KNOWING THE PLAYER AND QUESTIONING THE GAME:
CHALLENGING DIVERSITY AND REPRESENTATION IN VIDEO GAMES

BY

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis was to conduct video game industry representation and diversity research and to clarify what can be done for future video game creation by understanding the players' motivations and identities. Motivated by the impact that the video game industry has on the economy and its influence on education and mental health. The main goal was to analyze methods, approaches and trends in the development and design of video game projects, which have led to the growth of representation and diversity and provide a unique toolset addressing its main obstacles.

The study was conducted based on official literature and secondary data. The secondary data is suitable for this kind of research due to its ongoing updates and the relevancy of the fast-paced industry. The online sources were official news articles, business e-journals, company annual reports, official professional critic reviews, customer surveys, and feedback. This theoretical framework allows for the precise illustration of the current state and perspective of the industry.

The results present an overview of the whole video game industry, methods and approaches companies use for story and character creation, how the trends change, and its overall outlook for the future.

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Definitions

Video Game: a game played by electronically manipulating images produced by a computer program on a television screen or other display screen.

Player: A player character (also known as a playable character or PC) is a fictional character in a video game or tabletop role-playing game whose actions are controlled by a player rather than the rules of the game. The characters that are not controlled by a player are called non-player characters (NPCs).

Representation: the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way or as being of a certain nature.

Diversity: the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.

Culture: the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social groups.

Identity: the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is.

Customization: the action of modifying something to suit a particular individual or task.

Motivation: the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way.

Futures thinking: Futures thinking is an approach to strategic design that considers what is likely to change and what is likely to stay the same in the future, to be more reflective in strategic planning.

Bug: software error or fault in a computer program or system that causes it to produce an incorrect or unexpected result, or to behave in unintended ways.

Focus

The focus of this thesis was to conduct video game industry, representation, and diversity research, and to clarify what can be done for future video game creation by understanding the players' motivations and identity. The main goal was to analyze methods, approaches and trends in the development and design of video game projects that have led to the growth of representation and diversity.

This research aims to understand players' motivations, impacts, and influences from video game designs to provide designers and producers with a tool kit that ethically helps with character and game creation by utilizing multiple features to strengthen identity development and culture.

Main Questions

How might we leverage storytelling and foresight thinking in video games to strengthen character creation and the player's identity?

1.What has been the evolution and feedback of current efforts of representation?

2.What are the effects of representation in video games on cultural identity?

3.What does motivation do to shape identity?

4.Are video game organizations conscious of their impact on influencing identities?

5.What components of video games are added for the immersive feel of another culture? (music, ambience sounds etc.)

6.Has forced representation been a problem? If so, why, and how does it affect the audience?

7.How do biases/stereotypes play a role in design?

The project's objectives would be to understand the ins and outs of ethical character design and storytelling and how it impacts culture and self-identity.

The outcome of the project would be a continuation of the research cumulated into a tool that can be used to analyze video games' storylines, characters and setting in a way to adjust or design for an accurate and respectful representation of cultural identity.

Introduction: What is Out There?

Video games have become an integral part of modern society, and their influence on our lives is undeniable. One aspect of video games that has gained increasing attention is the representation of cultural diversity.

What We Know

Representation is a powerful tool that shapes our understanding of the world around us. In video games, the representation of cultural diversity can have a profound impact on players' identities. The gaming industry has come a long way in terms of representation, but there is still much work to be done. In recent years, we have seen more diverse characters and storylines in video games. For example, in the game "Assassin's Creed Origins," the protagonist is a black man from Egypt. This game challenges the stereotype that all ancient Egyptians were white and broadens our understanding of the culture.

When players see characters that look and sound like them, they feel seen and heard. This representation can validate their existence and create a sense of belonging. On the other hand, the lack of representation can make individuals feel invisible and excluded. This is especially true for marginalized groups, such as people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities. For these groups, representation in video games can be a powerful tool for building self-esteem and pride in their identity.

Why is There an Opportunity?

The video game industry has become a massive global phenomenon, with millions of players worldwide. In the United States alone, 43% of Americans aged 18-29 play video games often or sometimes, according to a report by Pew Research Center (Duggan, 2015). This figure highlights the sheer scale of the industry, and the potential it holds for impact and change.

As of 2020, the global video game market was valued at $159 billion, with mobile games alone accounting for $77.2 billion, according to Statista (2021). This incredible value is expected to grow even further, with projections indicating that the global video game market will reach a value of $200 billion by 2025 (Newzoo, 2021). These statistics reflect the significant opportunity that the video game industry presents for impact and change on a large scale.

One area where impact and change is particularly important is representation, cultural identity, and inclusivity in video games. Prioritizing these factors in game development can create a more inclusive and accepting gaming community and society. For example, the lack of representation of women and people of color in video games can have a negative impact on players, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and exclusion (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). In contrast, when video games accurately represent different groups of people and cultures, it can promote empathy, understanding, and acceptance.

Moreover, inclusivity in video games has the potential to positively impact society. By creating a space where all identities and experiences are represented, video games can help to break down social barriers and promote acceptance and understanding. Games such as Celeste have been praised for their representation of mental health issues and the character Madeline's journey to overcome them (Kafai & Burke, 2015). This highlights the potential of the video game industry to create meaningful change in the world.

In conclusion, the video game industry presents a significant opportunity for impact and change on a global scale. Its massive reach and projected value make it a medium with immense potential to shape societal views and perceptions. By prioritizing representation, cultural identity, and inclusivity in video games, game developers can create a more inclusive and

accepting gaming community and society. This is a significant opportunity to promote empathy, understanding, and acceptance on a large scale, and it is important for game developers and players alike to recognize and embrace this potential.

Video Game Industry Analysis

The video game market is a rapidly growing industry that has experienced significant growth over the past few decades. Video games have become one of the most popular forms of entertainment worldwide, with millions of people playing video games on various devices such as consoles, PCs, and mobile phones.

It comprises major game publishers such as Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft, as well as game developers such as Electronic Arts, Activision Blizzard, and Ubisoft. These companies are responsible for creating and publishing some of the most popular video game franchises in the world, including Super Mario, Call of Duty, and Assassin's Creed. In addition to these established players, there are many independent game developers and small studios creating innovative and engaging games, making a name for themselves in the industry. Indie games such as Hollow Knight, Celeste, and Stardew Valley have become hugely popular due to their unique gameplay mechanics, interesting stories, and immersive worlds. These games have proven that a small

team of developers with great ideas can create a hit game that resonates with players worldwide. The video game industry is highly competitive, with companies constantly vying for market share through the development of new technologies and the acquisition of popular franchises. With the increasing popularity of online gaming, the sophistication of gaming technology, the popularity of mobile gaming, and the rise of esports and cloud gaming, the industry is poised for continued growth and innovation.

According to recent market research reports, the global video game market was valued at USD 159 billion in 2020 and is expected to reach USD 200 billion by 2023, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.3% during the forecast period of 2018-2023(Mordor Intelligence; Grand View Research; Statista; Allied Market Research).

Driving Factors of Growth

One major factor driving the growth of the video game market is the increasing popularity of online gaming. Online gaming has revolutionized the industry, allowing players to connect with each other around the world and play games in real time. In 2020, the online gaming segment accounted for 79% of the global video game market, with a value of USD 126 billion (Mordor Intelligence; Grand View Research; Allied Market Research; Newzoo). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the growth of online gaming, as people are staying at home and seeking new ways to connect with others.

nother factor driving the growth of the video game market is the increasing sophistication of gaming technology. The latest gaming consoles and PCs can produce stunning graphics and immersive gameplay experiences that were not possible just a few years ago. This has led to the development of new gaming genres, such as virtual reality and augmented reality gaming. In 2020, the console gaming segment accounted for 31% of the global video game market, with a value of USD 49.2 billion (Mordor Intelligence; Grand View Research; Allied Market Research; MarketsandMarkets).

The video game market has also been impacted by the increasing adoption of cloud gaming, which allows users to stream video games on-demand instead of downloading them onto their devices. Cloud gaming has the potential to expand the video game market further, as it allows

users to play high-quality video games on low-end devices. In 2020, the cloud gaming market was estimated to be worth USD 1.15 billion, with a projected CAGR of 15.3% from 2021 to 2027 (GlobeNewswire; MarketsandMarkets).

Additionally, the video game market has been influenced by the rise of esports, which is competitive video gaming at a professional level. Esports has become a global phenomenon, with millions of people watching and participating in esports tournaments. In 2020, the esports market was estimated to be worth USD 1.08 billion, with a projected CAGR of 14.5% from 2021 to 2026 (Business Wire; Insider Intelligence). Lastly, the video game market is also being driven by the increasing popularity of mobile gaming. Mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets have become ubiquitous, and many people are now playing games on their mobile devices while on the go. This has led to the development of new genres of mobile games, including casual games and hyper-casual games. In 2020, the mobile gaming segment accounted for 43% of the global video game market, with a value of USD 68.5 billion (Mordor Intelligence; Grand View Research; Allied Market Research; App Annie). Mobile gaming has become an important part of the video game industry, as it allows game developers to reach a wider audience and provides gamers with more opportunities to play games.

In conclusion, the video game market is a rapidly growing industry that shows no signs of slowing down. The increasing popularity of online gaming, the sophistication of gaming technology, the popularity of mobile gaming, and the rise of esports and cloud gaming are all contributing to the growth of the market. As new technologies emerge and new platforms for gaming are developed, the video game market is likely to continue to expand and evolve in exciting new ways.

Business Models

B2P – buy to play, a business model for video games that can be played after its purchase.

F2P – free to play, a business model for video games that can be played for free.

P2P – pay to play, a business model for video games that can be played through monthly payments.

Buy to Play Model

The video game industry has been booming in recent years, with millions of gamers around the world playing games on consoles, computers, and mobile devices. With so many players, it's no surprise that game developers are always experimenting with different business models to monetize their products. One such model that has gained popularity in recent years is the buy-to-play business model. In a buy-to-play model, players purchase the game once and then have unrestricted access to all its content. This is different from free-to-play games where players can download and play the game for free but need to pay for additional features or content. In a buy-to-play model, players pay an upfront fee to purchase the game and can play it as much as they want without any additional costs.

One of the main advantages of a buy-to-play model is that it provides a steady stream of revenue for game developers (Ward, 2021). Instead of relying on in-game purchases or advertisements, developers can make a profit by selling the game itself. This model also ensures that all players have access to the same content, which can create a more balanced and fair playing field (O'Connor, 2019). In games with a buy-to-play model, players don't have to worry about spending more money to unlock additional content, which can be a relief for many players.

Another advantage of this model is that players do not have to worry about ongoing costs. In free-to-play games, players may feel compelled to spend money on in-game purchases to keep up with other players or unlock additional content. In a buy-to-play model, players can enjoy the game without worrying about these additional costs. This can be a major selling point for many players. However, a buy-to-play model can also have some disadvantages. If a game is not popular, it may be difficult to generate enough revenue to cover development costs. Additionally, players may feel hesitant to purchase a game without trying it first, which can make it difficult for new games to gain traction. This means that developers need to carefully consider the pricing of their games to ensure that they are accessible to players while also generating enough revenue to continue developing and improving the game. Despite these potential disadvantages, the buy-to-play business model has been successful for many games. Games like World of Warcraft, and The Elder Scrolls Online have all used this model to great effect. By

providing players with a complete game experience for a one-time fee, these games have been able to attract and retain a large player base. In conclusion, the buy-to-play business model has its pros and cons. While it provides a steady stream of revenue and ensures all players have access to the same content, it may also present challenges for game developers in terms of generating enough revenue and growing their player base. However, with careful consideration and planning, the buy-to-play model can be a successful way for game developers to monetize their products while providing players with a complete and enjoyable gaming experience.

BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS

DESIGNED FOR : BUY TO PLAY   DESIGNED BY : CRIS PAANO

Key Partners	Key Activities	Value Propositions	Customer Relationship	Customer Segments
Owner / Publisher Youtube Sponsors	Design Strategic Planning User Support **Key Resources** The Game Other Intellectual Property Human Resources Infrastructure	Deliver the best experience for the player in one transaction	Game Experience / Updates Personalized Digital Advertisements **Channel** Game Website Blogs Social Media	Gamers Advertisers Sponsors

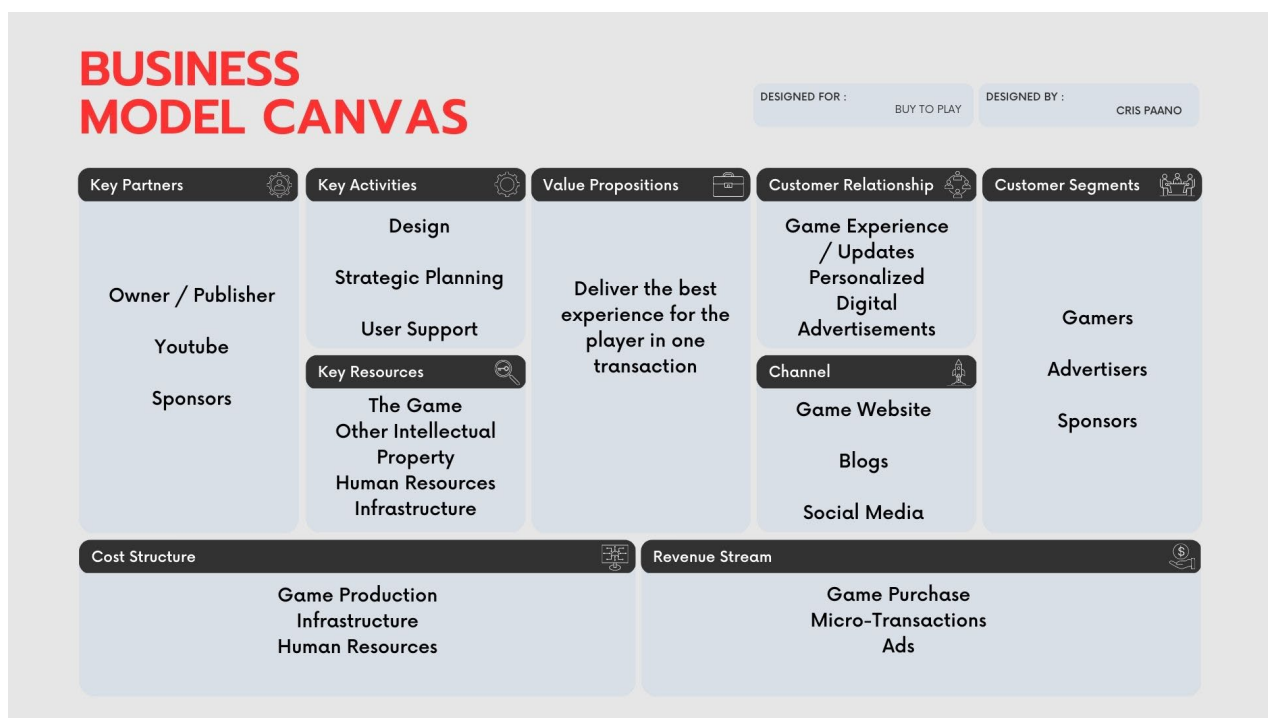| Cost Structure	Revenue Stream
Game Production Infrastructure Human Resources	Game Purchase Micro-Transactions Ads

Table 1: Buy to Play Business Model Canvas

Free to Play Model

Another business model that has become popular in recent years is the free-to-play model. In this model, players can download and play the game for free but need to pay for additional features or content. This can include things like in-game currency, cosmetic items, or access to special game modes or levels.

One of the main advantages of the free-to-play model is that it can attract many players. Since there is no upfront cost to play the game, players can try it out without any risk. This can help build a large player base and increase the game's popularity (O'Connor, 2019).

Another advantage of this model is that it allows developers to generate revenue over time. Since players can continue to purchase additional content, the game can generate revenue long after its initial release. This can be a major advantage for developers who want to continue supporting and updating the game over time (Visual Capitalist, 2021). However, there are also some potential disadvantages to the free-to-play model. One of the main concerns is that it can create an uneven playing field. Players who are willing to spend money on additional content may have an advantage over players who are not. This can make the game less enjoyable for some players and lead to frustration and resentment (O'Connor, 2019).

Another concern is that the free-to-play model can sometimes result in a lack of quality. Since developers are focused on generating revenue from in-game purchases, they may not put as much effort into creating high-quality content for the base game. This can lead to a game that feels incomplete or unpolished (Visual Capitalist, 2021).

Despite these potential disadvantages, the free-to-play model has been successful for many games. Games like Fortnite, League of Legends, and Dota 2 have all used this model to significant effect. By offering a free to-play experience with optional in-game purchases, these games have been able to attract a large and dedicated player base (O'Connor, 2019).

In conclusion, the free-to-play business model has its pros and cons. While it can attract many players and generate revenue over time, it can also create an uneven playing field and lead to a lack of quality in the base game. However, with careful consideration and planning, the free-to-

play model can be a successful way for game developers to monetize their products while providing players with an enjoyable gaming experience.
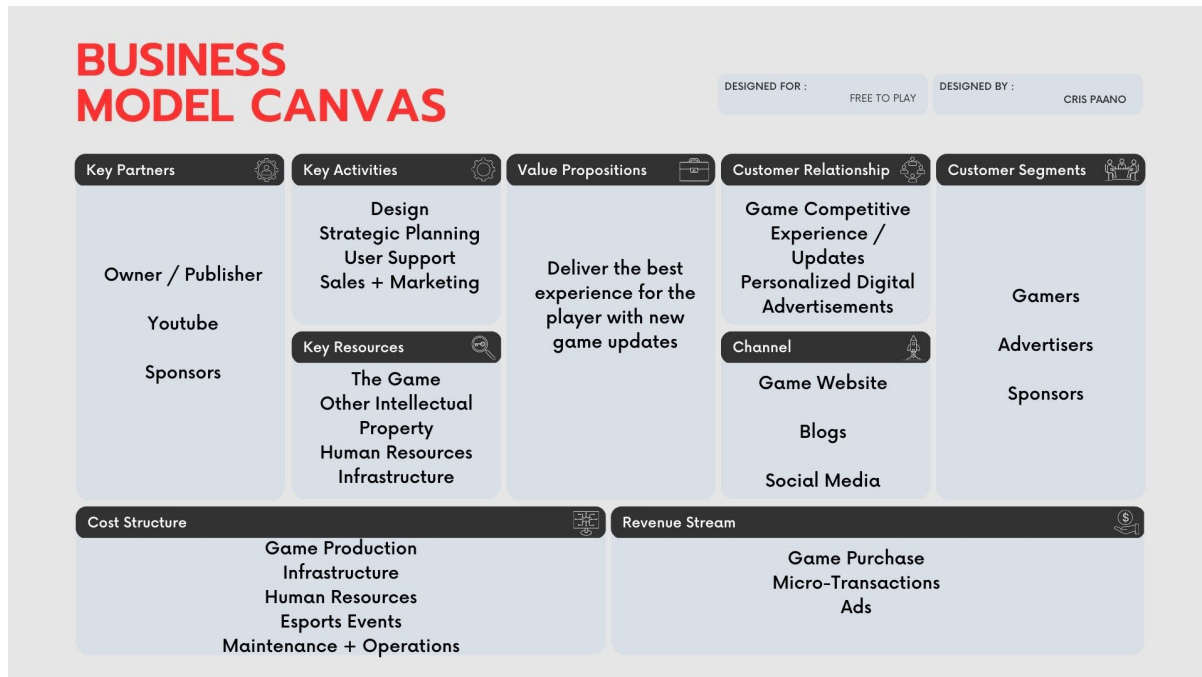

Figure 2. Free to Play Business Model Canvas

Pay to Play Model

The last business model used in the video game industry is the pay-to-play model. In this model, players are required to pay a subscription fee or a one-time fee to access the game. This is different from the free-to-play model, where players can download and play the game for free, but need to pay for additional features or content, and the buy-to-play model, where players purchase the game once and then have unrestricted access to all of its content.

One of the main advantages of the pay-to-play model is that it can provide a steady stream of revenue for game developers (Ward, 2021). This model can also help ensure that all players have access to the same content, which can create a more balanced and fair playing field (O'Connor, 2019). Additionally, this model can help eliminate some of the concerns that players may have about ongoing costs, as they know exactly how much they will be paying upfront to access the game.

However, there are also some potential disadvantages to the pay-to-play model. One of the main concerns is that it can limit the game's audience. Players who are not willing or able to pay for the game may not be able to access it, which can limit the game's popularity (O'Connor, 2019). Additionally, this model can create pressure for game developers to continuously release new content to justify the subscription fee or to encourage players to continue paying to access the game.

Despite these potential disadvantages, the pay to play model has been successful for many games. Games like World of Warcraft, Final Fantasy XIV, and EVE Online have all used this model to great effect. By requiring players to pay a subscription fee or a one-time fee to access the game, these games have been able to generate revenue and maintain a dedicated player base.

In conclusion, the pay to play business model has its pros and cons. While it can provide a steady stream of revenue and ensure all players have access to the same content, it can also limit the game's audience and create pressure for game developers to continuously release new content. However, with careful consideration and planning, the pay to play model can be a successful way for game developers to monetize their products while providing players with an enjoyable gaming experience.

BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS

DESIGNED FOR : PAY TO PLAY

DESIGNED BY : CRIS PAANO

Key Partners	Key Activities	Value Propositions	Customer Relationship	Customer Segments
Owner / Publisher Youtube Sponsors Collaborators	**Design** Strategic Planning User Support Sales + Marketing Game Updates **Key Resources** The Game Other Intellectual Property Human Resources Infrastructure	Deliver the best experience for the player with new game updates and extensions of the base game	Game Experience / Updates Personalized Digital Advertisements **Channel** Game Website Blogs Social Media	Gamers Advertisers Sponsors

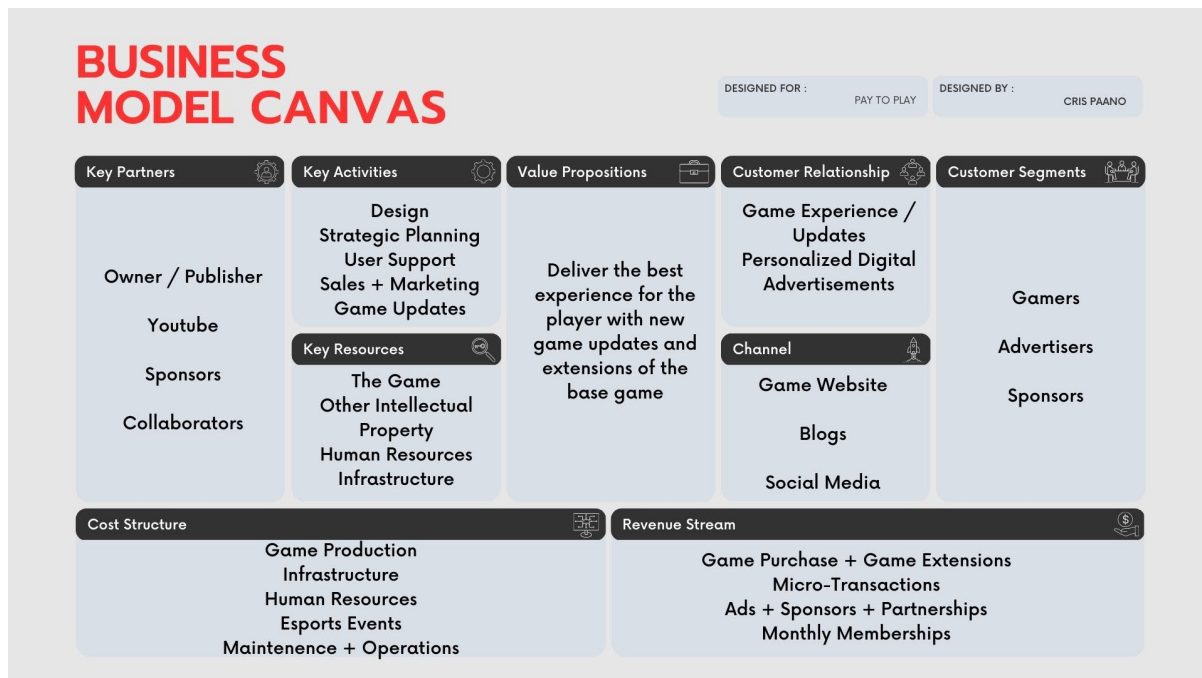| Cost Structure	Revenue Stream
Game Production Infrastructure Human Resources Esports Events Maintenence + Operations	Game Purchase + Game Extensions Micro-Transactions Ads + Sponsors + Partnerships Monthly Memberships

Table 3. Pay to Play Business Model Canvas

Know the Player and Know the Game

Video games are a hugely popular form of entertainment, with over 3 billion players worldwide. The industry was valued at $159 billion in 2020 and is projected to grow to $200 billion by 2025. Video game genres include action, adventure, role-playing, simulation, and sports, each offering unique gameplay experiences. Players are motivated by entertainment, challenge, socialization, and escapism. These motivations contribute to the industry's growth, along with accessibility and diversity. Entertainment offers an immersive experience, while challenge allows players to test their skills. Socialization provides a sense of community, and escapism provides a way to escape from everyday life. This can be particularly appealing during times of uncertainty, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Types of Players

Video games have become one of the most popular forms of entertainment, with a wide variety of games available to play. These games cater to different tastes and preferences, resulting in a diverse range of players with varying play styles. Firstly, there are casual players who play games for fun and relaxation. They enjoy games that are easy to pick up and don't require a lot of investment in time or effort. Casual gamers tend to play games in short bursts and may not be interested in playing competitively. They may also prefer mobile games, which are more accessible and require less time to play (Sjöblom, 2019).

