

A EUROPEAN VOICE IN GAME DESIGN

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Statement of Originality

This is to certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This complete thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or other purposes. I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work. All the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources therein have been acknowledged.

Bradley McAvoy-James

List of Original Publications

This thesis includes work from the following peer review publications completed or partnered:

A: James, B., Fletcher, B.D. and Wearn, N. (2013) Three Corners of Reward in Computer Games. *Foundations of Digital Games*, 8.

B: Fletcher, B.D., James, B. and Wearn, N. (2013) Gamification of Smart Meter Home Display Units Using Targeted Reward Mechanics. In ICA Game Studies Interest Group 2013 Conference.

C: James, B. and Fletcher, B.D. (2015a) Understanding the Fanboy Culture; Their Place and Role within the Games Industry. *Video Game Cultures UK*, VG7.

D: James, B. and Fletcher, B.D. (2015b) Defining the Global Ludo Polychotomy. *Digital Games Research Association DiGRA*, 12.

E: James, B. and Fletcher, B.D. (2016) We are Smash Bros; Understanding Player Types and Ideals Through Worldwide Game Design. *Video Game Cultures UK*, VG8.

Abstract

The definition of terminology is important with regards to the advancement of knowledge. Without clear and understandable definitions, work can become difficult to comprehend and loses clarity. This is important when examining culture, a field which changes substantially over short periods of time. When combined with video games, another field which sees accelerated growth and change, this becomes even more so due to the rapid expansion of consumer understanding and mentality with regards to video games.

The focus of this thesis is to ascertain the meaning behind the use of current geographical terms such as 'Eastern' and 'Western' in the video games industry, and in doing so highlight the existence of an emerging European voice within game design and culture. This is achieved through a literature review exploring the preliminary use of the terms, the evolution of the necessity of them in popular culture and the justification of the use of games in research.

The first study within the thesis examines the use of and current meaning behind the current geographical terms within the video gaming industry and culture, while also exploring emerging markets through focus groups consisting of participants within the field. This produces a reasoning for the use of 'Eastern' and 'Western' as terminology in game culture. The second study uses this data, in combination with games analysed over a five-year period, to display examples of what Eastern, Western and European games are and gives context to these terms. These are presented as case studies containing key information, a previously developed model used to clearly identify a game's reward systems and netnographic review.

The thesis concludes that a European voice in game design is present. This has implications into the ways in which video games will be developed and produced. These conclusions challenge the conclusions of existing literature into the East/West divide as well as highlighting new areas for future study.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Reducing a field which has an influence on global cultures and entertainment to a dichotomy is a restrictive measure. However, thanks to a convergence of media and information accessibility, popular media types have been reduced into two identifiable groups: Eastern and Western (Meštrovic 1994 and Macgilchrist 2007). These terms are used frequently within popular culture and the entertainment industry and have become the general terms used in conversation when the topic involves worldwide mediums (Pattberg 2009), but what is a “Western” product and how and why is it only opposed to “Eastern”?

In the case of video games, the acceptance of an East versus West mentality initially came from the ongoing console wars (Harris, 2015). Though this began with two Japanese companies’ rivalry in the industry it has since evolved to include Western influences, with Microsoft joining the market, which advanced the consumers’ market allegiance from just companies to whole countries (Consalvo 2007). However, this should not be an acceptable excuse; the video gaming industry is more popular than it has ever been with new ways to play and enjoy the medium constantly being developed and put into effect (ESA 2018). The field has quickly grown from being considered childish and negative in concept to an area worthy of study and its rapidly increasing audience (Oliver et al. 2016).

An average consumer will already have their own personal definition of what they believe to be Western or Eastern due to cultural upbringing or bias and will impart these onto anything with these same labels attached (Thompson 2018). This makes the use of this terminology of Eastern and Western limiting, and while it is understandable to an extent, it does not allow for the growth of a medium outside of these undefined confines. With regards to the video gaming industry, there are many variations in the development, marketing and study of video games, and so limiting these areas to a perceived dichotomy would prevent growth and constrict development which can cause practices to suffer over time.

While players may not realise these restrictions, their effects will be present within the video games they play, despite the title’s intended design seeming unaffected. Due to this, a value or theme introduced into the product may be taken for granted unless observed by a matching cultural player type. When viewed by this new player, the values within the game will affect them, as detailed by Bogost (2007), due to meaningful choices and interactions the video game imparts on anyone who engages with it. If video games can communicate

values and ideas in these ways, then it is reasonable to assume that game design patterns can also convey and represent values depending on the region the game is created for.

