

Understanding Gaming's Connection with New Media

Safian Qureshi
Drama 571
10086638

Contents

Abstract	3
I. INTRODUCTION	4
i. Background	4
II. DISCUSSION	5
i. Consoles as Media Devices	5
ii. The Need to Communicate	6
iii. Games as Social Software	7
iv. Game Culture	7
III. CONCLUSION	10
ii. Bringing it Together	10
BIBLIOGRAPHY	11

Abstract

As new media progresses and develops into a means of connecting people around the world, gaming too has evolved over the years alongside to converge with new media. There was a point in history where a greater part of games aimed to be an attraction to one player only, being classified as 'single-player video games'. A single-player game, by definition, is;

'a video game where input from only one player is expected throughout the course of the gaming session'¹

Although some of the earliest videogames such as *Pong* were designed to be a two-player experience, the majority of videogames prior to the year 2000 were for one player only². Today, it is almost mandatory for a game to have a multiplayer component to it to perform well in terms of sales. The biggest, most popular titles in gaming that have absurd amount of sales such as *Call of Duty*, *League of Legends* and *World of Warcraft* all have one thing in common; a multiplayer mode. This paper will briefly engage in dialogue as to how games have evolved into a form of social software. It will also establish a link between how the growth and progress of new media has had a direct influence on the gaming industry as a whole.

¹ "Single-player video game - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single-player_video_game (accessed July 17, 2013).

² Kocurek, Carly . "Game Studies - The Agony and the Exidy: A History of Video Games." Game Studies - Issue 1202, 2012. http://gamestudies.org/1201/articles/carly_kocurek (accessed July 17, 2013).

I. INTRODUCTION

i. Background

Throughout the development of new media, each device produced enabled society to become closer and connected. This is evident in the gaming industry as well, as the vast majority of games today aim to build communities around the game. Services such as the PlayStation Network/Xbox Live for consoles and Steam for the PC exist as a product of the direction new media is headed in; an always connected world.

Looking at the past, although major games prior to 2000 were primarily single player, some of them did incorporate multiplayer functionality. The idea of local multiplayer can be seen in the first generation of consoles with the Magnavox Odyssey in 1972 having two ports for controller input³. Generations of consoles to come would follow suit and include multiple controller ports, recognizing that games are meant to be social.

As new media technology grew and the internet became less crude and increasingly accessible to the public, the gaming industry took advantage and integrated it with their games. The 'online' experience would become popularized first with PC games such as Warcraft and Doom. These games would not actually take advantage of the internet, rather would give players multiplayer by Local Area Networks (LAN) in the case of Warcraft. Doom, on the other

³ Winter, David . "Pong-Story : Magnavox Odyssey, the first video game system." Pong-Story . <http://www.pong-story.com/odyssey.htm> (accessed July 17, 2013).

hand, used a service called Dial Up Wide Area Network Games Operation (DWANGO) to match players that provided a monthly fee⁴. This service would be short lived as the internet became consumer friendly and widespread, *Quake* taking advantage of it and offering free multiplayer. Though the service was short lived, it pioneered and showed what the future would hold; the concept of players playing simultaneously amongst one another over large distances, a connected community which would eventually become reality.

II. DISCUSSION

i. Consoles as Media Devices

Game consoles in the past served one function and one function only; to read the cartridge and display the game on a television set. They were designed for a single purpose and their hardware architecture was quite limited. 'Homescreens' were nonexistent and turning on a console with the game disk inside would simply direct the TV to the menu for that specific game.

However with the advancements in new media, the consoles of today serve a much broader range of functions. No longer do console immediately play the game inserted, rather they prompt one towards a social hub of 'all in one' entertainment; music, videos and games together in one place. The Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 have attempted and almost succeeded

⁴ "1993-1994: DOOM and DWANGO - UGO.com." Daily Geek News Videos - UGO. <http://www.ugo.com/games/history-of-online-gaming-1993-1994> (accessed July 19, 2013).

to do that already, replacing the need for movie players such as DVD or Bluray. They are multimedia devices which do a good job of providing an easy to use interface to access a variety of content.

Microsoft is aiming to take down other media devices such as cable boxes as well with their launch of their next console, the Xbox One. They proclaim that their next generation of console will be able 'to deliver a whole new generation of blockbuster games, television and entertainment in a powerful, all-in-one device'⁵.

ii. The Need to Communicate

Looking back at the telegraph, this 'old media' tool provided us with a medium to have communication with distant groups of people. As the telegraph became replaced by the telephone, further development into the 'idea' of sending voice over large distances took place⁶. Voice Over IP (VOIP), simply put, offered voice communication over the internet. A direct impact of this progress in new media can be seen quite clearly in the gaming industry as this technology plays an integral role in the current and upcoming generation of consoles and handheld systems.

⁵ Matrick , Don. "Microsoft unveils Xbox One: the ultimate all-in-one home entertainment system." Microsoft Corporation. <http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/news/Press/2013/May13/05-21XboxPR.aspx> (accessed July 21, 2013).

⁶ Theodorou, Van. "Here's a History of VOIP." Worldnet Solutions Inc. <http://www.worldnetsolutionsinc.com/history-of-voip/#> (accessed July 21, 2013).