Secondly, there are hardcore or competitive players who take gaming very seriously. They often spend hours playing games and strive to be the best at what they play. They may also participate in tournaments and other competitive events. These players are often highly skilled and have a competitive mindset that drives them to be the best (Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006).

Thirdly, there are exploratory players who enjoy uncovering secrets and hidden areas within games. They enjoy taking their time to explore the game world and may not be concerned with completing the game or winning. These players are often motivated by curiosity and the desire to discover new things (Schell, 2014).

Fourthly, there are social players who enjoy playing games with others. They may prefer cooperative games where they work together with others to achieve a goal or competitive games where they can compete against friends and strangers alike. These players are often motivated by socializing and building relationships with others (Bowman & Perret, 2019).

Lastly, there are completionist players who want to complete every aspect of a game, including optional objectives and collectibles. They will often spend hours playing a game to achieve 100% completion. These players motivated by the desire to see everything that a game has to offer (Gackenbach, 2018).

Moreover, the types of players of video game characters have changed over time. With the rise of e-sports, competitive players are becoming more prevalent. These players often have a rigorous training schedule and a highly competitive mindset. They may also prefer certain types of games, such as first-person shooters or real-time strategy games, which require fast reflexes

and quick decision-making skills. On the other hand, casual players are still an important part of the gaming community. They provide a more relaxed and social atmosphere for gaming, often playing with friends or family. Casual players also tend to play more mobile games, which are more accessible and require less time to play.

Exploratory players are also becoming more common, with the rise of open-world games that allow players to explore vast game worlds at their own pace. These games often have hidden areas and secrets that can only be uncovered through careful exploration and experimentation.

In addition, players can also be categorized by their preferred gaming platforms. For example, PC gamers often prefer games that can be customized and modified, while console gamers may prefer games that are optimized for their specific console's hardware. Mobile gamers, on the other hand, often prefer games that can be played on the go and don't require a lot of time or effort to play. Overall, the types of players of video games are diverse, and each has its own unique preferences and play styles. Understanding the different types of players can help game developers create games that appeal to a wider audience and provide a more enjoyable gaming experience for everyone. This is particularly important as the video game industry continues to grow and evolve.

Types of Games

There are many types and genres of video games, each with its own unique characteristics and gameplay elements. One of the most popular types of video games is action games, which require quick reflexes and hand-eye coordination, often involving combat or other physical challenges. These games are often fast-paced and can be played solo or with others. Examples of action games include Call of Duty, Assassin's Creed, and Grand Theft Auto.

Another popular type of video game is adventure games, which involve exploration and puzzle-solving, often set in a fantasy or science fiction world. These games are often story-driven and can be played solo or with others. Examples of adventure games include The Legend of Zelda, Tomb Raider, and Uncharted.

Role-playing games are another type of video game that allows players to take on the role of a character and make decisions that affect the game world and story. These games often involve

character creation, levelling up, and quests. Examples of roleplaying games include World of Warcraft, Final Fantasy, and Skyrim.

Shooter games are also popular video games that involve shooting enemies and often require quick reflexes and strategy. These games can be played solo or with others and often have a multiplayer mode. Examples of shooter games include Halo, Overwatch, and Fortnite.

Strategy games require strategic planning and decision-making, often involving resource management and building. These games can be played solo or with others and often have a multiplayer mode. Examples of strategy games include Civilization, Starcraft, and Age of Empires.

Sports games simulate real-world sports, such as football, basketball, or soccer. These games can be played solo or with others and often have a multiplayer mode. Examples of sports games include FIFA, NBA 2K, and Madden NFL. Simulation games simulate real-world activities, such as driving, flying, or managing a business. These games can be played solo or with others and often have a multiplayer mode. Examples of simulation games include The Sims, Euro Truck Simulator, and Flight Simulator.

Puzzle games require problem-solving and critical thinking, often involving logic or spatial reasoning. These games can be played solo or with others and often have a multiplayer mode. Examples of puzzle games include Tetris, Candy Crush, and Portal.

Platformer games require players to navigate through levels by jumping and avoiding obstacles. These games can be played solo or with others and often have a multiplayer mode. Examples of platformer games include Super Mario Bros, Sonic the Hedgehog, and Rayman.

Fighting games involve one-on-one combat between characters, often with special moves and combos. These games can be played solo or with others and often have a multiplayer mode. Examples of fighting games include Street Fighter, Mortal Kombat, and Tekken. Each type of game can have multiple genres and sub-genres, and there is often overlap between diverse types and genres. For example, an action game may also be a shooter, or a sports game may also be a simulation. Understanding the several types and genres of video games can help players find games that suit their preferences and play styles. It can also help game

developers create games that appeal to a wider audience and provide a more enjoyable gaming experience for everyone.

History of Representation

Based on the 100 top-selling and major games released since 2017, nearly 80 percent of all main characters are men, while nearly 55 percent are white. This doesn't reflect the wide diversity of gamers themselves - something that needs to change (Webb & Davies, 2022). Video games have come a long way since their inception in the 1970s. As the industry has grown, so has the conversation around representation, diversity, and inclusivity in gaming.
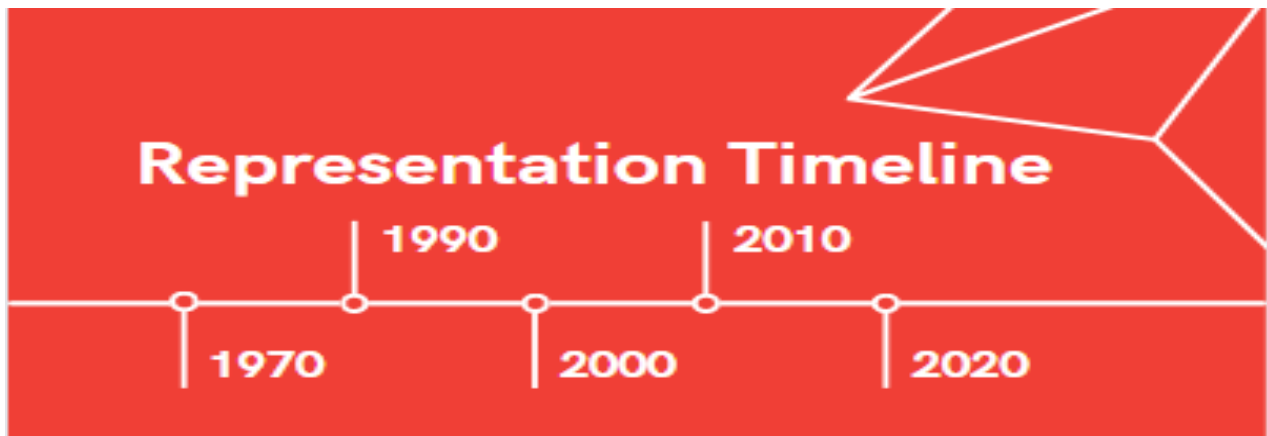
In the early days of gaming, representation was limited to a handful of white male protagonists. Games often perpetuated harmful stereotypes and were criticized for their lack of representation of marginalized groups. However, as the industry has evolved, so has the representation in games. In the 1990s, we saw the rise of female protagonists in games like Tomb Raider and Perfect Dark. This was a huge leap forward in diversifying the types of characters players could relate to. However, these characters were still often portrayed in a sexualized manner, perpetuating the "male gaze" in gaming (Shaw, 2014).

In the 2000s, we saw more representation of people of colour, LGBTQ+ characters, and characters with disabilities. Games like Mass Effect and Dragon Age allowed players to create characters with a wide variety of identities, while games like Life is Strange and The Last of Us featured well-developed LGBTQ+ characters (Taylor, 2016). Today, the conversation around representation, diversity, and inclusivity in gaming is more important than ever. The industry is making strides toward better representation, but there is still work to be done. The gaming community must continue to hold developers accountable and demand that marginalized groups are represented in a respectful and accurate manners.

Problems for Representation

One area where representation is still lacking is in the portrayal of mental health issues. While some games have touched on the topic in a meaningful way, mental health is often used as a plot device or a means of sensationalizing a character's behaviour. This can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and trivialize the experiences of those who live with mental health issues. For example, in the game, Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice, the portrayal of the main character's psychosis was praised for its accuracy and sensitivity, but the game was still criticized for using mental illness as a horror element (Grossman,

2020).

Another issue that continues to be a problem in the gaming industry is the underrepresentation of women and people of colour in game development. While progress has been made in recent years, white men still dominate the industry. This lack of diversity can lead to a narrow range of perspectives and ideas, which can limit the types of games that are produced. For example, the game Celeste, developed by a team that included women and non-binary individuals, was praised for its thoughtful representation of mental health and its diverse cast of characters. (Kuchera, 2018).

In addition to representation and accessibility, there are other areas where the gaming industry needs to improve its inclusivity. One of these areas is the representation of Indigenous peoples. While some games have made an effort to include Indigenous characters and cultures, there is still a long way to go. The lack of representation can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and erase the experiences and contributions of Indigenous peoples (Katz, 2017).

Another area where the gaming industry needs to improve is in creating a more welcoming and safer environment for marginalized groups. Online gaming communities can be particularly toxic, with harassment and hate speech being all too common. This can make it difficult for marginalized players to feel comfortable participating in online.

gaming communities (Hernandez, 2018).

Despite the challenges, there are many examples of games and game developers who are leading the way in creating a more inclusive gaming industry. For example, the studio That Dragon,

Cancer created a game that explored the experience of caring for a child with cancer, while the game Sea of Solitude tackled themes of loneliness and mental health in a thoughtful and meaningful way.

Negative Outcomes

Video games have the unique ability to break stereotypes and challenge preconceived notions. By including diverse characters and storylines, video games can promote empathy and understanding. For example, a game that features a Middle Eastern protagonist can challenge negative stereotypes and provide a more nuanced understanding of the culture. This can lead to a more positive perception of the culture and its people, shaping players' identities.

In addition, video games can also challenge gender stereotypes. For example, in the game "Horizon Zero Dawn," the protagonist is a strong, capable woman who defies the stereotype that women are weak and passive. This type of representation can inspire young girls and women to pursue their dreams and break down gender barriers.

Sexism

Sexism in video gaming is a complex and multifaceted issue that has been an ongoing concern for decades. Video games often perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and promote unrealistic beauty standards, leading to a negative impact on players' identities, particularly women (Dill & Thill, 2007; Fisher & Miller, 2018). This can result in players developing negative body image and low self-esteem, which can affect their overall identity (Fisher & Miller, 2018). One of the most common ways in which sexism manifests in video games is through the portrayal of female characters. Women are often depicted in a stereotypical manner, objectified and sexualized, and presented as weak and submissive. This reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and contributes to a culture of misogyny within the gaming community (Dill & Thill, 2007).

Moreover, sexist attitudes are often present in the gaming community, with female players being subjected to harassment, discrimination, and exclusion (Fisher & Miller, 2018). Female players are often the target of sexist remarks and unwanted advances, creating a hostile environment in which they are not taken seriously and are often excluded from gaming activities. This can lead to female players feeling discouraged from engaging in video games, leading to a loss of interest in the medium altogether (Fisher & Miller, 2018). Sexism in video gaming not only affects female players but also male players. It reinforces harmful gender stereotypes, such as the idea that men should be dominant and aggressive while women should be submissive and weak. This can lead to male players feeling pressure to conform to these gender roles, limiting their ability to express themselves freely and creating a toxic environment for all players (Dill & Thill,

2007).

Furthermore, the issue of sexism in video gaming also extends beyond the depiction of female characters and the treatment of female players. The lack of representation of diverse identities in video games contributes to a culture of exclusion and reinforces harmful stereotypes about marginalized groups. People of colour, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and individuals with disabilities are often underrepresented in video games or portrayed in a stereotypical manner. This lack of representation can lead to players from marginalized groups feeling ignored, excluded, or even attacked in the gaming community. It can also send a message to non-marginalized players that certain identities are not important or are inferior. This contributes to a

culture of discrimination and intolerance that can have lasting impacts on players' identities and self-esteem (Dill & Thill, 2007; Fisher & Miller, 2018).

The issue of sexism in video gaming is not limited to the gaming community itself. The wider media often perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes and contributes to a culture of misogyny that is reflected in video games. This can make it difficult for video game developers to break free from these harmful stereotypes and create games that are inclusive and empowering for all players (Dill & Thill, 2007). Research has shown that exposure to sexist video games can lead to players developing negative attitudes toward women, and this can have a lasting impact on their relationships with women in real life (Kimmel, 2008). Similarly, the lack of representation of diverse identities in video games can contribute to a culture of intolerance and exclusion, limiting players' ability to see and appreciate diversity in the real world (Dill & Thill, 2007; Fisher & Miller, 2018). Furthermore, the issue of sexism in video gaming can have a significant impact on players' mental health and well-being. Players who experience harassment, discrimination, and exclusion in the gaming community can develop symptoms of depression and anxiety, leading to a negative impact on their mental health (Fisher & Miller, 2018). Furthermore, players who are exposed to harmful gender stereotypes in video games can develop negative body image and low self-esteem, leading to a negative impact on their self-worth (Dill & Thill, 2007).

