Why we do not go outside and play

- A qualitative study of psychological motivators for video gaming

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study of motivators for gaming. The method used was grounded theory and data was collected through internet surveys on gaming forums, followed by further questions through e-mails. The data was analysed with affinity diagrams categorized by content to identify patterns. The results show that, entertainment, interactivity, experience and escapism are the overall motivating factors, while the factors that motivate players to play a specific game are narrative, gameplay, social and aesthetics. Furthermore, it was possible to find indications of a relationship between these factors.
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1. Introduction

Even though the mainstream video game industry is not even half a century old, it has had a major impact on the entertainment market. The industry had a global revenue of $91.8 billion in 2015 (Newzoo, 2016), compared to just four years earlier in 2012 when that number was $66.3 billion worldwide (Newzoo, 2013). This makes the video game industry revenue greater than the total global filmed entertainment revenue for 2015, even though these types of media have been established for a much longer time.

The gaming industry has also changed quickly over time, with technology developed for video games growing exponentially in power over a very short period of time, as well as the introduction and appropriation of new technology, such as smartphones and pads less than 10 years ago. A more recent example would be the Virtual Reality hardware being introduced at this very moment.

As the video game industry continues to grow and change, it remains unclear what actually motivates its popularity; some examples of very popular games in recent years are a blocky mining simulation and another where you play as a goat.

This study aims to take a look at what fundamentally motivates people to play games, and how they explain what makes and what breaks a game.
2. Research Approach

In this chapter the research methodology used in this study is presented, as well as detailed accounts of the data collection process and the analysis of the collected data.

2.1 Methodology

The methods chosen for this study are based on the grounded theory method formulated in the book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method is founded on the idea that through systematic analysis theories and concepts can be derived directly from the data.

The essential methods of grounded theory are described in *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide* (Birks and Mills, 2005) to include the following concepts:

- **Initial coding and categorization of data** is the first step of the data analysis, where the data is separated into groups, usually by identifying words with affinity to each other. Categories are groups of codes. These can be said to be theoretically saturated when further data analysis only return codes that fit into existing categories.

- **Concurrent data generation or collection and analysis** refers to the process of incrementally collect, analyse and code the data. This differs from other research methods that either collect and analyse all data in one go, or to first set up a theoretical proposition and then collect data to test that hypothesis.

- **Memo writing** is the concept of writing down and record the thought process during the whole research process, which can be helpful to form a cohesive theory from the data.

- **Theoretical sampling** is an iterative process further develop any identified categories, by locating sources of information relevant to the analytical process. Memo writing is recommended here to help to map any sources, as well as keeping track of the decision making process.

- **Constant comparative analysis** is another iterative process where all data, codes and and categories are compared to each other through the whole research process, where specially the comparisons between categories are important. This is what make grounded theory a inductive method.

- **Theoretical sensitivity** is a concept that addresses researchers will already have a degree of insight in the subject as well as themselves. This level of insight will most likely increase as the researchers handles and become immersed in the data. Birks and Mills describe that the concept of of theoretical sensitivity acknowledges this fact and accounts for it in the research process.
• **Intermediate coding** is the second stage of coding that follows the initial coding, but since the whole data analysis process are iterative in its nature the coding will move between these stages as part of the concurrent data generation and the constant comparative analysis. The purpose of the intermediate coding is to connect subcategories to form clearly defined categories, as well as connect categories to each other.

• **Identifying a core category** is something the researcher can choose to select a core category to encompass and explain the grounded theory as a whole, usually on a highly abstract and conceptual level. According to Birks and Mills this can be done when the all categories on all levels have reached full theoretical saturation.

• **Advanced coding and theoretical integration** is described as the most difficult part of the grounded theory method. The process of advanced coding includes the use of a storyline technique to present the grounded theory, and is critical for the theoretical integration. If done correctly, and with the assistance of theoretical codes drawn from existing theories, the final result can be a comprehensive explanation of a process or phenomena.

Due to its explorative approach to the subject of the research, as well as the qualitative and written form of the collected data grounded theory was considered an appropriate method for this study.

![Figure 1. Model of the research process for this study](image)

### 2.2 Data collection

Data was primarily collected through internet forums of three selected gaming sites. A post with a short description of the purpose of the inquiry followed by a single question was posted on internet forums hosted by the gaming websites The Escapist Magazine, FragZone and Penny Arcade. The question asked was:

“Why do you play games?”

The results of the first question varied, and focus was put primarily on answers from The Escapist Magazine, as these results tended to be considerably more extensive compared to the other forums. The answers were published by the respondents in the forums, and were public. Consent
was given for the answers to be used for research, collected through personal messages. In these messages an inquiry for possible follow-up questions was sent as well. The response was 100% positive. This question was sent to a selected number of participants. The follow-up question was:

“What can break a game for you?”

