59.99 (\$69.99 for next-generation



console) to own the next title. When the titles feel the same from the earlier, but with a different theme.

## MY PERSPECTIVE

I started playing the series with Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. I thoroughly enjoyed the game, the intense action, the addictive online play. Two years later I forgot about the series. Then a friend mentioned to me about Modern Warfare 2 and explained that the online part is enjoyable. I bought it at a discount, played it, and enjoyed it. Then bought and played the next two games (Black Ops, and Modern Warfare 3). I enjoyed them too but didn't get the same thrill as I did with Modern Warfare 2. Black Ops II was released, instead of buying it on day one. I rented it at a Redbox stand for a day. Played the first two campaign missions then jumped online. I reached rank 35 and stopped. Returned the game the next day and never went back to it. To this day I have never prestige or completed the campaign. To me, it felt that I saw everything that the game had to offer and \$59.99 is not worth the money. The games after, I held onto the same attitude.

I do own almost every title but never paid full price for them. Whether buying it used on eBay or waiting for the holidays for the deep discount (which is guaranteed to happen with every release). These games are fun to play, but they expire because after a while they become redundant. Run into battle! Guns blazing! Kill the enemy! Die! Re-spawn and do it all over again! Then the rise of hackers manipulating the game in their favor hurt the integrity of the competition.

In recent times the series has gone from being the innovator to imitator. They were in the lead of creating new systems and gameplay modes for the first-person shooter genre, but over time it has become clear that they could not come up with new features to differentiate themselves from their earlier titles. Infinite Ward's Ex-employees studio (Respawn) released their title. The series is a futuristic first-person shooter that includes jet pack, wall running, large mechanized robots. The units sold are lower than Call of Duty's numbers, but the reviews have been high.

With the releases of Respawn titles. The Call of Duty franchise implemented jetpacks and wall running in their titles. Think about it. Respawn, former employees of Infinite Ward were influencing the current titles. It shows that the talent was in the two employees. Even in the (2019) Modern Warfare, they borrowed mechanics from EA's Battlefield series.

The series cannibalizes itself. When the new product is released. The last title fades away. Much like planned obsolescence like any sports game. It seems like once the corporation has squeezed the money out of the title. It throws the lifeless body aside and starts draining the new one. Consumers would be more interested in buying the next title if it's priced at \$40 or below because most people buy it to play online. Then once they have seen everything that the game has to offer it's time to move on.

My hope for the series is Activision starts leaning into the innovation aspect of development and not the "Popping titles out like popcorn". 2019 proved that the fans were yearning for a big change. Let's see if the trend continues for the new title.

**Statistics came from data in an Excel sheet created by Jesse C. Pacheco**

-<https://www.kaggle.com/jessepacheco/codstats>

**Graphs created by Jesse C. Pacheco** - <https://www.kaggle.com/jessepacheco/call-of-duty-ratings-and-sales>

**Activision settles lawsuit with former Infinity Ward heads West and Zampella**

-<https://venturebeat.com/2012/05/31/activision-settles-lawsuit-with-former-infinity-ward-heads-west-and-zampella/>