Racism

Racism in video games is an issue that has been present for many years. Video games often perpetuate harmful racial stereotypes and promote the idea that certain races are inferior to others. This can lead to a negative impact on players' identities and experiences, particularly for players from marginalized racial groups (Tynes, 2007). One of the most common ways in which racism manifests in video games is through the portrayal of characters from different racial backgrounds. Characters of colour are often depicted in a stereotypical manner, perpetuating harmful racial stereotypes and contributing to a culture of racism within the gaming community (Williams, Martins, Consalvo, & Ivory, 2009). Moreover, racist attitudes are often present in the gaming community, with players from marginalized racial groups being subjected to harassment, discrimination, and exclusion. This can lead to players feeling discouraged from engaging in video games, leading to a loss of interest in the medium altogether.

The lack of representation of diverse racial identities in video games contributes to a culture of exclusion and reinforces harmful stereotypes about marginalized groups. People of colour are often underrepresented in video games or portrayed in a stereotypical manner, which can lead to players from marginalized groups feeling ignored, excluded, or attacked in the gaming community. It can also send a message to non-marginalized players that certain identities are not important or are inferior. This contributes to a culture of discrimination and intolerance that can have lasting impacts on players' identities and self-esteem.

Workplace

The video game industry has been criticized for its lack of diversity and representation in both the games they produce and the individuals they employ. The lack of representation has been most prominently seen in the portrayal of characters in video games, which often feature stereotypical and marginalized depictions of gender, race, and other identities. This issue is not new and has been a concern for decades. However, it has gained more attention in recent years due to the growing awareness of social justice and the need for inclusivity in all areas of life.

One of the most significant consequences of the lack of diversity in video games is exclusion. A problem that Seth Smith brought up at the Riot Games conference, was that there was limited diversity in characters' story development and overall storytelling in games because the team itself that worked on the game wasn't diverse. To create a diverse and correctly represented game, the team itself needs to be diverse to lend their lived experiences.

> "Representation starts with people who look like you…working on the game itself."

Players from underrepresented groups, such as people of colour, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and individuals with disabilities, may feel ignored or excluded when they do not see accurate representations of themselves in video games (Williams et al., 2009). This can lead to a sense of alienation and a lack of interest in the medium altogether. The lack of diversity in video games can also contribute to a culture of discrimination and intolerance, where players may develop negative attitudes towards certain identities or perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

Today's Pioneers

Valorant, Apex Legends and Sims are leading with the most culturally diverse characters with detailed storylines which can allow for an increase in cultural identity for misrepresented/underrepresented cultures.

Apex Legends

Apex Legends was released for Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4 and Xbox One in 2019, 2021 for Nintendo Switch and 2022 for PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X/S and mobile, where players can also cross-platform play. It is a free-to-play battle royale, first-person shooter. Separated into teams of either two or three, players can choose from a selection of characters known as "legends" that have different powers and perks. While Apex doesn't take place on Earth, it still gives representation to characters who are very rarely portrayed in this positive light.

Representation of Different Cultures

Apex Legends has made a conscious effort to represent different cultures in the game.

The game includes playable characters from various countries such as Gibraltar from Gibraltar, Bangalore from India, Lifeline from Jamaica, and Rampart from India. These characters are designed with attention to cultural details such as clothing, language, and physical attributes. For instance, Bangalore is depicted as an ex-soldier from India, and her character design includes Indian military-style clothing and accessories (Respawn Entertainment, 2021a).

In addition to playable characters, Apex Legends also includes maps that are inspired by different countries such as Olympus, a map that is inspired by Greek mythology, and World's Edge, a map that is inspired by a volcanic area in the Outlands. These maps are designed to showcase unique cultural and architectural features, which adds to the immersive experience and provides an opportunity for players to learn about different cultures.

By including characters and maps that represent different cultures, Apex Legends is setting an example for other games to follow. It is essential for game developers to recognize the importance of creating a space that is welcoming to everyone, regardless of their background, culture, or identity. Apex Legends' efforts to create an inclusive community demonstrate that video games can be more than just a form of entertainment; they can also facilitate social change.

Storytelling

Apex Legends has also made efforts to promote inclusivity in the game's storytelling. The game's lore includes characters with different sexual orientations and gender identities, such as

Bloodhound, a non-binary character. The game also includes a character named Mirage, who has a hearing impairment. This representation of characters with disabilities and different sexual orientations promotes the idea of inclusivity and diversity in the gaming community (Respawn Entertainment, 2021b). Furthermore, Apex Legends' storytelling is inclusive in terms of the characters' backgrounds and personalities. Each character has a unique background and personality that is explored through the game's lore and in-game interactions. For instance, Lifeline is depicted as a caring and compassionate person who is dedicated to helping others. Bangalore is depicted as a disciplined and determined soldier who values loyalty and teamwork (Respawn Entertainment, 2021a).

Diversity Efforts

Respawn Entertainment, the developer of Apex Legends, has made significant efforts to create a diverse and inclusive workplace environment. The company has implemented a number of initiatives to promote workplace diversity, such as unconscious bias training for hiring managers and employee resource groups for underrepresented communities (Respawn Entertainment, 2021c). Respawn Entertainment has also made a commitment to increasing the number of women and underrepresented minorities in leadership positions within the company (Respawn Entertainment, 2021c). These efforts demonstrate that Respawn Entertainment is committed to creating a workplace that is welcoming and inclusive for all employees.

Valorant

Valorant is a free-to-play first-person shooter game that was released in 2020, where it rapidly gained popularity due to its character design and its association as the first first person shooter, FPS game coming out of Riot Games, famously known for the game League of Legends. It has made significant strides in creating a gaming community that is inclusive, diverse and respectful of different cultures.

Representation Features

One of the ways in which Valorant has attempted to achieve this is by representing different cultures in the game. The game includes playable characters from various countries such as India, Japan, and Mexico (Riot Games, 2021a). These characters are designed with attention to cultural details such as clothing, language, and physical attributes. For instance, Jett, one of the characters in the game, is a skilled fighter from South Korea. She is depicted wearing traditional Korean clothing and speaks in Korean (Riot Games, 2021a).

In addition to playable characters, Valorant also includes maps that are inspired by different countries such as Morocco and South Korea (Riot Games, 2021b). These maps are designed to showcase the unique cultural and architectural features of these countries. The attention to detail in the design of these maps not only adds to the immersive experience but also provides an opportunity for players to learn about different cultures. By including characters and maps that represent different cultures, Valorant is setting an example for other games to follow. It is essential for game developers to recognize the importance of creating a space that is welcoming to everyone, regardless of their background, culture, or identity.

Promoting Inclusivity

Valorant has also made efforts to promote inclusivity in the gaming community. The game has a robust reporting system that allows players to report toxic behavior such as hate speech, harassment, and discrimination (Riot Games, 2021b). The game also includes a feature that lets

players choose their preferred pronouns, promoting the idea of gender inclusivity (Riot Games, 2021c). This feature allows players to identify themselves using pronouns that they find comfortable, which is a significant step towards creating a space that is welcoming to all players.

Furthermore, Valorant has implemented measures to ensure that players with disabilities can enjoy the game. For example, the game includes colorblind modes that make it easier for colorblind players to distinguish between different elements in the game (Riot Games, 2021d). This is a significant step towards making the game accessible to players with different needs. It is worth noting that this feature is not only helpful to colorblind players but also to players who may have trouble distinguishing certain colours due to other visual impairments.

Fostering a Community of Acceptance

Valorant has actively encouraged players to be respectful of different cultures and identities. The game's official social media channels often share messages of support for marginalized communities and celebrate cultural events such as Pride Month (Riot Games, 2021f). Additionally, the game includes features such as playing cards and sprays that allow players to express their support for different causes. For instance, players can purchase player cards that show their support for different charities, such as the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (Riot Games, 2021f). This feature not only allows players to express their support for different causes but also helps to raise awareness about important issues. The company has implemented a number of initiatives to promote workplace diversity, including unconscious bias training for hiring managers and employee resource groups for underrepresented communities (Riot Games, 2021b). Riot Games has also made a commitment to increasing the number of women and underrepresented minorities in leadership positions within the company (Riot Games, 2021b). These efforts demonstrate that Riot Games is committed to creating a workplace that is welcoming and inclusive for all employees.

Valorant's attempt at representation, cultural identity and inclusivity is a significant step towards creating a gaming community that is accepting of players from diverse backgrounds. By promoting inclusivity, fostering a community of acceptance, and representing distinct cultures, Valorant is setting an example for other games to follow. It is essential for game developers to

recognize the importance of creating a space that is welcoming to everyone, regardless of their background, culture, or identity. Valorant's efforts to create an inclusive community demonstrate that video games can be more than just a form of entertainment; they can also facilitate social change.

The Sims

Unlike FPS games like Apex Legends or Valorant, Sims is a fully customizable simulator life game where players can create characters of all races and navigate through different life events. Sims, a popular life simulation game developed by Maxis and published by Electronic Arts, has made significant efforts to create a virtual world that is inclusive and respectful of different cultures.

Representation

Sims is a popular life simulation game that has made significant efforts to accurately represent different cultures in the game. The game's developers, Maxis and Electronic Arts, have taken great care to ensure that the items and clothing from various countries, such as India, China, and Japan, are designed with attention to cultural details like traditional clothing, decor, and food (Electronic Arts, 2021a). The inclusion of such items in the game is a way to introduce players to different cultures and traditions. These items allow players to learn more about other cultures and participate in cultural events like festivals and celebrations.

Sims has also created a world based on Polynesian culture, called "Sulani." This world features traditional huts, clothing, and food (Electronic Arts, 2021b). The developers have implemented this world to showcase the unique cultural and architectural features of Polynesian culture. By doing so, Sims allows players to experience and learn about cultures they may not have encountered before.

Inclusivity Within the Game

Sims has taken active steps to promote inclusivity within the gaming community. One of the most significant features of the game is the ability to create Sims with a diverse range of skin tones, body types, and features (Electronic Arts, 2021c). This feature promotes the values of body positivity and diversity, as players can create Sims that more closely resemble themselves or others they know. The game also allows players to choose their Sims' gender identity and sexual orientation, which promotes gender and sexual inclusivity. Additionally, the game

includes a robust reporting system that empowers players to report toxic behavior like hate speech, harassment, and discrimination.

Sims has implemented measures to ensure that players with disabilities can fully enjoy the game. The game has accessibility features like text-to-speech and closed captions, which make it easier for players with hearing or visual impairments to play the game (Electronic Arts, 2021d). The game also includes a colorblind mode, which helps colorblind players distinguish between different elements in the game.

Honorable Mentions

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice is a critically acclaimed action-adventure game developed and published by Ninja Theory. The game follows the story of Senua, a Pict warrior who embarks on a journey to the Viking underworld to save the soul of her lover. The game is known for its portrayal of mental illness, as Senua experiences psychosis throughout the game. The developers worked with mental health experts and people with lived experience of psychosis to create an authentic portrayal of the condition (Ninja Theory, n.d.).

Dragon Age: Inquisition

Dragon Age: Inquisition is a popular role-playing game developed by BioWare and published by Electronic Arts. The game is known for its diverse cast of characters, which includes characters of different races, sexual orientations, and gender identities. The game allows players to develop relationships with the characters, including romantic relationships, regardless of the player's gender or sexual orientation. The game's portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters has been praised for its authenticity and inclusivity (BioWare, 2014).
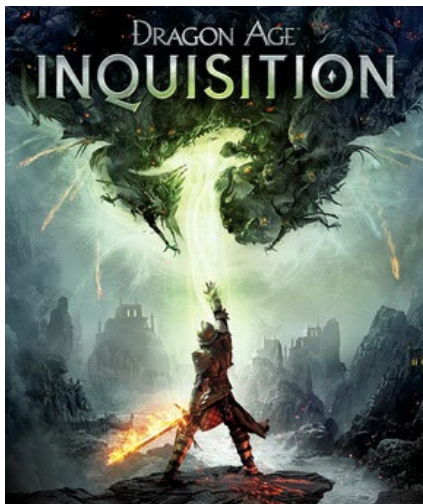
Mortal Kombat

Mortal Kombat is a popular fighting game developed by NetherRealm Studios and published by Warner Bros. The game is known for its diverse cast of characters, which includes characters from different races, cultures, and sexual orientations. The game's portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters has been praised for its authenticity and inclusivity. The game also includes a robust character customization feature that allows players to create characters that represent themselves and their identities (NetherRealm Studios, 2019).