In addition to the electronic survey, a number of interviews were used for additional data. This allowed for more varied questions, but proved too time-consuming to be used extensively.

Interviews were also conducted with 3 students in their early 20’s. Each interview consisted of the same main questions, and the interviewees were encouraged to speak freely and elaborate on the subject in order to keep the data as consistent as possible. This method proved too time-consuming to complete on a larger scale.

At a later time, while this paper was being finalized, a smaller, additional set of data was collected from members of a multi-national gaming community based in the United Kingdom. The results from this smaller data collection was used to test the categories developed during the analysis phase described below.

2.3 Analysis

In total 46 people on internet forums responded, predominantly from The Escapist magazine forum. The respondents’ ages ranged from 14-53. No data about the gender of the respondents was collected as it was not deemed relevant for this survey. The respondents’ identities on the forums were kept anonymous by default and no action was taken to collect any identity data; nothing other than their self-assigned forum nicknames was ever used. As most of the data was already in text form, only the interviews needed to be transcribed.

The data was analysed by categorising statements by subject or concept. This was done in several iterations, and categories were added, removed or combined until a majority of the data had been compiled into suitable categories.

Using these categories, a rough outline of the connections between them began to form. This process served the same purpose as memo writing.

As more data was added, and the process of sorting and modifying the categories was iterated, a more complete and all-encompassing set of categories and subcategories was established. These categories and the interaction between them could then be used to form hypotheses and draw conclusions on the subject, as well as comparing the results to other research.
The final set of data was collected from a closed gaming community forum. The procedure was the same as the initial data collection from the internet forums. The number of respondents here was 7, and they ranged from 16-46 in age.
3. Results

In this chapter the results of data analysis and a discussion about the results are presented. The general properties of the identified categories and their relationship to each other will be presented, as well as a sample of quotes from the different categories.

3.1 Interpretation of Data

While studying the data some patterns can easily be found in the respondents’ answers. At first, an answer about the general motivations for gaming was given, followed by various example from games or related topics in much greater detail. The same pattern was seen in the answers for the second question, where the respondents were asked about what they considered to be negative, or game-breaking, aspects of a game.

Using this pattern two types of categories could be set up for further analysis. The first category is what I have chosen to call Primary Gaming Motivators. Those are the general reasons stated for why the respondents play videogames, that is not directly connected to individual games. While iterating through the data four types of primary motivators could be established:

- Entertainment
- Experience
- Interactivity
- Escapism

The other type of motivators that could be used for categorising were identified in a slightly different way. As the respondents started to get into more detail about specific games a number of aspects tied directly to a specific game were mentioned. Many of these aspects could be sorted together in more encompassing categories that better described their purpose in the game. I have chosen to call these categories Game Specific Motivators, and they include:

- Narrative
- Gameplay
- Aesthetics
- Community
In the following chapter we will more thoroughly look at how the respondents described their personal motivations, how it kept them playing a game, and the aspects that could ruin a game for them. It will also present how the interaction and balance between the Game Specific Motivators can affect the player’s overall perception of the game. The quotes provided are samples selected from the different categories describing a recurring concept. They are taken from various participants.

3.2 Primary gaming motivators

The primary gaming motivators are the more abstract type of motivators, that draws people to gaming in general. As players of many different types of games seem to have one or more of the same of these motivators, they can not be considered to be connected to any specific type of game.

It can also not be said that these motivators are unique for gaming, but rather the reasoning why gamers are drawn to their preferred medium.

3.2.1 Entertainment

"Games are fun. I like having fun. As long as I play them I am having fun so I keep playing them"

The most common, and perhaps the most loosely defined reason given for playing is simply “to have fun”. Many of the respondents acknowledged by that it is a very broad and almost all-encompassing concept. One respondent even went so far as to describe “fun” to be one of only two reasons people do anything at all.

The main reason for playing games is for entertainment. It’s why we do most anything in life.
It’s either necessary, which gaming isn’t, or it’s entertaining

An interesting theme that appeared several times in the data was how videogames as a medium was put in direct opposition with other, more traditional media such as books, movies and TV. In those cases the reason behind it is simply presented as a personal preference.

Entertainment- This is the big one and reason number one, I play games because they are fun, I play games for the same reason many watch tv or movies or read books. It passes the time enjoyably

Others explained the preference for games based on a lack of time.

I don’t watch tv very often, and when I have nothing better to do I will start up a quick session of a game I know won’t take any longer than 20-30 minutes to complete
An even more interesting theme that actually showed up a few times in the responses was an explicit disdain for other, older types of media, especially TV. Videogames were described as superior due to the fact that the player actively takes part of what is happening, rather than passively watching something.

