

Yen Hsieh Hsu

Professor Al Futrell

COMM 303

December 20, 2020

Video Games, The Future of Gaming

Video games have been around for decades and have been throughout the majority of people's life at some point in time. Many people have memories of it, starting with video arcade games and console games in the 1970s, and now to the current massive multiplayer online games on our smartphones and personal computers. Video games as an interactive media have slowly risen to popularity with the general public over the years. This can be seen with the growth of revenue in the industry. The video game industry back in 2018 generated a total revenue of \$119.6 billion, and for 2019, it grew to \$151.9 billion. As the industry grows, there are about 2.5 billion people in the world, ages ranging from 18 to late 30s, playing video games on either consoles or devices such as their personal computer or smartphone which contributes to the data.¹ Currently with the pandemic occurring and the advancement of technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality, video games in general have gained and will gain even more popularity, which is changing social interaction and communication among peers, lifestyle and behavior, and technology in certain ways.

Throughout the essay, a series of theories will be used to approach the topic of video games and how interaction changes as people start to immerse themselves in the virtual world. The theories mentioned will be: the uses and gratification theory, the social information processing theory, the media dependency theory, and a little bit on the principle of relative constancy. The uses and gratification theory tries to understand why and how people actively seek media to satisfy their specific needs. The social information processing theory, more specifically the social presence theory, states that communication is most

efficient when the medium they use is perceived to be as similar with the other people that are present. For media dependency theory, it studies the effect media has on its audiences and their interaction with media, audiences, and social systems. It also states that people tend to depend on the media that satisfy the most goals. Lastly, the principle of relative constancy, states that people spend part of their income on media over time, and spendings on new media does not affect the total expenditures on media, as people tend to move their spendings from the old media to the new one. The principle of relative constancy also heavily relies on the economic situations of the people, as if there are any fluctuations in the economy, spendings may also change.

Starting with a brief history, the first video game was made in the late 1950s by William Higinbotham to show that science is not just for destruction and war. This was followed by several other creations in the following years.⁴ What people would remember from the early video games were the large arcade game machines with joysticks, buttons, other controllers, and a small screen. But actually, video games did not reach mainstream popularity until the 1970s and 1980s with the development of better and more portable technology. For example, the development of game consoles such as the Odyssey, the first video game console developed in the 1970s, made video games more accessible for home users as they could play the games by connecting to the TV screen at home. This caused an increase in people playing video games, which continued to last even when the popularity of the Odyssey console games fizzled out over the next few years and was replaced by Nintendo, Sony, and Sega with their own consoles.² Later with the computer being easier to acquire for normal households, video games have also started to develop into online games that can be played by connecting to the computer or Internet.

There are various types of video games. From the classic arcade games to console games such as the ones of Playstation, there are also competitive or role playing games on the

computer and smartphone which are popular nowadays. Within this paper, the focus is on multiplayer games either online on the computer or smartphone, and a few via virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Multiplayer games are where various players (usually there is a limit on players) play the same game, on the same platform, and interact with each other. Another type of multiplayer games are massive multiplayer online (MMO) games, where there are large numbers of players, often hundreds or thousands, on the same game server. For virtual reality, it is a computer generated simulation in which people can interact with the objects inside the artificial environment. And for augmented reality, it is similar to virtual reality as the content is computer generated, but its difference is that it is being overlaid onto the real world through devices such as our smartphones.

Some of the popular games to be mentioned in the paper include League of Legends, OrbusVR, Among Us, Pokemon Go, and Phasmophobia. To shortly introduce the idea of these games, League of Legends is a team-based, strategy, and competitive battle arena game developed and published by Riot Games for both Microsoft and macOS users. OrbusVR is a massive multiplayer online (MMO) game designed specifically for virtual reality headsets. Among Us is an online multiplayer deduction game, similar to Mafia, which can be played with 4-10 players. Pokemon Go is a mobile game which includes augmented reality features, where players catch virtual Pokemon characters while moving around their location. The location of players are tracked by the game using location tracking and mapping technology. Lastly, Phasmophobia is a multiplayer survival horror game that can hold up to four players, themed towards ghost hunting.

There are many reasons why people, ranging from youths to adults, will play video games. Back when arcades began to increase in popularity with youths, people found the opportunity to relax, socialize, and meet new people through playing the same popular games as other youths are playing. At the same time, these games also fostered a competitive

culture, where youths will challenge each other, find people to practice with, and play similar games with.⁴ This attitude continued through to this day in many competitive games online such as League of Legends. The game League of Legends contains 115 million active users and is a perfect example of a competitive game, as they host various tournaments in stadiums, similar to how a physical, traditional sport event would be held. According to the uses and gratification theory, people will actively seek and consume media to satisfy certain needs. Many players seek the thrill and competitive nature of games. For example, the thrill of playing a competitive game such as League of Legends with friends or other users at any time, and the sense of achievement after winning a match. Another reason could be the attention gathered when streaming a game, or the interest in watching good players stream their own game.

Apart from competition, players will also actively seek multiplayer games or MMOs to socialize and meet new people. Many of these players have different lives between the virtual world and reality, where their online persona is different from how they are behind the screen. Video games can give these players the freedom to be someone else and also remain anonymous, which makes socializing with strangers easier. For example, with OrbusVR and various other MMOs, players are able to design and create their own character and join the game. Other players are unable to see or know who the person behind the screen is, at most just hear their voice if the voice-chat option is enabled. Also, role-playing games are another example of how players can dissociate from their real identity. For example, a farming simulation game can make players pretend they are farmers and have them complete “tasks” related to farming.