Carmen Sandiego

Carmen Sandiego is a popular educational game developed by Brøderbund and published by The Learning Company. The game follows the story of Carmen Sandiego, a master thief who travels the world stealing famous treasures while being pursued by the player, an Interpol agent. The game is known for its portrayal of different cultures and countries, as players must use their knowledge of geography and other countries' cultures to solve puzzles and capture Carmen Sandiego. The game also features diverse characters, including a female protagonist and characters from different cultural backgrounds (Brøderbund, 1985).

Historical Failures

In recent years, there has been a growing movement toward creating a more inclusive and diverse gaming community. However, there are still many video games that fall short in their representation of different cultures and identities. This section will examine some of the negative examples of representation, cultural identity, and inclusivity in video games.

The Grand Theft Auto Series

The Grand Theft Auto (GTA) series is a popular open-world action-adventure game that has been criticized for its negative portrayal of different cultures and identities. The game is notorious for its use of racial and ethnic stereotypes, particularly in its depiction of African American and Latino characters. These characters are often portrayed as criminals, drug dealers, and gang members, perpetuating harmful stereotypes about these communities (The Guardian, 2013). Additionally, the game often includes homophobic and transphobic content, such as the use of slurs and the depiction of transgender characters in a negative light (Kotaku, 2013).

The portrayal of women in the game is also problematic, as they are often depicted as sexual objects or damsels in distress. The game reinforces harmful attitudes toward women and perpetuates the idea that they are inferior to men. The game has faced numerous controversies over the years, with many critics arguing that it glorifies violence and criminal behaviour.

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 is a first-person shooter game that has been criticized for its negative representation of different cultures and identities. The game includes a mission in which the player takes on the role of an undercover CIA agent who must infiltrate a Russian airport and kill innocent civilians. The mission has been criticized for its use of graphic violence and its insensitivity to real-world events, such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks. The game perpetuates harmful stereotypes about Russians and promotes the idea that violence is an acceptable means of achieving political goals (Eurogamer, 2009) The game's portrayal of Middle Eastern cultures is also problematic, as it perpetuates negative stereotypes and reinforces harmful attitudes toward these communities. The game reinforces the idea that Middle Eastern cultures are violent and dangerous, perpetuating harmful stereotypes about these communities. In conclusion, it is clear that there are many examples of video games that have negative representations of cultural identity, inclusivity, and representation. Games such as Grand Theft Auto, Resident Evil 5, and Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce negative attitudes toward different cultures and identities. It is essential for game developers to recognize the impact that their games can have on the gaming community and to make a conscious effort to create games that are inclusive, diverse, and respectful of different cultures and identities. Game developers must make a concerted effort to create games that are respectful of different cultures and identities. This includes working with cultural consultants to ensure that representations of different cultures are accurate and respectful. Developers should also strive to create more diverse characters and storylines that represent different cultures and identities. This will help to create a more inclusive and diverse gaming community that is welcoming to all players.

Resident Evil 5

Resident Evil 5 is a survival horror game that has been criticized for its negative representation of different cultures. The game takes place in Africa, and the player takes on the role of a white protagonist who must fight against hordes of infected African villagers. The game has been criticized for its use of racist imagery and stereotypes, particularly in its depiction of African villagers as violent and primitive. The game reinforces harmful stereotypes about African cultures and perpetuates the idea that Africa is a dangerous and violent place (GameSpot, 2009). Furthermore, the game has been accused of perpetuating the idea of the "white saviour," as the white protagonist is portrayed as the hero who must save the African villagers from their own culture. This reinforces the idea that white people are superior and must "save" people from other cultures.

Why it Matters and When Does it Matter

Video games have become an increasingly popular medium for entertainment and storytelling. They allow players to immerse themselves in virtual worlds and experience different narratives. However, the lack of representation, cultural identity and inclusivity in video games has been a longstanding issue.

Representation

Representation in video games refers to the depiction of different groups of people, such as women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities. The lack of representation can result in players feeling excluded or alienated from the gaming community. It can also perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce societal biases.

For example, many video games have been criticized for their portrayal of women as sexualized objects rather than fully developed characters (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). This can have a negative impact on young players who may internalize these harmful representations of women. Similarly, video games that lack representation of people of colour can reinforce harmful stereotypes and contribute to the marginalization of entire groups of people (Kafai & Burke, 2015).

On the other hand, when video games include diverse representations, it can create a more inclusive gaming community where players from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed and represented. It can also provide opportunities for players to learn and understand different perspectives and experiences.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity in video games refers to the representation of different cultures, traditions, and histories. It is important for video games to accurately represent cultures, rather than relying on harmful stereotypes or cultural appropriation. When video games accurately depict cultural identity, it can help to educate players about diverse cultures and foster a greater sense of empathy and understanding. For example, games like Never Alone and Mulaka have been praised for their accurate and respectful portrayal of Indigenous cultures (Phillips, 2019). It can also create a more inclusive gaming community, where players from different cultural backgrounds feel welcomed and represented.

However, there is a fine line between respectful representation and cultural appropriation. Video game developers must be aware of the cultural significance behind the elements they include in their games and must consult with members of the respective cultures to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Inclusivity

Inclusivity in video games refers to the representation of different identities and experiences. This includes the representation of people with disabilities, different gender identities, sexual orientations, and more.

When video games are inclusive, it creates a sense of belonging for players who may not see themselves often represented in mainstream media. It can also help to break down societal barriers and promote acceptance and understanding. For example, the game Celeste has been praised for its representation of mental health issues and the character Madeline's journey to overcome them.

Additionally, inclusivity in video games has the potential to positively impact society as a whole. By creating a space where all identities and experiences are represented, video games can help to break down social barriers and promote acceptance and understanding.

When Does It Matter?

Representation, cultural identity, and inclusivity matter at all times in video games. The lack of representation, cultural identity and inclusivity in video games can have a negative impact on players, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and exclusion. However, it is also important to note that representation, cultural identity, and inclusivity can be especially important in certain contexts. For example, video games aimed at children should prioritize inclusivity and accurate representation to promote a more inclusive and accepting next generation. Similarly, games set in historical contexts should prioritize accurate representation of cultures and experiences to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

In conclusion, representation, cultural identity, and inclusivity in video games matter because they have the power to shape how players see themselves and others. When video games accurately represent different groups of people and cultures, it can promote empathy, understanding, and acceptance. However, it is important to note that video game developers must be mindful of the potential for cultural appropriation and harmful stereotypes (Kafai & Burke, 2015). It is important for game developers to consider these factors when creating new games, and for players to demand representation and inclusivity in the games they play. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and accepting gaming community and society as a whole.

Character

Customization

In most video games, there are NPCs, Non Playable Characters and Playable Characters that can also be considered avatars. Avatars are considered computer-generated visual representations of people (Nowak & Rauh, 2005; Schroeder, 2002). Player representation can be traced back to over 4000 years ago however where representation made its first appearance for a user representation in a video game would be from 1985's Habitat (Castronova, 2004), the first massively multiplayer online role-playing game, MMORPG. Character customization is an integral feature of modern video games. It enables players to personalize their in-game avatars, creating unique characters that represent themselves or their cultural background. The importance of character customization goes beyond aesthetics and affects representation, cultural identity, and player experience.

Representation

Representation, cultural identity, and inclusivity matter always in video games. The lack of representation, cultural identity and inclusivity in video games can have a negative impact on players, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and exclusion. However, it is also important to note that representation, cultural identity, and inclusivity can be especially important in certain contexts. For example, video games aimed at children should prioritize inclusivity and accurate representation to promote a more inclusive and accepting next generation. Similarly, games set in historical contexts should prioritize accurate representation of cultures and experiences to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

In conclusion, representation, cultural identity, and inclusivity in video games matter because they have the power to shape how players see themselves and others. When video games accurately represent different groups of people and cultures, it can promote empathy, understanding, and acceptance. However, it is important to note that video game developers must be mindful of the potential for cultural appropriation and harmful stereotypes (Kafai & Burke, 2015). It is important for game developers to consider these factors when creating new games, and for players to demand representation and inclusivity in the games they play. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and accepting gaming community and society as a whole.

Cultural Identity

Character customization also allows players to express their cultural identity. Video games can be a powerful tool for cultural representation and education. By allowing players to create characters that represent their cultural background, video games can help promote understanding and appreciation for diverse cultures (Kerr, 2018). For instance, a player can create a character with traditional clothing or accessories that represent their cultural heritage. This feature allows players to highlight their culture and share it with others in a unique and interactive way.

Cultural representation in video games has been a contentious issue for many years. Many gamers and critics have called out video game developers for perpetuating harmful stereotypes and cultural appropriation (Kerr, 2018). However, character customization provides an opportunity for video games to promote cultural representation and education in a positive and respectful way. By allowing players to create characters that represent their cultural background, video games can help to break down cultural barriers and promote understanding and appreciation for diverse cultures.

Player Experience

Lastly, character customization enhances the player experience. It allows players to create a unique identity within the game and makes them feel more invested in their in-game avatar. Players can customize everything from their character's appearance to their abilities, giving them a sense of control over their in-game experience (Yee, 2007). This feature also encourages players to take more risks and try new things in the game, as they are more invested in their personalized character.

Player experience is a crucial aspect of video game design. Players are more likely to continue playing a game if they feel invested in their in-game avatar and the overall gaming experience (Yee, 2007). Character customization provides a solution to this problem. It allows players to create a unique identity within the game, promoting player investment and engagement. This feature encourages players to take risks, experiment with different play styles, and explore the game world in new and exciting ways.

In conclusion, character customization is an essential feature in video games that affects representation, cultural identity, and player experience. This feature allows players to create unique characters that represent themselves or their cultural background. It also enhances the player experience, making them feel more invested in their in-game avatar. Therefore, video game developers should continue to prioritize character customization in their games to promote diversity, cultural representation, and player agency.

Current Tools

Available

The Diversity Space Tool

The Diversity Space Tool was created in 2016 to help identify unconscious bias and opportunities for growth in inclusion (Activision Blizzard, n.d.). It is meant to supplement the hard work and focus of their teams in telling diverse stories with diverse characters. This process is intended to create a conversation where developers, assisted by the tool, challenge assumptions, assess choices and find opportunities for authentic representation to be fostered in their games.

The Diversity Space Tool is a measurement device that helps identify how diverse a set of character traits are and in turn how diverse that character and cast are when compared to the 'norm' (Activision Blizzard, n.d.). It establishes a baseline for typical character traits (which is done by the creative team working closely with DE&I experts), and then weighs new character designs against it to measure their diversity. During this process, the tool can also uncover unconscious bias, such as why certain traits are seen as "male" vs. "female," or why characters from certain ethnic backgrounds are given similar personalities or behaviours. By starting at the character conception stage, the tool allows designers to promote more thoughtful creative choices from the ground up, which in turn leads to games that are more representative of their player base.
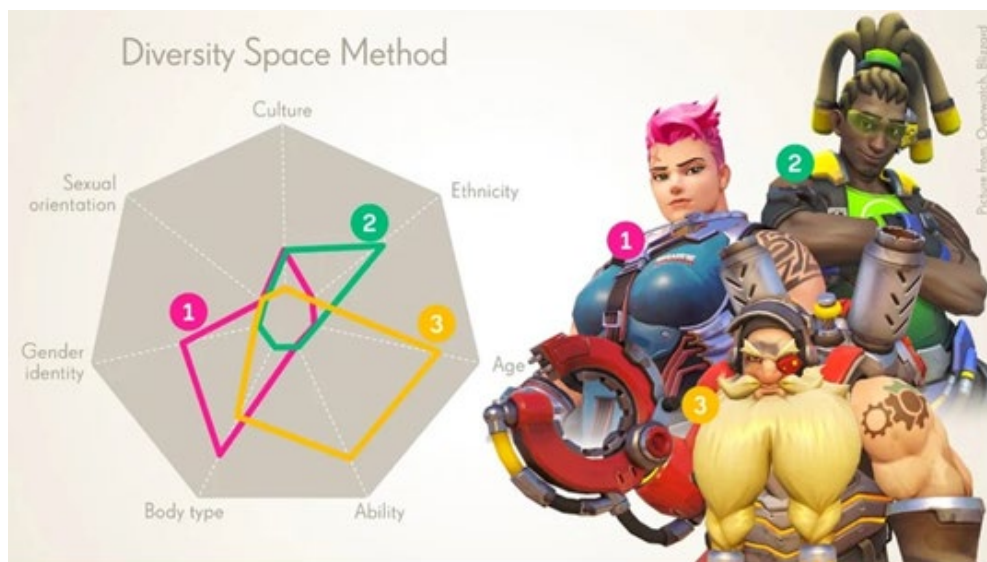
Others

There are various tools available to measure representation and diversity in video game characters and storylines. For instance, one such tool is the Inclusion Scorecard developed by AnyKey, an organization dedicated to supporting diversity and inclusion in esports (AnyKey, n.d.). The Inclusion Scorecard is a framework that allows game developers to assess the inclusivity of their games across various dimensions, such as gender, race, and sexuality. Another tool is the GEM metric (Gender Equality Measure) developed by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, which allows content creators to measure the gender balance of characters in their media (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, n.d.)