Games offer a way you can take an active part of a story. You get to feel like you’re a part of it rather than getting the passive experience of watching a movie or reading a book.

3.2.2 Interactivity

I play video games because they’re kind of like movies, but interactive. Some people choose to watch American Idol or whatever. I choose something similar, but a bit more interactive.

The wish to take an active part and interact was mentioned so often it can be considered a primary motivator. The reason for it being frequently mentioned is most likely because it is the major aspect that differentiates videogames from other major types of media: books, movies and TV. The wish to be able to interact is such a major factor that it can be a significant motivator, even if the story of the game is inferior to that of other media.

Games don’t have as good of stories as books, but the added interactive element of gameplay does add a new depth to the stories given.

The interactive element of a game also seems to add to the suspense of the player experiences. Because many games are not linear there are possibilities for the player’s experience to deviate because of actions and decisions made by the player. The player’s experience can also be affected by elements of randomness within the game.

If I get into a game and something makes me go ‘Holy shit that was awesome, let’s try that again!’ that makes my day.

3.2.3 Experience

I play games because of the experience, sure movies and books are cool. They can transport me to another world, they can make me care, but games do it so much better.

“If I go outside I can play sports. If I play games, I can be awesome instead.”

Through interactivity some of the respondents express that they can experience something other than their ordinary life. They can experience stories or events in a wide array of different time periods and environments, and even in futuristic or fantasy settings. Movies and books could do this as well, but the interactivity of games make them unique compared to other media such as
movies and books. The interactivity allows the player to assume the role of a character within the
game and experience the setting on another level. Several people expressed that they enjoyed
playing games because they find it more entertaining to be active in the ongoing storyline.

I've played football in the NFL, baseball in the MLB, I was a cowboy in the old west, a human
fighting for the universe, a test subject in a lab, an agent fighting off a zombie infestation, a
war hero in three different decades, an assassin, and a hero fighting dragons, just in the last
year. I was able to do this all from my couch, and my experience isn’t the same as everyone
else who played the same games. That’s why gaming is special to me.

3.2.4 Escapism

Gaming is fun because it’s the best way to tell a story, the best way to live another life, and
the best way to forget about your own troubles.

The eagerness to experience something different also seems to some players to be rooted in a
wish to get away from everyday life, and games provide their primary way to do this. This seemed
for many to be connected to the other statements that the interactivity of the game let them
become more immersed and provided a better experience. As the player takes an active part in
what is happening in the game and that it also allows the player to experience thing that would
not be possible outside of the game, this medium is a good form of escapism.

I play games because I want to get away from the grey and boring everyday life for a
moment. Probably why I don’t really like realistic games.

Another interesting aspect of the “escapism”-subject is that some viewed games as a way to
get away from other people. This adds an opposing position to that of games as a social activity,
which will be presented further down in this paper.

“To escape the constant annoyance of humanity”

3.3 Game specific motivators

There are motivators that draw players to specific games and not just gaming in general. As these
motivators are more directly connected to specific components of the games, they are more
directly visible, and easier for the respondents to point to when answering. As mentioned earlier
I have chosen to call these types of motivators Game Specific Motivators.

The components that these motivators correlate to are often connected to a specific part in the
game development process, however some motivators cross-over and are affected by multiple
parts of the a game. There are also motivators that are not directly a part of the game as a
product, but rather exist outside of it, all while being inherently connected to a certain product. An example of this is the social culture surrounding a game.

As these motivators are directly linked to aspects of the games, they were also more susceptible to be affected negatively when a certain component is perceived as bad. Because of this, all of the answers about what could break a game the players will use examples pointing towards one of these components.

It should also be mentioned that far more detail was given about motivators of these types, possibly due to the less abstract comparison to the primary gaming motivators. This allowed for several sub-categories to be established inside the different game specific motivators category.

3.3.1 Narrative

“I guess a game with a good storyline can keep me in front of my screen for hours”

The motivator that was probably most commonly mentioned by the respondents as a reason for playing a game was the narrative. As was mentioned earlier, many players find games a superior medium for experiencing a story. The possibility to actively take part in the story rather than being passive and watch a story unfold seem to be what draws some players specifically to games.

A very interesting aspect is that a narrative can be powerful enough make the player ignore other faults in the game, such as broken gameplay. The narrative can be the sole motivator for playing the game.

I love playing video games because, quite simply, I loves me a good story. I’ve played quite a few games with lacklustre gameplay simply because I like the story the game tells

The narrative part of the game includes several different aspects that together help deliver the story to the player.

