**A Critique of “The Uber Game” by Financial Times**

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URL: <https://ig.ft.com/uber-game/>

<https://www.ft.com/content/c9a8b592-a81d-11e7-ab55-27219df83c97>

Financial Times produced a news game, The Uber Game, that allows a user to experience the gig economy using stories gathered from FT’s journalists and work from FT’s artists, developers and UX designers. This is one of my favorite digital news games. As an avid gamer, it's cool to see journalists tap into other forms of media. In the beginning- there was oral storytelling. Society moved to pictures, then print, then digital and now interactive. From here, journalism can go anywhere- I chose this The Uber Game (and the corresponding article) to highlight the ways journalism can grow and criticize the ways storytelling is eroded.

The Uber Game is easy to find. Typing in “the uber game” on a search engine, like Google, will bring you directly to the Financial Times’ piece. It’s worth mentioning- this interactive piece won an award at the [Online Journalism Awards in 2018.](https://awards.journalists.org/entries/the-uber-game/) The Uber Game won the Excellence and Innovation in Visual Digital Storytelling award for a large newsroom. The game is easy to navigate. A user clicks on choices to advance the narrative, Choose-Your-Own-Adventure style. In many respects, this game is accessible. Anyone with an internet connection can play the game and read the article.

The game could be more accessible, however. The Uber Game is offered in english- no other translations (no translations given from FT, unclear if third-party software could translate words.) The game does not offer narration. The article does not offer narration. Only folks who can see, can read English and can click around a screen can play the game. Folks who can access Financial Times are at the whim of the accessibility the site offers (moderately accessible, honestly.)

The Uber Game reminds me of the javascript games on children’s websites in the early 2000s. The design is aesthetically pleasing, easy to navigate and fun! The point is to make as much money as possible in a limited amount of time. The game gives a series of text prompts layers on top of colorful environments. The user takes on the role of an Uber driver that is a dad with a thousand dollar mortgage. Each decision has a consequence, positive or negative, that affects the final outcome.

I don’t have much criticism in the way of design or functionality. The game is truly fun and easy for any level gamer. A lazy internet user to a veteran programmer can play and learn more about the ins and outs of driving for Uber on the west coast, specifically.

The user will get the meat of the story by getting through the difficulty in the game. Reporting takes the front seat with regard to the script. Will you drive in San Francisco or Sacramento? Will you lease a car or a van? Each option has a bearing on what you can make. Driving for Uber can be freeing and frustrating. It can be a lucrative business or a strained avenue for income. Simulating this experience brings the narratives in the corresponding article to life. Instead of just reading about drivers who have to put up with riders that trash the car- you play through that scenario.

The options are limited in what kind of driver you are. This is most likely due to time constraints and core mission. The game could be more fleshed out. For example, the option is given for where a player can drive but not where a player lives. The option is given for what a player can drive but it’s only two options. For a news game- the limited options keep the story simplified and flowing. As a game, the limited options make the game small. This story on gig workers that drive for Uber is vast. No one driver’s story is exactly like another’s. This could be why broad strokes were captured in the game with simple character design. The case could be made that the game is too simple and leaves some good storytelling out.

All in all, I don’t have much in the way of critique. If the game was more accessible and offered more player customization it’d be 10/10. For now I feel the game and article are 9/10. It’s fun, allows an experience that gives more insight and is simple enough for anyone to jump into.

This mode of storytelling is powerful because it allows communities not immediately present in a story to get closer to the material. Gaming as a tool can make stories accessible for neurodivergent, disabled and youth populations. Data driven stories specifically can come to life past infographics. Data driven stories can take the form of Q & A games, role-playing games, or even word games! Just think- in newspapers, crossword puzzles would take buzzwords from stories and arrange them.

I remember the Scholastic periodical that was given out in school. There were Nat-geo like stories that were simplified for children and featured in pages next to colorful games. I remember being intrigued and excited to jump into my interactive magazine. Here in the future (our present) we can do even more for our kids. We can bring entire stories to life- imagine Nat Geo stories on endangered animals in VR. Imagine Forbes stories on startups using javascript! The future of journalism is exciting!