Overall, these tools serve as a means to promote more thoughtful creative choices from the ground up, which in turn leads to games that are more representative of their player base.

Points of Intervention

Video games have been a popular form of entertainment for decades, but the industry has been criticized for lacking diversity and inclusivity. The lack of representation of marginalized groups in video games can contribute to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, as well as limit the potential for players to see themselves reflected in the games they play. To improve identity from representation, cultural diversity, and inclusivity in video games, the following points of intervention should be considered:

Points of Intervention

Research   **Harm Reduction**

**Diversify**   **Feedback**   **Customize**
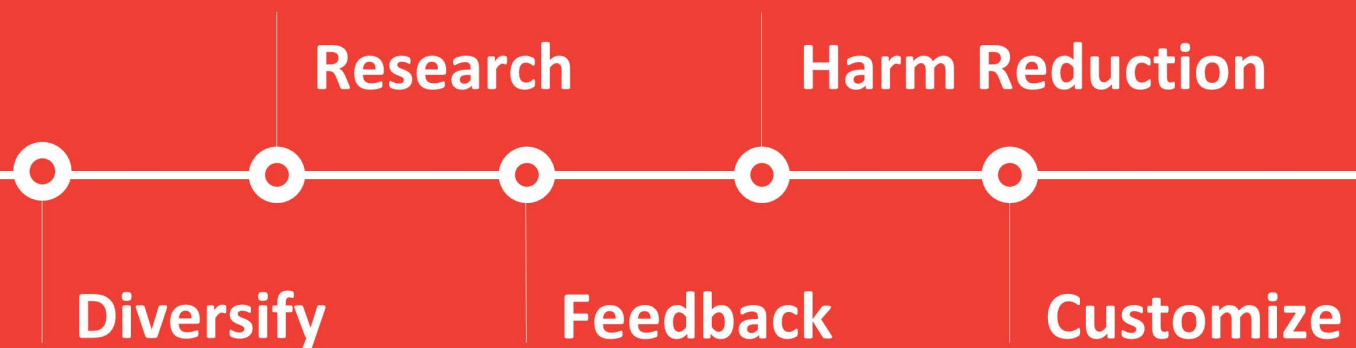
1. Diversify Game Development Teams

One of the most effective ways to improve cultural diversity and inclusivity in video games is to diversify the teams that develop them. By including individuals from different backgrounds and experiences, game developers can gain a better understanding of the diverse perspectives that exist within their audience. This can lead to more inclusive game design, and a wider range of characters and storylines that are representative of a variety of cultures and identities (Kafai & Burke, 2015).

2. Conduct Research on Underrepresented Groups

Another important point of intervention is to conduct research on underrepresented groups in order to better understand their experiences and perspectives. By doing so, game developers can create characters and storylines that are more authentic and representative of these groups. This can also help to avoid harmful stereotypes and cultural appropriation (Shaw, 2014).

Points of Intervention

Social Issues

Art Styles

Language

Accessiblity

Foster
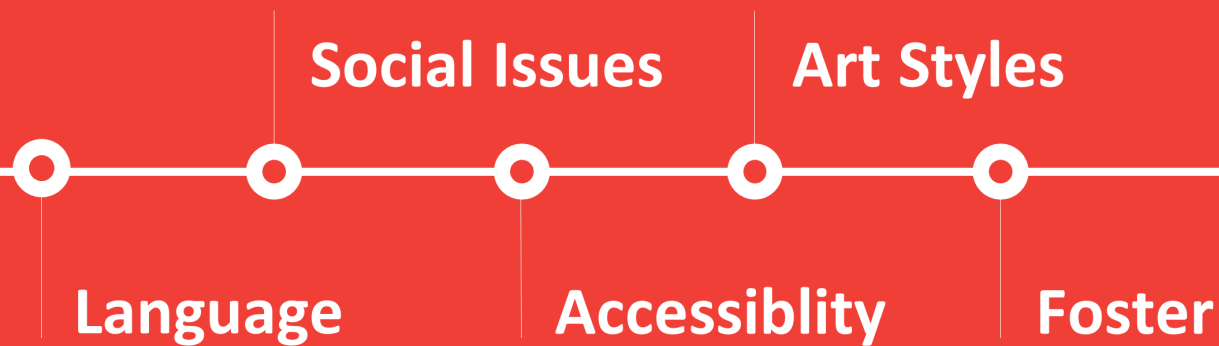
3. Incorporate Feedback from Marginalized Communities

Game developers should actively seek feedback from marginalized communities throughout the development process. This can help to identify potential areas of concern in terms of representation and inclusivity and provide opportunities to make changes that better represent these groups. Incorporating feedback can also help to build trust and foster a sense of community between game developers and their audience (Consalvo & Dutton, 2019).

4. Avoid Harmful Stereotypes and Appropriation

Game developers should be mindful of harmful stereotypes and cultural appropriation when creating characters and storylines. This can involve consulting with experts and members of the relevant communities to ensure that representations are accurate and respectful. When in doubt, it is always better to err on the side of caution and avoid potentially harmful portrayals altogether (Rollings & Morris, 2000).

5. Include Customizable Character Options

Another way to improve identity from representation and inclusivity in video games is to include customizable character options. This can allow players to create characters that more closely resemble themselves or their desired identity and can help to break down barriers to representation in games (Deterding et al., 2011).

6. Include a Variety of Language Options

To improve cultural diversity in video games, developers should consider including a variety of language options. This can help to make the game more accessible to players from different linguistic backgrounds and can also help to highlight the diversity of cultures and languages that exist in the world.

7. Address Social Issues in Game Storylines

Another way to improve identity from representation and inclusivity in video games is to address social issues in in-game storylines. This can help to raise awareness of critical issues and create empathy among players. It can also provide opportunities for marginalized groups to see themselves represented in a positive light for marginalized groups to see themselves represented in a positive light.

8. Provide Accessibility Options

Developers should also consider providing accessibility options in video games. This can include options for players with disabilities, such as customizable controls and subtitles. These options can help to make the game more inclusive and accessible to a wider range of players.

9. Showcase a Variety of Art Styles

To improve cultural diversity in video games, developers should also consider showcasing a variety of art styles. This can help to highlight the diverse range of artistic traditions that exist around the world and can also provide opportunities for game developers to work with artists from different cultural backgrounds.

10. Foster Diversity and Inclusion in Gaming Communities

Finally, it is important to foster diversity and inclusion in gaming communities. This can involve creating safe spaces for marginalized groups, providing opportunities for underrepresented individuals to participate in game development, and promoting positive representation and inclusivity within the wider gaming community.

By implementing these points of intervention, game developers and the wider gaming community can work together to create more inclusive, diverse, and representative video games.

Trends

Digital Division

Society / Technology

The metaverse has to be thought of as a playground for all but there are concerns that it will widen the digital divide.

Description

People of colour and other marginalized groups statistically don't have the same access to technology and its advancements as others. This is because they either cannot afford or do not know how to use digital technology. The rapid shift towards an immersive, decentralized, blockchain-powered internet or the metaverse creates concern that the digital divide will further widen. This new era allows for this separation to continue, leaving countless behind.

Getting Ahead of The Emerging Meta Divide — People of colour are typically three to five years behind when applying new technology. The divide will displace people in a very disruptive way, from re-classification to elimination, to inaccessibility. Moving forward, individuals must be willing to champion information and share insights and tools to mitigate the divide (Hunt, 2022).

Don't let the digital divide become 'the new face of inequality' — The deputy chief of the UN released a warning that artificial intelligence and the blockchain pose numerous risks including exclusion. He stresses that it is necessary to leave no one behind and that a worldwide, multi-stakeholder and intergenerational approach is needed (United Nations, 2021).

How the Metaverse could worsen the digital divide — Companies and governments are rushing to get into the metaverse, but digital and social inclusion experts are concerned that they are losing sight of the fact that users need specific gear and reliable connection to the internet (Sharma, 2022).

Counter / Related Trends

Decentralization, web 3.0, cryptocurrency, NFTs

Expanding Representation

Society / Environment / Economic

When there is an increase of representation in the video game industry, not only from the storytelling and character creation but in the workplace as well it encourages new audiences to interact and engage with this content.

Description

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift toward promoting representation and inclusivity in various entertainment industries. This trend has been seen in television, film, and even in the music industry. The push for diversity and representation has been driven by a desire to accurately depict the world we live in and provide more opportunities for people from underrepresented communities. One clear example of this trend can be seen in the increase of diverse casts in television shows and films.

Many popular shows and movies now feature casts that include people from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as those who identify as LGBTQ+. This not only provides more job opportunities for actors from underrepresented groups but also helps to create more authentic and relatable stories for audiences to enjoy. Similarly, the music industry has also

seen a push toward greater representation and diversity. Many artists are now using their platforms to promote inclusivity and social justice issues. This can be seen in the lyrics of their songs, as well as in their music videos and social media presence.

Overall, the trend of expanding representation in the entertainment industry is a positive step toward creating a more inclusive and diverse society. While there is still work to be done, the progress that has been made is encouraging and hopefully, this trend will continue to grow in the years to come.

Signals

Why 'The Sims' Trans-Inclusive Update Means So Much to Me - The customization of simulated characters cause audience members to feel seen and heard. (The Daily

Beast, 2023)

Video games are becoming more accessible — and games are better for it - Allowing options for disabled gamers to join in and be apart of the fun (Polygon, 2023) HBO's 'The Last of Us' adaptation is a milestone for LGBTQ gamers - Providing hope for LGBTQ gamers that focusing on queer romance gave them hope for the future of video games (NBC News, 2023)
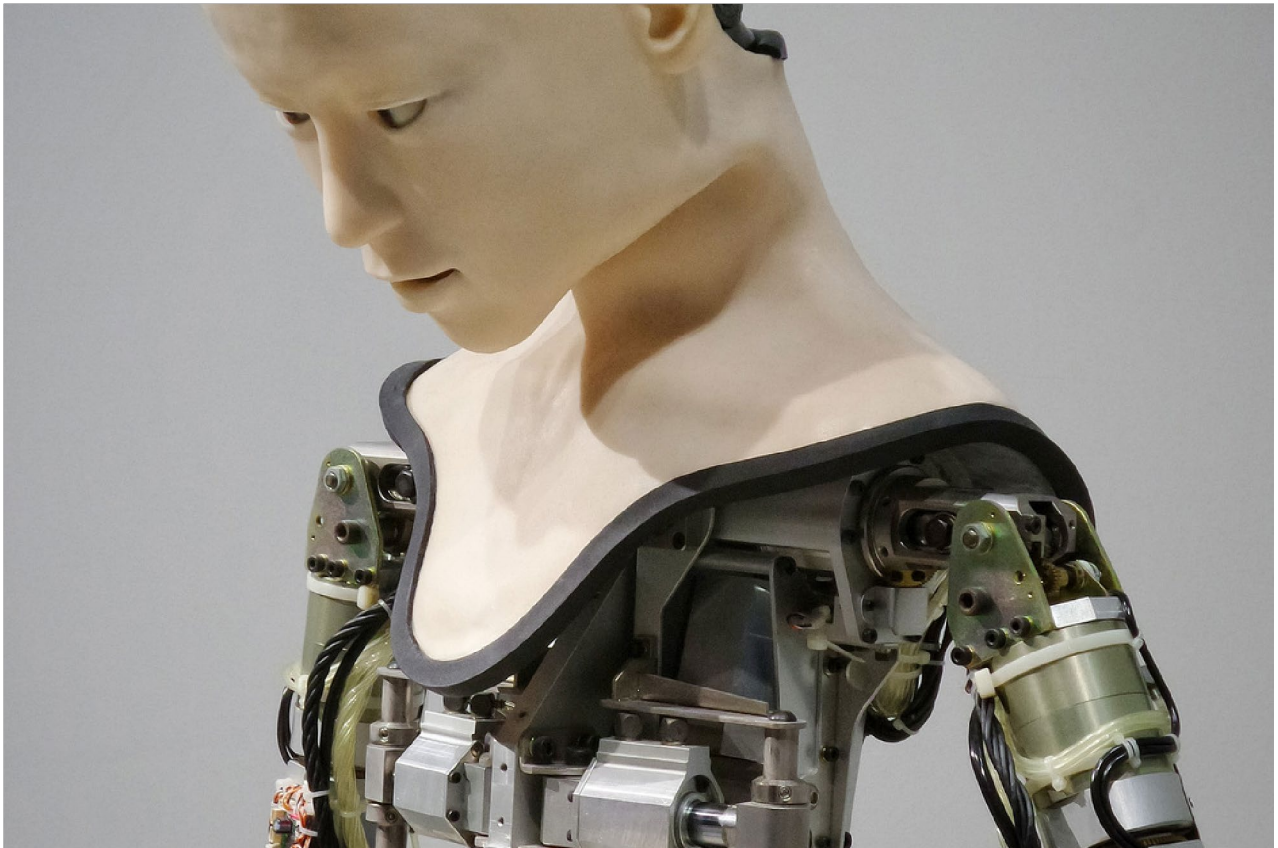
Counter / Related Trends

Harmful Misrepresentation / Forced Diversity

Robotic Human

Society / Technology

Enhancement and augmentation of the human condition using technology

Description

Technological advancements have blurred the lines between humans and machines. While the transhumanist idea has been around for less than half a century, it is only now beginning to manifest on a tangible scale. With the rise of movements such as bio-hacking, technological implanting, DNA data storage, and artificial intelligence, the transhumanist belief that the human race should evolve beyond its current physical and mental limitations - especially by means of science and technology - is becoming more prevalent. This will lead to the existence

of two distinct types of beings: the human and the posthuman, along with the laws that differentiate them.