Setting

“There’s a rhyme and reason to everything”

The setting is a combination of a number of components that build up the world in which the game takes place, which is a large part of the narrative as it includes the environment, what time period it is and the overall history and lore and background story of the surrounding world. This can make up the foundation of the whole game, and establish what rules apply in the fictional world, either physical or social. Because of this, it is an important aspect, as any inconsistencies, either in the story or the mechanics, will have a massively negative effect on the players. Something the
respondents said they reacted very negatively to was when a game was inconsistent or did not follow its own logic.

“Things that go against the lore or player character I’ve created”

**Characters**

“In an RPG it is my character and I’m playing my story”

The characters are a major part of the narrative in a game as it includes all the inhabitants of the setting, friends and foes. Their interactions with each other and the surrounding world and the player is often used as a powerful tool used to deliver the narrative. They are the things in the game that the player is supposed to care about and feel for, as well as providers of information relating to the ongoing story or history.

To deliver a story the game must engage the player directly and tap into his mind and emotions. Have well written characters with their own psychology and expand them till the end of the game.

The main character is almost always the protagonist. It seems that the main character can come in two formats; the undefined avatar of the player, that is created by the player and whose actions are based purely on the whims of the player. This type of character relies heavily on the notion of freedom in the game; the players must have the possibility to perform the actions they want, and if this illusion of freedom is broken, it has a negative effect on the gaming experience.

If your character isn’t doing what you want him to, then you start feeling like you’re piloting the character, not BEING the character, which is huge.

The other type of player character is the predefined character; the player takes the role of an actor in a predetermined event, as a sort of roleplay. This creates demands for interactivity that are a little different from the undefined player character, as instead of freedom for the player to choose what the they want, the game has to allow the player to take the actions they believe fit the character they play. This makes it possible to have a more structured storyline, however if there is a greater demand that the story plays out in a way that the player believes is fitting to the character. It was expressed that failing to provide appropriate actions can have a very negative effect on the game. One person referred to the character Niko Bellic in the game Grand Theft Auto IV, a character that is presented as calm and rather reluctant to engage in mindless violence:

If Niko were in control, would he shoot wildly at cops for no reason? Or crash his car just for the fun of it? No
The other type of characters that inhabit games are Non-Playable Characters, or NPCs. These are predefined characters implemented into the game to serve as actors in the setting or plot, both as allies and antagonists. These characters must have their own personalities, appearances and dialog, and in some cases, voices. It has been mentioned that the personalities, dialog and psychology of the NPCs are very important for the narrative, both as actors and to deliver the plotline to players.

Make the player feel sad when something happens to his favorite character, happy when the one he hates gets what he deserves and so on.

Plot

Video game narratives in most cases have some sort of overarching plot or event that takes place during the game, although it could be to various degrees in different games. In some games driven by their narratives the plot is central to the game, while others grant the player a greater amount of freedom, i.e. so-called Sandbox games, but even these games usually have some sort of underlying, optional plot.

The plots in video games differentiate themselves from movies and books in that the interactive element enable the story to vary depending on the choices of the player. According to the answers the plot is also an important part of the game, and a bad plot could potentially ruin a game. Examples of bad plots are those with unrealistic twists, or a plot that does not take the action of the player into account, or allows the player to take the path they want. One person in the study mentioned the game Mass Effect 3:

Most people agree that ‘their’ Shepard would not have accepted the choices given to him/her. Their Shepard would have continued to fight and either succeeded or died trying

This limits interactivity, as if the game forces the player to take actions that do not fit how the player wants to play, how the player imagines their character would act or how the game world works. This has a really negative effect on how the players perceive the game.

3.3.2 Gameplay

The other main motivator mentioned during this study is gameplay. The definition for this term is somewhat ill-defined but is commonly used to describe the interactive parts of a video game. In the answers given by the participants in this study the main elements of the gameplay consist of controls, challenge and progression.
Along with the narrative, gameplay is considered by many of the participants to be among the most important parts of the game. This should not be considered surprising, as this is what makes video games unique when compared to other, more traditional media.

**Controls**

As games exist in many forms, the demands put on their controls can vary. When talking about control the answers covered controls ranging from direct control of individual scenes in the game, to control that has an effect on the narrative plot, such as dialog and major decisions. In this way, the gameplay is closely connected to the narrative, as the controls are the means of interactivity mentioned earlier.

Some games have the overall story play out the same way, but each fight can turn out differently because of the input of the gamer. Other games let you actually change the fate of characters in the story.

For some type of games, primarily action-oriented games, players express that the controls must be as seamless as possible; the character in the game must make the actions the player desires in action sequences. In these cases skill becomes a factor to tackle obstacles.

Call of Duty handles this exceptionally well. The controls are responsive and the character does what I want all of the time. When I die, it’s not because of controls, it’s because of a bad strategy.