The first goal of this thesis will be to determine the East/West dichotomy within the video gaming industry. This industry is an appropriate area to study the extent of the divide as it is a massive institution and used on a worldwide scale. In America alone, 64% of households are home to at least one person who plays video games on a regular basis, with 38% of frequent players feeling that video games give them more value for their money than DVDs, music, streaming services and even going to the movies (ESA 2018). Despite this, it is still a relatively young industry when compared to other forms of media and can benefit from applicable qualitative data which could evolve it, otherwise it risks the very real threat of stagnation (Tschang 2007).

However, the video gaming industry has also learnt and grown from its entertainment counterparts' achievements and innovations. Television, for example, has been a psychological, social, cultural, economic and political form for nearly a century while being a part of the entertainment field (Nolan 2002) and now, video games have achieved much the same. In the short time in which the games industry has been an established commercial product, since the introduction of the Nintendo Entertainment System from 1983 to 1987 around the world (Altice 2015), video games have integrated themselves within numerous cultures worldwide and changed the way new generations of consumers interact and communicate (Oliver et al. 2016). These connections have led to emergences of cultural areas in these traditional markets previously explored by television (Elasmar 2003, Kottak 2012) and film (Black 2001, Craig et al. 2005).

It was likely that the video gaming industry would follow this pattern as well and, with consideration to the increasing changes in social climate and the effects this has on the wider gaming market (Valentine and Jensen 2016), it is happening right now. Members of gaming culture and the industry are making themselves known to wider audiences thanks to the increasing cultural dominance of the industry and the insights they offer into the modern natures of digital and participatory culture (Muriel and Crawford 2018). When considering the regional cultures of video gaming, based on the findings in research on original works (James et al. 2013), a European aspect has become apparent. While the potential for a region's emergence into the worldwide gaming market has been considered before (Penix-Tadsen 2016), a European voice in the field has not been considered and

neither have any methods for the process of showcasing and discovering these expansions. Overall, this research will attempt to not only present the existence of a European voice in the field of video games, but also develop the methods to identify this emerging region which has a real potential to be a noteworthy part of the worldwide gaming industry.

1.1. Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 of this thesis will begin by outlining the use of the Eastern and Western terminology in general and academic use, though more specifically on the works which have utilised this terminology with regards to video games. Special attention will be given to how the terms have been used within the topics covered and what these terms represented in their work. The rationale for their continued application will be explored through observation of the terms' origins and use in popular culture followed by their wider cultural impact. Examining the changes of culture over time will establish a clearer timeline, and justification, for these important cultural shifts which are vital in determining how this has occurred for video games. The chapter will then briefly discuss the use of video games as a form of research, concluding with an examination of the terminology's representation within this field and presenting the aims and objectives of the thesis based on this literature review.

Chapter 3 will outline the aims and objectives of the thesis, along with research questions that need to be answered to complete this work and hypotheses on the answers to these subsequent questions.

Chapter 4 outlines the methods and approaches that will be utilised to answer the research questions of the thesis. These will be presented with a breakdown of the rationale of both studies, split into two sections. First, the supporting study which will consist of engaging with focus groups consisting of participants who are a part of gaming culture with the goal of identifying the social consciousness towards the Eastern and Western terminology. This is followed by an explanation of the longitudinal study of 250 video games from 2013 to 2018, with a focus on examining the evolution and impact of video games over these years. The results are made up of multiple areas including the titles' cultural code words (Hyatt and Simons 1999) and their applications (Rapaille 2007), a netnographic review for each product examined (Kozinets 2015) and designation of region based on a game design model (James et al. 2013). Both studies will include examples of how they were undertaken, along with addressing potential problems or limitations.

Chapter 5 contains extensive explanations of the supporting and main study's initial results accompanied by individual breakdowns of each part involved in completing them and again is divided into two parts. The supporting study addresses the nature of the participants who took part in the focus groups and gives further clarification to the results through discussion of the open and hidden meanings behind the participants' conclusions and perceptions. This is accompanied by highlighted breakdowns of the results and is concluded by the initial response to the data and its effects on future work within the thesis. The main study will similarly provide explanations of every piece of data recorded and identify common themes and trends in each of these areas over each of the years. The data will be presented in as accessible forms as possible, such as through tables and word clouds. All of these will also be given context using the video games and cultural trends during the times discussed during the study.

Chapter 6 discusses the key results and data drawn from the initial results and attempts to highlight the significant trends, cultural influences and rise of new video game design methods and approaches. For the supporting study, this was done through examination against the regions defined in the thesis, and for the main study by using the game design model (James et al. 2013) for a concise summary and netnographic reviews for additional context.