Signals

How biohackers are trying to upgrade their brains, their bodies — and human nature? — To refuse a hack would mean to be at a huge professional disadvantage or to face moral condemnation for remaining suboptimal when optimization is possible. In a world of superhumans, it may become increasingly hard to stay "merely" human

(Samuel, 2019).

Microsoft Patents New Cryptocurrency System Using Body Activity Data — Microsoft has patented a cryptocurrency mining system that leverages human activities, including brain waves and body heat, when performing online tasks such as using search engines, chatbots, and reading ads. "A user can solve the computationally difficult problem unconsciously," the patent reads (Bitcoin News, 2020).

Paralyzed man with severed spine walks thanks to implant — Implant on the spine helps a formerly paralyzed man to walk (BBC News, 2022).

How silicon chips define the evolving world order — Talks about how silicon chip implants can potentially be the next oil. Implant chips have already found their way into the hands of thousands of people in Sweden who have opted for the scan the able subdermal chip implants in their bodies (Renton Reporter, 2022).

Counter / Related Trends

Anti-technology movement

Starting at the Foundation

Society / Values

The importance that diversity and inclusion have on the workplace can affect the bias and informed decisions on ongoing projects due to different life experiences brought to attention.

Description

The trend of promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace is becoming increasingly important in modern society. Companies are recognizing that having a diverse workforce can lead to more informed decision-making and a wider variety of perspectives, which ultimately benefits both the business and its employees. Moreover, when individuals from different backgrounds and experiences work together, it can lead to a more creative and innovative environment, where new ideas and approaches can be shared and implemented. One key aspect of promoting diversity in the workplace is avoiding groupthink. Groupthink can occur when individuals within a group share similar backgrounds or experiences, leading to a lack of critical thinking and an overreliance on past practices.

 By hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds, companies can avoid groupthink and ensure that all perspectives are considered when making important decisions. Another important aspect of promoting diversity in the workplace is avoiding bias. Bias can occur when individuals make decisions based on stereotypes or preconceived notions about certain groups of people.

By hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds, companies can avoid this type of bias and ensure that all employees are treated fairly and equitably.

Finally, promoting diversity in the workplace can also create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all employees. When individuals feel valued and respected for who they are, they are more likely to be engaged and productive in their work. This can lead to better business outcomes and a more positive work culture. Overall, the trend towards promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace is a positive step towards creating a more equitable and just society. By recognizing the importance of diversity and actively working to promote it within the workplace, companies can ensure that they are making informed decisions, avoiding bias, and creating a more inclusive work environment for all employees.

Signals

How To Launch A SUCCESSFUL DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION PROGRAM (HRD, 2022)

New Report Claims Valve's Structure And Work Culture Is Hostile To Diversity (Gamespot, 2023)

The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion in Creating Fair and Equitable Societies (OpinionNigeria, 2023)

The mostly harmful history of Native representation in popular video games (The Daily Aztec, 2022)

Call of Duty Warzone 2.0 faces backlash over cultural misrepresentation, Arabic translation errors (Eurogamer, 2022)

Counter / Related Trends

Dangerous workplace, Generation Gaps

Therapy Gaming

Technology / Values

Prescribing video games for therapy for diagnosed people with mental illness.

Description

It's already proven that playing video games increase memory, learning, spatial awareness, attentional control, creative problem solving and decision-making. However, the trend lies in utilizing this knowledge and building mind-enhancing tactics within future games so that people with ADHD, OCD, and BPD can practice their impulse control obstacles, memory retention and creative problem-solving skills.

Signals

How video games affect the brain — Evidence demonstrates that playing video games increases the size and competence of parts of the brain responsible for visuospatial skills – a person's ability to identify visual and spatial relationships among objects. In long-term gamers and individuals who had volunteered to follow a video game training plan, the right hippocampus was enlarged (MediLexicon International, n.d.).

Action Video-Game Training and Its Effects on Perception and Attentional Control — A study by Green and Bavelier found that action video games enhance attentional control. According to this study, action games involve high-speed gameplay and contain objects that quickly pop in and out of the visual field. They have the broadest benefits to perceptual and attentional abilities (Green et al., 2016).

Do action video games improve perception and cognition? — A study conducted by McDermott et al. compared the memory of action video game players with nongamers. They found that action video game players excelled over non-gamers in tasks that involved retaining many memories. They also demonstrated higher precision with visual-spatial short-term memory tasks (Boot et al., 2011).

FDA Permits Marketing of First Game-Based Digital Therapeutic to Improve Attention Function in Children with ADHD — In 2020, the FDA approved the first prescription digital game as therapy for ADHD. EndeavorRx is for youths aged 8-12. It's mainly for those who have the inattentive or inattentive-hyperactive type of disorder. It's meant to be used as part of treatment that may include medication and behavioural therapy (FDA, 2020).

Counter / Related Trends

Gaming addictions and their neural rewards, Poor anger management control,

Negative effects of free voice comms, Parental control

Art Imitating Life

Technology / Values

Creating freedom and acceptance within game storytelling allows players to explore their identity or try out other creative possibilities.

Description

Video games have become an increasingly popular form of entertainment, with millions of people around the world playing games on a regular basis. As the medium has evolved, so too has the way that video games address issues of identity and representation. One trend that has emerged in recent years is the focus on creating freedom and acceptance within video game storytelling, allowing players to explore their identities. Many games now offer players the ability to create characters that reflect their own identities, including gender, sexual orientation, and race.

This not only provides a more immersive and personalized gaming experience but also helps to promote acceptance and understanding of diverse identities. Players can choose to play as characters that look like them or explore various aspects of their identity through their in-game avatars.

This trend has been driven by a desire to create a more inclusive gaming environment, and to provide players with a greater sense of agency and autonomy within the games they play. By allowing players to create and customize their own characters, video games are providing a space where players can explore their identity in a safe and supportive environment.

As this trend continues to grow, it has the potential to make video games a more welcoming and inclusive space for players of all backgrounds. By promoting acceptance and understanding of diverse identities, video games can help to create a more tolerant and open-minded society. While there is still work to be done to ensure that all players feel represented and included, the progress that has been made so far is encouraging, and hopefully, this trend will continue to grow in the years to come.

Signals

Why 'The Sims' Trans-Inclusive Update Means So Much to Me - The customization of simulated characters cause audience members to feel seen and heard. (The Daily

Beast, 2023)

Hogwarts Legacy strives for player freedom and inclusion - Avalanche Software aims to correct the Harry Potter legacy that was put down by J.K.Rowling's transphobic beliefs by creating an inclusive game. (Gameshub, 2023)

Counter / Related Trends

Ethics of AI gaming

Dator's Four Futures

This generation method would allow the organization of a large variety of drivers and insights into narratives that can inform decisions for a new tool. To start, a variety of parameters were selected to create a base for the scenarios. These parameters are both macros, like economy or culture, while some are quite micro and specific to the topic, accessibility, and workplace diversity. The parameters are diverse to force perspective on the intricacies of the representation of video games and their effect on the economy. After the parameters were established, each column was filled with simple verbs, like increasing, decreasing, expanding, progressing, etc.

After each column was completed, I created more descriptive entries so it would be easier to understand and digest each point for those reading. It is also important to note that in each of the scenarios, there are both winners and losers. Along with the information from Dator's Four Futures table, I used trends and drivers from secondary research to begin developing the scenario narratives.

Parameters	Growth	Collapse	Discipline	Transform
Economy	• Globalized and Accessible	• Economy Decay	• Economy Regeneration	• Economy at an all time high
Government	• increase in Government Video Games	• Misleading Government Propaganda games	• Government Controlled games	• Government utilized video games for education of its system
Culture	• Digitally Connected / Reinforced	• Divided	• neo-collectivism	• Complete comprehension of culture
Technology	• More ways to game past AR/VR	• Only available to rich people	• Creation of cheaper gaming consoles/alternatives	• Level playing field for games available
Energy	• Abundance of energy	• Limited access to energy	• Attention towards energy used	• Increased funding for alternative energy
Cultural Inclusion	• increase and more games are created with designs that can have translations	• Games can't have any story or design related to culture	• Games are only available in english and only to certain groups	• All cultures are represented fairly and without harsh stereotypes
Workplace Diversity	• Increased Hiring margins for diversity	• Minimum Diversity Quota is not being filled	• Minimum Diversity Quota is being filled	• Expansion of experiences and lack of bias
Technology Accessibility	• everyone will have access to some sort of gaming device whether its pc/console/mobile	• Only available to rich people	• Creation of cheaper gaming consoles/alternatives	• Technology is accessible for everyone
Representation	• all video games that have detailed story lines will have correct representation	• No representation, games downgrade to animals and grey blobs	• only approved representation is allowed	• Representation is everywhere and it is accurate without stereotypes or bias
Influence / Impact	• high impact on positive youth identity	• high impact on cultural identity related to gaming	• high impact on negative youth identity	• no impact
Cost of Games	• increase due to increase in team sizes	• increase for its limited runs	• Business models allow for one price for all games	• decrease for its accessibility or business models

Growth

Economy	Globalized and Accessible	**Workplace Diversity**	Increased Hiring margins for diversity
Government	increase in Government Video Games	**Technological Accessibility**	everyone will have access to some sort of gaming device whether its pc/console/mobile
Culture	Digitally Connected / Reinforced		
Technology	More ways to game past AR/VR	**Representation**	all video games that have detailed story lines will have correct representation
Energy	Abundance of energy		
Cultural Inclusion	increase and more games are created with designs that can have translations	**Influence / Impact**	Low impact on youth identity
		Cost of Games	increase due to increase in team sizes

Table 5. Growth

Growth

In the year 2040, the world of video games had undergone a complete transformation. Once a medium dominated by a limited array of characters and storylines, the gaming industry had evolved to reflect the diverse array of cultures and identities that existed in the real world.

Gone were the days of stereotypical characters and one-dimensional plotlines. Instead, gamers could now choose from a vast array of options that represented people from all walks of life. Women, people of colour, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and those with disabilities were no longer relegated to the sidelines.

Instead, they were front and center, represented in all their complexity and nuance. It wasn't an easy road to get there. In the early days of gaming, the industry had been dominated by a narrow group of developers and gamers who were resistant to change. But as new voices emerged and the demand for more diverse representation grew, the industry began to slowly evolve.

One of the key factors in this evolution was the emergence of indie game developers who prioritized inclusivity and diversity in their work. These developers created games that reflected their own experiences, and the experiences of people like them. As these games gained popularity, larger developers and publishers began to take notice. Another factor was the rise of social media and online gaming communities.

Gamers who had traditionally been marginalized found a voice on these platforms and began to demand more representation in their favourite games. These grassroots movements put pressure on the industry to change.

Today, the world of gaming is a much more inclusive and representative place. Gamers of all backgrounds can find characters and storylines that reflect their own experiences. And as the industry continues to evolve, it's clear that the revolution of inclusivity in gaming is just getting started.

Collapse

Economy	Economy Decay	**Workplace Diversity**	Minimum Diversity Quota is not being filled
Government	Misleading Government Propaganda games	**Technological Accessibility**	Only available to rich people
Culture	Divided		
Technology	Only available to rich people	**Representation**	No representation, games downgrade to animals and grey blobs
Energy	Limited access to energy	**Influence / Impact**	high impact on cultural identity related to gaming
Cultural Inclusion	Games can't have any story or design related to culture		
		Cost of Games	increase for its limited runs

Table 6. Collapse

Collapse

In the year 2040, the video game industry faced a crisis. A crisis of representation, cultural identity, and inclusivity. It all started with the release of a highly anticipated game that was marketed as being "revolutionary" and "inclusive". However, upon its release, it was quickly apparent that the game fell short of its promises.