It can also have an effect on the entertainment factor of the gaming experience; a seamless control of the character can make the player feel more connected to character and the game world.

In World of Warcraft your character auto-attacks and it is turn based, the character’s actions are somewhat but not entirely in sync with my own while in fable my character swings his sword when and how I choose and as many times and from what direction I desire, making his actions an extension of my own which makes the game feel more real.

If the controls do not respond well enough it could have a negative impact on the gaming experience, to the extent that players said it could make them stop playing a game altogether.

“If the controls don’t do what I want, why should I keep trying?”
**Challenge**

Another aspect of the gameplay that was mentioned several times during the survey was challenge. By overcoming challenges and obstacles in the game, the player will achieve a sense of progress. Examples of obstacles mentioned were: boss fights, puzzles, dialog scenes and regular in-game combat. As the player advances through the game, the difficulty has to increase to keep the game challenging enough for the player.

A fun game consists of setting out goals and objectives for you to achieve while the difficulty curve ascends at a reasonable rate.

The increase in difficulty is a balancing act; if the difficulty curve is steep and if it becomes too hard for the player to proceed it may have a very negative impact on the experience.

Also, the thing that’s most likely to make me stop playing a game is when I get stonewalled by high difficulty.

However, if the game is too easy it can be unstimulating, which could also have a negative effect.

What would make me not want to play a game anymore is pacing. If I can breeze through a game with little to no difficulty, then I would stop at a certain point and move on to another game. If there is no challenge or sense of progression in a game, then it’s not worth investing my time in it.

Confusion about the goal was mentioned among the answers as a negative factor. The game should be clear on what is to be done and also make sure that the game allows the player to take the appropriate action to complete those goals.

Video games, often times, are like a giant puzzle. You have clear cut rules, a goal, and well defined tools to get to that goal.

**Progression**

There are many methods utilized to give the player a sense of progression. One way is to advance the storyline in the game, but in more non-linear games there are other options. One way is to let the character in the game develop. This is usually done through a system of experience points and levelling, which results in new items or abilities being unlocked. It is a common method to represent the character learning more and becoming more proficient. It is also a method to withhold and reward players over time, to increase the longevity of the game.

Another method used to show progression in the game is to focus on the progression of the player. In multiplayer gaming an obvious way to show the player’s progression is to compare
and rank them based on scores or performance. As the player’s own skill increase they will climb higher on the ranking or scoreboard, much like in sports.

   I am a competitive person, and isn’t happy with my performance until I am at the top, regardless what game”

3.3.3 Aesthetics

I personally believe it’s far easier to make up for poor graphics and sound than poor plot and controls

The third Game Specific Motivator that could be identified in this study was aesthetics. It includes all the components used to present the content of the game to the player. This includes visual design, graphics and audio. Since these components are the only way for the game to give any information to the player they have a very strong connection to all other aspects of the game. However, the players do not seem to think of these aspects as very important on their own.

Graphics

The visuals has been in focus for a long time in the game industry and has steadily been more and more developed over the years, and has even been considered a driving factor in the industry for many years. One of the most unquestionably common statements is that graphics is not very important for the game. It could be an appealing factor, for example it could have an interesting art style, however bad graphics does not really break the game, like many other components could. During the interview, no one actually mentioned graphics as an important, or game-carrying factor.

   “Good graphics undoubtedly do add to the experience but if that’s all the game has, I’ll get bored quickly

Audio

In contrast to the statements about graphics, the audio of a game was talked about in more or less the opposite way. While it was never mentioned that it would be the sole reason for playing a game, it was often mentioned to be able to greatly enhance the gaming experience, but could also ruin a game completely. Especially voice acting was said to improve the narrative, and be very jarring when done wrong. However the general expectations for voice acting in games seem to be low.

   “If the actors don’t sound into it, why should I?”
Somewhat surprisingly, music or game soundtrack was never mentioned by any participant.

3.3.4 Social

Playing with others has always been a part of gaming, and with the connectivity of the internet it has become one of the main parts of the experience. How players interact with each other depends on how they play with each other, whether it is cooperative or competitive.

Because putting other players in the game allows the gameworld to be populated with actual people instead of computer controlled characters, it can have quite an effect on how the game is focused, and through that what motivates the players.

Aside from the in-game social aspect, there is also a community surrounding the game, which can reach outside of the game itself.

Competitive gaming

Many players prefer to be pitted against each other, both professionally and for recreational purposes. This is most likely because human players are more intelligent and harder to play against compared to computer controlled adversaries, who can be easily tricked. This could be the reason why defeating a human adversary give a much higher degree of satisfaction than a computer-controlled one as some players expressed. In games with a ranking system or leaderboards, which may give players ranks, titles or in-game abilities, the progression factor and feeling of overcoming challenges become prominent motivators.

