

“Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the notion that the focus on developing games for casual gamers may cause harm to the industry in the long term.”



Introduction

In this text I will be looking at how developing games for casual gamers may cause harm to the industry. I will be looking at what casual and hardcore gamers/games actually are and the effects they have in the business.



Casual Gamer – Casual gamers want to be able to play a game that’s fairly easy. They want to play a game that doesn’t require a lot of time or any special skills. They play games to pass the time and usually don’t spend hours a week on a console.

Hardcore Gamer – this phrase is used to describe someone who spends a large amount of their free time playing computer games. They want hard, challenging games with a lot of rules and options. They spend their time mastering all of the actions/rules the game has to offer, even if they are not needed. Hardcore gamers like to be fully immersed into the game. I personally like to turn off the lights, put on a set of headphones and give 100% attention to the game.

Creating games for casual gamers will most likely affect the industry in the long run.

“It is very important to reach as many gamers as you can” - Laddie Ervin

I think this quote should always be remembered when developing games for both casual and hardcore gamers. The hardcore gamers play a big part in the success of a game. If the game turns out to be brilliant, the hardcore gamers will inform the casual gamers. Also, if it is bad, they will let them know about that too. Hardcore gamers create the hype for a game which leads to casual gamers buying them.

So designing games aimed just towards casual gamers may be a dangerous step. Example, obviously hardcore gamers want hardcore games. If there’s a shortage of these on the market, there’s a high chance the hardcore gamers will not enjoy the available games as much. They will notify the casual gamers that the games are not that good - resulting in casual gamers not buying them.

By saying this, I don't want to imply that I think all games should be hardcore. There needs to be some sort of balance of how much of each type of game is made. The industry needs to make games for everyone.

On the other hand...

With the evolution of games and the next-gen consoles, games are becoming more expensive to make and take longer to produce.

As the audience continues to grow, compared to the casual gamers, the hardcore audience is becoming smaller in percentage.

Casual gamers take up more of the industry's audience. Therefore, with fewer games on the market, it would be sensible for the industry to create games for that broader part of the audience. Hardcore gamers will always exist, but they will only have a small selection of games to choose from. Unfortunately for themselves, there are not enough of them to cause a big difference in the sales. Casual games with fewer features than hardcore games cost less to produce than hardcore games. Looking at it from that point of view, more casual games could make the industry a lot of money (through sales) and also save it a lot of money (due to low production costs).

Even though the gaming world has these visions of hardcore and casual games, it doesn't necessarily mean they are only hardcore or casual. Take games like Street Fighter 2 and Mortal Kombat for instance. These games are in the arcades. Therefore they should be casual games (so everyone can play them). However, some hardcore gamers play these games day in day out to become masters at them. They try to complete the game without losing any energy/rounds. So this means a game doesn't always have to be just casual or hardcore. The player can choose for his/herself how hardcore/casual they want to make the game.

The point I'm trying to make is, if the industry develops games just for casual gamers, they may not lose their hardcore audience. The hardcore gamers will find something in the casual games, and then make something hardcore out of it (by setting themselves really hard challenges). If this actually happens, the industry wouldn't lose much of their audience (bearing in mind, the hardcore gamers need to find a challenge they can set themselves in the first place).

"more casual game players view the playing of such games as an important leisure time activity than TV, reading, or spending time with family and friends;" – PopCap casual games survey.

By looking at this, casual games seem to be taking over a number of free time activities. The home video/DVD sales hit approximately 13 billion pound in the US (\$25 billion). If casual games are going to take over this industry, with the number of gamers becoming bigger every year, imagine how much more money they would make for the industry!

If there is something the industry needs to worry about, it's the way the games are made. The industry needs more innovative ideas for games. Over the last decade, graphics and hardware have been the two main things that have sold games/consoles. In time, the graphics will reach a stage where they cannot be more realistic. Buyers will get bored of seeing the same graphical effects in games. The industry needs to focus more on the game-play side of things rather than the graphical side. This way, gamers will carry on buying games because they will have a different experience with each one (rather than having the same experience with different images).

The solution for the industry is to vary the types of games it makes. The consoles should offer entertainment for all of its users. Example, the Nintendo Gamecube and the N64 were mainly focused on the companies' previous successors (Mario, Pokemon, etc). The consoles were not very diverse which may have been the reason they weren't as successful as others. The PS2 however, offered games such as the Eyetoy (where you are in the game through the result of a camera) and a karaoke machine. These features/games attracted a larger part of the audience which helped the console become a success.



The industry needs to create something to reach new consumers who are not gamers. The Nintendo Wii is a great example for this. The unique control system attracted a lot of non-gamers. On the day of its launch, the console broke the UK's sales record (105,000 units). I think this was because the original control system is aimed towards casual/new gamers. There isn't much to the interface and it doesn't offer difficult controls – mainly just one button and a swinging motion (which casual gamers want). So, taking this record breaking console into mind, it may be better for the industry to make more casual consoles as well as games.

Casual games can now be acquired through a number of ways. They can be bought through mobile phones, over the internet and also through the TV. Their 'easy to play' nature attracts people who don't usually play games, widening the audience day by day. It would be difficult to play hardcore games with the small amount of controls. This is why you don't see games like Unreal Tournament/Gears of war on phones/TV. New gamers would leave the game if they had difficult controls.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, I believe that there is no exact definition of what a casual and hardcore game actually is. It doesn't matter what you play, it's the way you play it. How much you care about gaming is what counts. As I said, hardcore gamers will find a way to make what we call 'casual games' hardcore.

Overall, the whole point of the industry is to make a profit. So no, I don't think creating games for a casual audience will harm it. With the number of casual gamers on the rise, I think there is a good chance it will help it.