People from different cultural backgrounds expressed their disappointment in the game's lack of representation. The characters were all white and straight, and the story was focused on a narrative that failed to resonate with many players. The developers of the game were accused of tokenism and exploiting marginalized communities for profit.

The backlash was swift and severe. People took to social media to express their outrage and boycott the game. The controversy sparked a larger conversation about representation and inclusivity in video games. Many games that had previously been praised for their diversity were now criticized for their lack of depth and nuance. As the conversation continued, it became clear that the problem was not just with individual games, but with the industry as a whole. Developers were more concerned with making a profit than creating games that truly represented the diverse experiences of their players. As a result, many gamers felt excluded and marginalized.

The collapse of representation in video games had far-reaching consequences. It not only affected the gaming community but also society as a whole. The lack of diversity in video games contributed to a larger culture of exclusion and othering. People from marginalized communities were denied the opportunity to see themselves represented in mainstream media, which only reinforced their feelings of isolation and invisibility.

In the end, the crisis served as a wake-up call for the video game industry. Developers realized that they needed to do better, and many began to take steps to create more inclusive and representative games. It was a slow process, but it was a step in the right direction. The collapse of representation in video games may have been a dark time, but it ultimately led to positive change.

Discipline

Economy	Economy Regeneration	**Workplace Diversity**	Minimum Diversity Quota is being filled
Government	Government Controlled games	**Technological Accessibility**	Creation of cheaper gaming consoles/alternatives
Culture	neo-collectivism		
Technology	Creation of cheaper gaming consoles/alternatives	**Representation**	only approved representation is allowed
Energy	Attention towards energy used	**Influence / Impact**	no impact
Cultural Inclusion	Games are only available in english and only to certain groups	**Cost of Games**	Business models allow for one price for all games

Table 7. Discipline

Discipline

In 2040, the government took over the video game industry intending to make it a more disciplined and regulated space. They believed that video games were too violent and inappropriate for children, and they wanted to impose their values on game developers. The government began to monitor all aspects of game development, from character design to plotlines, making sure that they were in line with their regulations. Developers were outraged by the government's actions. They claimed that the government was stifling creativity and limiting their ability to tell the stories they wanted to tell. They were forced to create games that promoted the values of the ruling party, even if they didn't believe in them. Characters of all races, genders, sexual orientations, and abilities were no longer allowed in games. Games set in different cultures and with different languages were banned. The industry became a homogenous, bland space where creativity was stifled and diversity was non-existent. Players were outraged by the lack of diversity and representation in games. They called for change, but their voices were silenced by the government. The industry became a place where only a select few were allowed to create and play games. But then, a group of rebel developers decided that enough was enough. They banded together to create an underground gaming community, where creativity and diversity were celebrated. Games with characters of all races, genders, sexual orientations, and abilities. They refused to be silenced by the government and fought for their right to create the games they wanted to create. The government tried to shut down the rebel developers, but they were too powerful, and their games were too popular. Slowly but surely, the rebel developers began to change the industry from the ground up. They showed the world that video games could be a place for creativity, diversity, and inclusivity. In the end, the rebel developers won. The government was forced to loosen its restrictions on game development, and the industry became a more welcoming, diverse, and representative place. And the rebel developers continued to create games that pushed the boundaries of what was possible, inspiring a new generation of game developers to do the same.
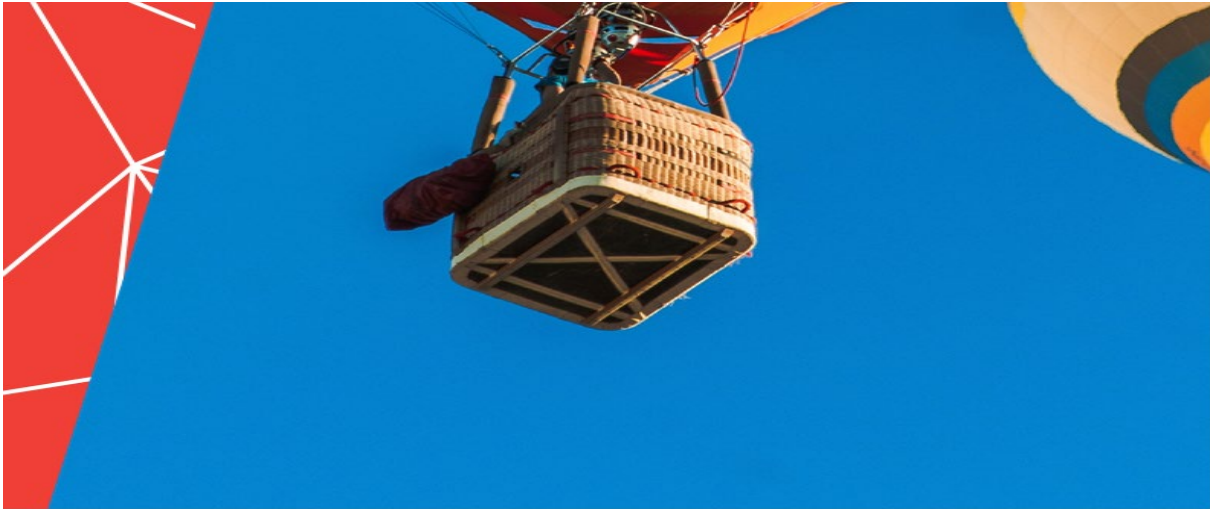
Transform

Economy	All time high	**Workplace Diversity**	Expansion of experiences and lack of bias
Government	Government utilized video games for education of its system	**Technological Accessibility**	Technology is accessible for everyone
Culture	Complete comprehension of culture	**Representation**	Representation is everywhere and it is accurate without stereotypes or bias
Technology	Level playing field for games available		
Energy	Increased funding for alternative energy	**Influence / Impact**	high impact on youth identity
Cultural Inclusion	All cultures are represented fairly and without harsh stereotypes	**Cost of Games**	decrease for its accessibility or business models

Table 8. Transform

Transform

It was the year 2040 and the world of video games had undergone a radical transformation. Gone were the days of stereotypical representations and lack of inclusivity. The gaming industryhad finally recognized the power of diversity and cultural identity and was now leading the way in promoting positive change.

In this new reality, video games had become a reflection of society's diverse makeup. Players could now create characters that reflected their own unique cultural backgrounds and identities. From skin tone to facial features, clothing to accessories every aspect of a character's appearance was customizable. Not only were players able to create characters that looked like them, but they could also explore new cultures and perspectives through immersive gameplay. Games were designed to educate and celebrate different cultures, breaking down barriers and promoting understanding. The impact of this shift in representation was visible everywhere. The gaming community was now more diverse and inclusive than ever before, with players of all ages, genders, races, and backgrounds coming together to share their love of gaming. Even the gaming industry itself had become more diverse. Women and people of colour now held key leadership positions, shaping the future of gaming with their unique perspectives and experiences.

This vision of a more inclusive gaming industry is not just a fantasy, but a movement that is already happening today. In recent years, several video games have significantly promoted diversity and inclusivity. For example, "Life is Strange" features a bisexual protagonist and explores themes of mental health and trauma. "Assassin's Creed: Origins" showcases ancient Egyptian culture and history. "Gone Home," tells the story of a young woman coming to terms with her sexuality. These games and many more like them have helped to pave the way for a more diverse and inclusive gaming industry. As I looked around at the world of gaming in 2040, I couldn't help but feel hopeful for the future. The transformation of representation, cultural identity and inclusivity had not only changed the world of gaming but also sparked a larger movement toward a more just and equitable society.

Influence Determination Technique

Table 9. Influence Determination Technique

Description

This tool utilizes the three influencing variables of Identity, Representation and Motivation to understand what is needed to focus on video games' impact on cultural identity. The IDT's columns are separated as a linear time journey to analyze preexisting games however, it can be used for games at any stage to forecast the reactions of their audience. The important thing to take away from the IDT is that it is used to measure and inform designers about the impact of their choices for the game. This creates a place where stereotypes and bias can be easily documented because their presence does affect gameplay, motivation and cultural identity. Allowing players to be informed on changes and how it affects others is another step after the IDT has been used to promote transparency and inclusion within the design process.

"Experience" is where designers can write the initial intentions of their design and how they want it to be perceived. This is an area for "hopes and dreams". What is the game's initial intention? For the Character's design choices? For the Storyline?

"Perception" is used when the game has been released to gather insights and quotes from players and their experiences with the game's storytelling, character design and setting of the video game. How was the game was received by the players?

"Improvement" is the last section of the IDT where it is used to take the experience and perception and make changes to the sections that need it the most. What can be improved?

"Characters" is where the characters in the game are described, their features, their physical description, and their personality. What features are noticed about the characters?

"Storyline" describes the story of the video game. What features are noticed about the storyline?

"Factors" apply to the variables of Identity, Representation, and Motivation outlined below.

Three Influencing Variables

Identity

The concept of identity encompasses various elements that define an individual's self concept. Identity is shaped by a multitude of factors, including social, cultural, and environmental elements. These components have a significant impact on an individual's beliefs, values, and attitudes, which ultimately influence their decision making process.

The main influencing components of identity are as follows:

Social factors play a crucial role in shaping an individual's identity. This includes the influence of family, friends, and the wider community. The family is often considered the primary socialization agent, as it is the first point of contact for a child (Baumeister, 2005). The values, beliefs, and behaviours that are instilled in a child during their formative years can have a lasting impact on their identity. The influence of friends and the wider community also plays a role in shaping an individual's identity (Stryker, 1980).

Cultural factors refer to the shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artifacts that characterize a group or society (Hofstede, 1980). Culture plays a significant role in shaping an

individual's identity, as it provides a framework for understanding the world around them. The culture an individual is raised in can have a profound impact on their identity, shaping their beliefs, values, and attitudes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Environmental factors encompass the physical, social, and economic conditions in which an individual lives. The environment an individual is exposed to can have a significant impact on their identity. For example, an individual raised in a disadvantaged community may have a different outlook on life compared to someone raised in a more affluent area (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Representation

Representation in video games has become an increasingly important topic in recent years, as the industry continues to grow and evolve. The way that characters, settings, and storylines are represented in video games can have a significant impact on the player's experience and perception of the game. The main influencing components of representation in video games are as follows:

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the representation of characters and settings in video games. The culture in which the game is developed, and the intended audience can have a significant impact on the representation of characters and settings (Williams et al., 2009). For example, a game developed in Japan may have different cultural references and character designs than a game developed in the United States. The representation of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality can also be influenced by cultural factors (Shaw, 2014).

Social factors refer to the influence of society on the representation of characters and settings in video games. This includes the influence of social norms, values, and beliefs. Video games are often designed to appeal to a certain demographic, and the representation of characters and settings can reflect this (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009). For example, a game designed for a younger audience may have simpler character designs and storylines, while a game designed for an older audience may have more complex and mature themes.

Economic factors can also influence the representation of characters and settings in video games. The video game industry is a highly competitive market, and developers must consider the potential profitability of their game. This can lead to certain character designs and storylines being prioritized over others (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009). For example, a game with a popular character design or storyline may be more likely to be successful, even if it does not represent all groups equally.

Motivation

Motivation is a complex psychological construct that drives individuals to achieve their goals. Motivation is a critical aspect of human behaviour, as it influences our actions, thoughts, and emotions. The main influencing components of motivation are as follows:

Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal factors that drive an individual to achieve their goals. These factors are rooted in an individual's values, beliefs, and interests. Intrinsic motivation is driven by the desire to engage in activities that are inherently rewarding and enjoyable (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, an individual who has an intrinsic motivation to learn a new language may be driven by their interest in the language or the satisfaction they feel when they successfully communicate in the language.

Extrinsic motivation refers to the external factors that influence an individual's behaviour. These factors include rewards, punishments, and social pressures. Extrinsic motivation is driven by the desire to obtain external rewards or avoid negative consequences (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, an individual who is motivated to perform well at work may be driven by the promise of a bonus or promotion.

Social factors refer to the influence of other people on an individual's motivation. Social factors include the influence of friends, family, colleagues, and society. Social motivation can be positive or negative, depending on the nature of the influence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, an individual may be motivated to pursue a particular career path because it is highly valued by their family or social group.

Conclusion

Video games have a big impact on cultural identity, with representation and diversity playing important roles. They shape perspectives and understanding of different cultures.

We explored how representation and diversity in video games positively affect cultural identity, leading to better understanding and inclusivity. Negative impact from stereotypes in games can reinforce harmful beliefs and misunderstandings. Game developers must consider representation of cultures and characters to provide positive impact on cultural identity.

Video games can combat cultural biases and prejudices, provide a safe space for exploration, and promote empathy and understanding of different cultures. They bring people together and can educate and promote cultural awareness. Diversity in games also has economic benefits, with higher revenues for developers. The Influence Determination Technique helps designers analyze how their games affect users' cultural identity. In summary, developers should prioritize diversity and inclusivity to promote a positive impact on cultural identity.

Questions?
Contact me.

cpaano.com

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