“It’s fun stompin’ noobs”

The competitive aspect of a game is very closely connected to the gameplay components, as it requires good controls and balance. Since the player is going up against other players, any unbalanced part of the game could be seen as an unfair advantage.

Co-operative gaming

Another way to play with other people is in cooperative games, where instead of competing you are working together towards a shared goal. Co-op gaming is a far more social endeavour, as it is more often than not played with friends, pitted against a computer controlled artificial intelligence. Compared to competitive gameplay co-op gaming requires a lot more focus on the general design of the game, as it should create a challenge and have good pacing for several players with different levels of skill.

A commonly mentioned reason for cooperative play is the challenge and satisfaction of successfully
coordinating the team effort toward the shared goal.

Like competitive gaming, cooperative gaming is closely connected to the gameplay and design aspect, but for other reasons; in a cooperative game the design has to be challenging and also make every player relevant for the success of the group in the game.

...any time I see two switches on opposite sides of a room to open a door, or two pressure sensitive plates that we both have to stand on, I get taken out of the game

Community

The far more overarching type of social aspect of gaming is the community surrounding it. It can give an added value to the game, in some cases becoming a very prominent part of it. It is of course also required for competitive games, as without players, the game can not function. However, even a good community can not be solely held together without a good game behind it.

A game being good is what brings the community to it. Of course if the game is good the community can have a large impact. For example look at World of Warcraft
4. Conclusions

**Different genres have different components that could be considered the most important**

Competitive multiplayer games must have almost perfect controls and balancing, while story driven games must have the aesthetic elements and, of course, the story to drive the narrative.

Identifying the elements is a project for a future study, but I wanted to mention something that came up during the surveys: if a game in a genre fails to deliver its main component, while maintaining a very high level in other areas, it can have a negative effect on how the game is perceived.

An example that was mentioned is Battlefield 4. While having very good graphics and sound, it was strongly criticized for lacking in the gameplay and level design, as well as the initial launch problem. Even though lot of effort was put into the aesthetics the game was considered broken upon launch, with some people finding the graphics to be a source of irritation, because of how it contrasted the components of the game that should have been considered the most important.

**If one of the components is of a high enough level, it can elevate the whole product if all the other components are on an average level**

There are games that has a single component that is strong enough to make a game appealing, even though the rest is considered mediocre.

The most commonly mentioned component that could do this was gameplay, as players often mentioned that they enjoy returning to older games for the sole reason that they enjoyed the gameplay. It could also be seen with narrative, where players could ignore what was considered bad gameplay or graphics, just to experience the story of the game.

**If more than one component is below average it drastically increases the risk of losing appeal to players**

Players seem to have some tolerance of some inconsistencies, and the tolerance is much higher if the games main component is of a high enough quality. However, there is a limit to how broken a component can be, especially if several components are subpar.

The narrative’s biggest problem is if it forces the player to take actions they do not want to take, because either they do not reflect the player’s idea of the character, or if it is not actions the player themselves would do. Writing only seem to be a big negative factor if the writing was first
considered good, but later took a turn that the players did not like.

Regarding gameplay it was most commonly mentioned to be unresponsive controls that caused the player to fail. This seemed to be universal for all types of games. For competitive multiplayer it was the lack of balance, either in the level design or in the in-game weapon, items or perks. Clunky user interface could be an annoyance, especially if it breaks from the norm.

With regards to aesthetics, as mentioned earlier, sound was more often mentioned as a game breaking factor rather than graphics. Especially voice acting could annoy. The male Mass Effect voice was mentioned a few times. Also repetitive voices, like taunts and such in battle was a big problem for some players. However, graphics were never mentioned as a game breaking factor.

The social part was rarely considered a game breaking component, as it could be ignored or overseen as bad behaviour from one player. The first-person shooter and console communities were considered especially rude. Rage quitting, i.e leaving a competition before it has ended when it does not go well is a problem most related to competitive games with few players.

Although a few common themes in the general motivators, entertainment, experience, escapism, interactivity could be identified, no direct links to preferences in the game specific motivators could be found

No direct connections could be made, but some statements could give some clues: Players seeking experiences would often mention narrative heavy games. This was also commonly mentioned by people seeking interactivity. In contrast, people seeking entertainment or escapism were more prone to talk about FPSs and more intensive games played in shorter instances. These connections are highly speculative, and possible subjects for future research.

A structure for gaming motivators

Finally, a model can be constructed from the results of this study. There are four overarching motivators, the Primary game motivators, that draws the players to gaming in general. These are a bit more abstract, and often connected to a desire for fulfilment or an alternative to everyday life.