With the ease of socializing without many barriers, it is also possible to join new communities and interact with the players within the community. Players are able to communicate more efficiently with each other through common interests, which somewhat

correlates with the social information processing theory. These common interests can be the game, the game features, shared identities, or the hardware they are using to play the game with, and it creates somewhat of a relationship that links these players together.³ With this, it can also lead users to becoming more dependent on games, where they use it a lot more than other types of media, as it is an easier medium to communicate with people and also be on the same interest level. Video games may then end up to be their preferred way of socializing.

Most of the games and situations mentioned above are before the current COVID-19 pandemic. After the start of the pandemic, many industries were affected, but not the gaming industry. Instead, it soared as developers could still publish games and also attract new audiences as everyone was just staying at home.⁵ This in turn caused many changes to have been made in various video games. Many people were unable to socialize with each other face-to-face and turned to gaming with their friends online. The uses and gratification theory also applies in this scenario as users seek games to satisfy their needs of social interaction and also to relieve their boredom. Instead of just using other types of social media, they instead turn to games.

Two popular games that have risen due to the pandemic are Among Us and Phasmophobia. What made them rise in popularity are their chat features. Usually, interacting with other players in a multiplayer game is through a chat box where players type what they want to say and send the conversation. But for the game Among Us, along with the built in chat box that the game already has, many players use Discord or other third-party programs to interact and discuss with their friends throughout the game. This improved socialization in the virtual world, where it no longer was a “type and send” situation, but they were able to hold actual conversations similar to being on a phone call, but while playing games with them.

Recently, with the integration of proximity chat in games, it completely changed the interaction of gamers, as players suddenly felt as if they were actually in the game. The game Phasmophobia is a prime example. Phasmophobia can be said to be targeted towards audiences that like horror games and also ghost hunting, or explorations. As the pandemic hit, these types of audiences were unable to go outdoors to explore with their friends, in which the game brought the exploration to them, only virtually. The proximity chat in the game added another layer of realism to the exploration players were doing. This feature could allow players to hear how close or far away another player was as they roamed around a map.

Apart from socializing in games, players may become dependent on video games and spend a fraction of their money on the products that the industry provides. This could be closely tied to the principle of relative constancy, where people spend a constant fraction of their disposable income on mass media over time, and at the same time media dependence. With media dependence, video games will become a person's first choice in spending their free time with, or for socializing. With thousands of new games being developed either for computers and smartphones, or even virtual reality, gamers are very likely to follow technology trends and also keep updated on news such as new gaming hardwares available in the market. Not only will gamers spend a fraction of their money on the game itself, but also the hardware such as a custom-built gaming computer or the most recent version of the Oculus.

Overall, video games will most likely keep innovating and growing in popularity in the next few years, and increase in revenue. A few innovations that are very likely to happen is with VR and AR, along with eHealth games where it is used to promote health and wellness. eHealth games are more welcomed as they are fun, alternative ways of keeping a person's health than the traditional ways of going to the gym. For VR and AR, there may be improvements in the headset such as with Facebook's Oculus Quest, a VR headset, and

Microsoft's HoloLens, an AR headset. Although the HoloLens is not intended for gaming, the company may develop one soon in the coming years. Along with the hardware, developments in the quality of AR in smartphones may also be improved, such as with better tracking of the physical world.

Of course, with the rapid development of technology, there are still some consequences to video games. For example, when people are too heavily reliant on video games and also seek it too much, there may be addiction. This is similar to social media addiction, where many people are unable to separate themselves from social media, and in this case gaming. Another concern is with privacy. Nowadays companies may also use your data to tailor games for the majority of the people's tastes and further worsen the addiction. Apart from companies using our information, it is also very risky to socialize online. When gaming, people are only able to see the characters and not the person itself. It is very likely to meet some person pretending to be someone they are not. Lastly, is that information is very likely to be compromised, especially with hackers and scammers. A lot of the games require accounts linked to our social media accounts or email, and some may even have payment options where users link their credit card onto the system. There are certain risks involved, as if any time a user loses their account, it is very likely for their information to be leaked.

To conclude, video games are changing our society in many ways that we can and cannot imagine. With the current pandemic, many people are turning to video games to socialize and kill time instead of other activities. Of course, there are benefits to video games such as connecting with people around the world and finding communities of people with similar interests, or even to be in better health through eHealth games. But at the same time it is necessary to consider the risks involved in it such as with privacy issues or the people you are meeting online. Even so, the video game industry will continue to rise in popularity along with new developments in technology. And sometimes, video games may bring further

improvements to hardwares we may have, such as with virtual reality headset and controllers.

All in all, it would be interesting to watch out for what the future holds for the gaming industry.

Bibliography

1. “49+ Video Game Statistics [Click the ‘Start’ Button] .” *Review42*, 21 Nov. 2020, review42.com/video-game-statistics/.
2. “Video Game History.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 1 Sept. 2017, www.history.com/topics/inventions/history-of-video-games.
3. “View of Uses and Gratifications of Social Games: Blending Social Networking and Game Play: First Monday.” *View of Uses and Gratifications of Social Games: Blending Social Networking and Game Play | First Monday*, firstmonday.org/article/view/3517/3020.
4. “What Was the First Video Game, Who Invented It and Why.” *Plarium*, plarium.com/en/blog/the-first-video-game/.
5. “The World Is Turning to Video Games amid Coronavirus Outbreak.” *Yahoo! Finance*, Yahoo!, finance.yahoo.com/news/coronavirus-world-turning-to-video-games-150704969.html.