The origins of voice communications (for consoles) between gamers lie with the inception of SegaNet, the first online service for console gaming. Although that service was short lived, it paved the path towards future solid online services such as the PlayStation Network and Xbox Live. These two services provide users with a very concrete means of communication; voice, text and video chat.

iii. Games as Social Software

As websites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube take the world by storm with their popularity and ability to share social aspects of one's life easily, game industries are beginning to adopt their social concept with their games by creating community websites for their specific games. Games are no longer 'over' once the match ends; statistics on one's performance are recorded and saved. They then can be shared amongst a circle of friends or made public for anyone to see. For certain FPS games such as Halo, extensive amount of stat tracking is involved, which show the most popular weapons the player uses, the vehicles the player prefers and even heatmaps of where a certain player kills and is killed the most⁷.

Gamer profiles are created much like a Facebook profile, keeping track of your achievements that you gain throughout playing various games. Other gamers can also 'like' or 'dislike' a certain user much like Facebook thus building his reputation as a player on the Xbox Live servers.

⁷ "Bungie.net : Halo 3 Heatmaps." Bungie.net . <http://halo.bungie.net/stats/halo3/heatmapstats.aspx?player=b3yondl> (accessed July 25, 2013).

iv. Game Culture

The massive interest for games by the public has fueled the gaming industries expansion into more than just games. Popular games have community followings in which gatherings take place consisted of players and enthusiasts. MineCon, BlizzCon and QuakeCon to name a few have thousands upon thousands of attendees, dressed up and involved in the events. Due to the incredible growth spurt of this industry, a whole new media revolving around gaming has been created; gaming journalism. Websites offering the latest gaming news are often updated to the hour. Reporters at times are on scene of the latest unveils of major titles or new consoles and it is unmistakable that games are not simply electronic software one plays for a few hours anymore.

Besides the above, a whole new media 'genre' of videos has been created due to gaming labeled 'machinima'. Machinima is an art form in which a game provides with the settings and characters while the plot is created by the director. Some of the most popular machinima videos on YouTube such as Arby n the Chief and Red vs. Blue (both from the Halo universe) have a total of over 13 million views for the first two episodes⁸⁹. The machinima

⁸ "Red vs. Blue: Why Are We Here?" YouTube video, posted by "RoosterTeeth" June 3, 2008
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BAM9fgV-ts>.

⁹ "Arby 'n' The Chief : "Pilot" YouTube video, posted by "machinima" Jan 7, 2008
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kb8rdc-0OpQ>.

YouTube channel holds the record for most total views and is rank 11 on the most subscribed channels¹⁰ ahead of popular music channels and sports.

The competitive nature of multiplayer games also has driven a focus towards e-sports. These events have large venues and extensive media coverage for every game being played. The games are then broadcasted live to viewers over the internet and the number of viewers cannot be ignored. Major League Gaming (MLG), a professional electronic sports organization, comments on the matter;

“Our viewership numbers this year have been staggering and MLG now pulls in larger audiences than several traditional television cable networks. Our LIVE streams of the Pro Circuit National Championships garnered more 18-24 male viewers than Comedy Central, MTV, TBS, and FX draw in an average quarter hour and nearly as many as Adult Swim¹¹.”

Comparing esports with sports, the 2013 NBA Championships pulled in a total of 17 million viewers on ABC over an average of 5 games¹². By comparison, League of Legends pulled in 18

¹⁰ "machinima YouTube Channel Stats, Subscriber Statistics, Ranking ." YouTube Stats / Statistics VidStatsX . <http://vidstatsx.com/machinima/youtube-channel> (accessed August 1, 2013).

¹¹ Tassi, Paul. "Major League Gaming Finals Shatter Viewing Records Again, Outpaces Cable TV - Forbes." Information for the World's Business Leaders - Forbes.com. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2011/12/06/major-league-gaming-finals-shatter-viewing-records-again-outpaces-cable-tv/> (accessed August 2, 2013).

¹² Kramer, Staci. "ESPN's live-streamed NBA Finals averaged 330k viewers — paidContent ." paidContent . <http://paidcontent.org/2012/06/23/espns-live-streamed-nba-finals-averaged-330k-viewers/> (accessed August 1, 2013).

million viewers for its All-Star game¹³. It is clear that esports are definitely a type of new media that is a force to be reckoned with.

III. CONCLUSION

ii. Bringing it Together

As the world moves forward into an 'always on, always connected' world, gaming too moves and is influenced by new media's direction. The gaming industry has matured from simply developing a game that is played once to a game that is supported and updated for years to come by supplementary software such as DLC and websites to support it. Gaming consoles too have evolved into media devices offering entertainment beyond simply games. Games are no longer bounded by disks and cartridges, they have massive followings

David Marshall, a professor and Chair of the Department of Communication Studies sums the connection quite nicely between games and new media;

'Because they straddle the technologies of television and computers, electronic games are a channel through which we can investigate the various impacts of new media and the technologies of convergence.'¹⁴

¹³ Tassi, Paul. "League of Legends Drew 18 Million Viewers For Its All-Star Game - Forbes." Information for the World's Business Leaders - Forbes.com. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2013/07/11/league-of-legends-drew-18-million-viewers-for-its-all-star-game/> (accessed August 12, 2013).

¹⁴ Marshall, P.D. 2002, Video and Computer Gaming, in Cuningham, and Turner, (eds).,The Media and Communication in Australia (Second Edition), Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest. pp. 273.

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<http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2011/12/06/major-league-gaming-finals-shatter-viewing-records-again-outpaces-cable-tv/> (accessed August 2, 2013).

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<http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2013/07/11/league-of-legends-drew-18-million-viewers-for-its-all-star-game/> (accessed August 12, 2013).
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