There is also a set of motivators, the Game Specific Motivators that makes a game interesting to a certain individual, based on what that individual’s personal preference is. There is a strong interaction between the components that are connected to these motivators as, in most games, all of them are needed to make a functional game. The Game Specific Motivators work as pillars and hold up and allow the player to satisfy their desire for any of the Primary Gaming Motivators that draw them to gaming. As the Game Specific Motivators make up the foundation of the model, each of them is needed, however depending on the game one pillar can be stronger and
compensate for weaknesses in any other category. Although it does not seem possible for one aspect of the game to compensate if all the other parts are sub-par.

**Figure 2.** A possible model of gaming motivators. The Game Specific Motivators work as pillars and hold up and allow the player to satisfy their desire for any of the Primary Gaming Motivators that draw them to gaming.
5. Discussion

5.1 Previous research

The amount of qualitative research on this subject has been somewhat limited, insofar as dealing with observations of gaming as a whole and not just specific parts. Further elaboration about this is made in the critique section of this paper.

However, a fair amount of quantitative research has been conducted on the subject. A paper from 2008 by Schuurman, De Moor, De Marez, & Van Looy presented a survey made with 2895 Flemish gamers. The gamers filled in nine question about motivations on scales from 1-5. The motivations presented were: ‘enhance skills’, ‘new worlds’, ‘arousal’, ‘indulge’, ‘competition’, ‘someone else’, ‘social contact’, ‘freedom’, ‘challenge’, ‘identity’. The result of this study identified four types of gamers with various levels of motivation. These were, from the most motivated type to the least:

• ‘overall convinced gamer’ (OCG): Gamers in this group were motivated by all motivators presented

• ‘convinced competitive gamer’ (CCG): Gamers in this group were motivated by competition and challenges, but less so of the prospect of ‘someone else’, explore ‘new worlds’ or be ‘social’.

• ‘escapist gamer’ (EG): This group was generally less motivated that the previous two, but scored high on ‘freedom’, ‘someone else’ and ‘new worlds’

• ‘pass-time gamer’ (PG): This group has only one strong motivation: ‘pass-time’

It seems that this study has found some correlation between the certain types of motivators and a general level of motivation for gaming. Some patterns in their study could possibly be found in this paper as well. For example competitive gamers in both studies seem to be especially motivated by challenge and competition, but less so by the exploration and purely social aspects of gaming. Another example is how they categorised ‘escapist gamers’ motivations for ‘freedom’, ‘someone else’ and ‘new worlds’, as escapist behaviour.

A problem with the study conducted is the method they used, where they located participants through e-mails and asked them to pass the e-mail on to other “gamers” they know. Schuurman et al. acknowledge that this method probably excluded gamers that consider themselves more casual gamers. Although the study in this paper used a different type of data, and a much smaller sample, it is possible that it is less skewed away from people considering themselves casual gamers, as the data seems fairly balanced.
There is another quantitative study by the Quantic Foundry (Yee, 2015), which is a business analysis company founded by Nick Yee. Quantic Foundry have made their own model called *The Gamer Motivation Profile*. This profile has been developed using an online tool and 30,000 participants. This model identified 12 motivators, in clusters of 2:

**Immersion:**

- Fantasy: The desire to become someone else, somewhere else.
- Story: The importance of an elaborate storyline and interesting characters.

**Creativity:**

- Design: The appeal of expression and deep customization.
- Discovery: The desire to explore, tinker, and experiment with the game world.

**Action:**

- Destruction: The enjoyment of chaos, mayhem, guns, and explosives.
- Excitement: The enjoyment of games that are fast-paced, intense, and provide an adrenaline rush.

**Social:**

- Competition: The enjoyment of competition with other players (duels or matches).
- Community: The enjoyment of interacting and collaborating with other players.

**Mastery:**

- Challenge: The preference for games of skill and enjoyment of overcoming difficult challenges.
- Strategy: The enjoyment of games that require careful decision-making and strategic thinking.

**Achievement:**

- Completion: The desire to complete every mission, get every collectible, and discover hidden things.
- Power: The importance of becoming powerful within the context of the game world.
Here we can detect a bit of a difference from the model of this study’s result. While many of the motivators can be found in both studies, some unique ones are also present. Completion was only mentioned once, and Action motivators, or the power motivator was never mentioned at all.

However, the majority of clusters and motivators can easily be seen as parallel in these models; Immersion is a parallel to the Narrative, the Mastery cluster can be seen as the Gameplay motivator, and the Social aspect even has its namesake in both studies.

All of the motivators from these studies can also be found in The Art of Game Design by Jesse Schell (2014). In the book Schell argues that games should be viewed through different lenses to better grasp their various parts. These lenses more or less touch on the same aspects and motivators that this study does, and many times expands upon them and goes into more detail. This is probably not so strange, as Schell’s book is a textbook aimed at game designers and tries to encompass all the parts that make up a game. It should not be so surprising that the book covers the areas mentioned by the gamers, and beyond.

Based on these examples there seems to be a fairly solid ground for further study of game motivators and games in general, not just as an out of a market perspective, behind closed doors in the industry or in comparison to other media, but as its own area of research.

5.2 Critique & Limitations

The author’s theoretical sensitivity

It should be clarified that this paper has been in the works for many years, and during these years I have spent a great deal of time in game productions schools as well as having conducted surveys for gaming companies. While not compromising the study, it should be clear that I could to some extent have a skewed what is considered to be common knowledge on this subject, as I spent so much time in this environment.

Dated data

One aspect of the study that should be pointed out that it has been written over a long time. There is a risk that the data is outdated. However, many of the examples used by the participants were from games several years old, and much of the descriptions were in general terms. The wide variation in age of the participants also allows them to have a perspective over a period of time.

Also, the final control set of data collected to test the established categories was collected at a later date, and the results did not show any changes over time compared to the original data gathered. Therefore I believe that the time aspect should not be considered too much of a problem.
Limitation of literature review

As you, the reader, might have noticed there is limited connection to other research. This is a conscious decision by me for two reasons:

Firstly, grounded theory, as it was originally formalized, made a clear point of letting the data be the sole source for any theory. From what I understand, this is heavily debated to this day. However, due to the explorative nature of this paper, this seem to be the most fitting approach to the subject. The original authors even made it a point to defend the explorative nature in the original book on the subject (Glaser, B & Strauss, A. 1967). As the point was to see what gamers themselves expressed as their motivations for gaming, the added value additional literature might provide seemed limited.

Secondly I found that previous research on video games was fairly limited, and what I did find tended to have a very specific approach to the subject. This problem is also mentioned in the introduction to Schuurman et al. study (2008), where the authors point out that the study of gaming motivations in a social-psychological context has mostly been focused on the effects of video games in an experimental setting while exploring harmful effects. The other type of study is in the context of “game theory” where, as they put it: “different approaches have continuously competed with each other: a ludology-perspective, a narratology-perspective and different media-perspectives (literary theory, film studies, cultural studies, and digital games as new media)”. I found this to be true and while it is easy to find literature exploring each of the different categories found in this study, relevant and contemporary studies on the subject of motivators for gaming as a whole have been hard to find, with the exception of a few very recent projects (Yee, 2015) started after work on this paper had already begun.

Critique of methods

The process of writing this paper did not turn out the way it was originally planned. The data gathering process was actually more of a probing effort to see what kind of results this method could result in. Surprisingly, it yielded a very large amount of responses, providing extremely insightful and exhaustive answers from simply asking the first question in some of the forums. There were also very positive responses when asked for permission to use the data, and when asking additional questions.

It should be noted, however, that the responses varied greatly depending on where the data was collected. The vast majority of the data came from the web forum for the Escapist Magazine, an online magazine with a very active and moderated community, which generally has a lot of serious discussions going on at any one time. The respondents were very interested in the subject and more than willing to answer the questions in depth.
The same goes for the second biggest source of data, which was the webforum for the Swedish web magazine “Fragzone” or fz.se. Here most of the respondents were equally enthusiastic, though occasionally combined with a bit more skepticism. In the forum thread with the question people expressed reluctance to answer, as they thought it was a company that collected the data. This was a phenomenon that was hinted at elsewhere on the forums as well; a skepticism towards certain parts of the gaming industry.

The final place where data collection was attempted was the forum for Penny Arcade, which is a very large web comic, as well as the founders of a considerable gaming convention in the USA. When putting out the question on these forum it immediately resulted in a very hostile response. No useful data could be collected. On closer inspection the forum connected to Penny Arcade did not seem to have the same type of discussions as the other forums.

Aside from these shortcomings in the method used to collect data it proved to be a very good source for this type of questioning, provided it is done in the right forum.

5.3 Future Studies

The following question could be interesting

*What components of the games are most strongly connected to each component?*

A more refined understanding would ensure that effort is put into the most relevant part of the game. This could lead to a better product.

*What are the greatest pitfalls that could break a game in different genres?*

This could be an even more relevant subject, as it seems that games that develop in certain ways through DLCs and updates can quickly suffer negative consequences from the player base. This could increase the longevity of a game.

*Is there a connection between general motivators and different genres or game specific components?*

By finding a connection of what the underlying factor for playing a certain type of game is.
6. References

Books


Papers


Online resources