Chapter 7 presents the overarching summaries and conclusions of this thesis. The chapter re-examines the aims and objectives of this thesis and then presents the answers to the research questions in the forms of definitions and observations based on the data and existing video games. It also considers its contributions towards further academic research within the video gaming field.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. “Eastern” and “Western” terminology

Markus and Kitayama talked about culture and the self, suggesting that people in different parts of the world tend to view themselves in two fundamentally different ways. They introduce this idea using popular phrases and sayings for emphasis:

In America, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease." In Japan, "the nail that stands out gets pounded down." American parents who are trying to induce their children to eat their suppers are fond of saying "think of the starving kids in Ethiopia, and appreciate how lucky you are to be different from them." Japanese parents are likely to say "Think about the farmer who worked so hard to produce this rice for you; if you don't eat it, he will feel bad, for his efforts will have been in vain". (Markus and Kitayama 1991 p. 224)

Developing on this idea, Markus and Kitayama's work places importance on the idea of the role of the self and how the individual has a need to be defined. One of the ways that the authors explored this was via the frequent use of the terms of Eastern and Western. This proposal, and subsequent findings, had a sizeable impact on various fields of study including social, personality and developmental psychology.

The specific use of terminology like Eastern and Western has been used often to define and identify large groups of people within predesigned geographical constraints for many years prior to Markus and Kitayama's research (Gilgen and Cho 1979). Yet despite the use of these terms, few institutions and parties have defined or even clarified what exactly these words represent and mean within a greater context, which is odd considering the impact of research and studies that have employed it.

One of the more prominent and almost singular explanations of the terms comes from research in worldwide politics. Meštrovic (1994) emphasized Émile Durkheim's views of tradition, culture and religion as keys to understanding the behaviour of all societies and used this to split the globe into two sections based on the geopolitical stance of the countries he analysed as part of his work. These were defined as Eastern and Western. This work was furthered by Macgilchrist (2007) who, while reviewing this work, made a change to which countries were considered Western based on the conclusions and parameters set by Meštrovic. In this case, it was concluded that Russia should be considered Western rather than Eastern based on changing worldwide views and conceptual inconsistencies with Mestrovic's initial work. However, while this is an

expansive field which is outside the scope of this thesis, the ideas and conclusions given are not without merit and should be utilised in other areas of work.

With regards to this, the terminology of East and West has been utilised often in the video gaming field since the subject's inception with regards to the study, marketing and discussions of developing gaming cultures. Kohler observed the difference between the two terms in the video games industry, citing clear differences such as Western players' easier investment into images and themes of power from the media they engage with but, in contrast, Eastern players viewing of the same imagery with an almost flippant mentality. Notably, Kohler also refers to these geographical terms as a descriptive word when talking about developers and the design choices that they employ; "Western developers embrace any middleware solution that would expedite the process. But Japanese developers were used to working in cloistered secrecy" (Kohler 2016 p. 283). Despite these observations and Kohler's certainty in the use of them, he does not offer an explanation what the designation of 'Western' means, aside from 'not Japanese'.

This is not just an occurrence seen with Kohler's work or even his area. Anderson et al. (2010), presented a study that suggested that exposure to violent video games is a causal risk factor for increased aggressive behaviour, cognition, and affect and for decreased empathy and prosocial behaviour. As a part of this study, they use the terminology of East and West when referencing the consumers who play video games but, unlike before, offer more in what these titles mean. They noted that, in cultural differences of aggression, Western equates to the United States of America primarily along with similar Western individualistic-culture samples such as Australia, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Regarding the Eastern title, this was given to players from Japan only, though they do mention that the reason for this is due the majority of studies they drew from that came from Eastern cultures were from Japan. Ignoring the potential issues with the work, as outlined by Ferguson and Kilburn (2010), the cultural generalisations are noticeable. The work does investigate some cultural differences outside of placing users into country-based compartments but, due to the overarching focus, it keeps these external to videogames and in this case examines homicides across the countries as a basis for aggression. While defining terminology was not the focus of this work nor was any form of clarifying this dichotomy of terminology, the use of Eastern and Western still fall to the user's definition.

Averill et al. (2001) also use the East and West terminology within their study into creative fields, instead they offer a model for understanding the aspects of emotion and creativity which stems from either biological or social systems. They use the East/West title to justify a divide in ideology from which we draw our creative influences, citing the Western's embrace of individualism against the East's collectivist orientation. This is similar again to Kohler and Anderson et al.'s usage, however, an emphasis is placed on the emotional impact of the label and reaffirming the nature of the terms being a true dichotomy. While their conclusions acknowledge that this balance is necessary as it leads the creative towards a goal of personal satisfaction and social harmony, they note that when a dichotomy is drawn some nuances are bound to be lost.

Pattberg (2013) discusses this dichotomy between Eastern and Western conceptions in which he concurs that, in line with what has been discussed before, the terms and the sequential divide have entered the commonplace cognition referring to it as being, omnipresent in history, philosophy, demographics, religion, culture, ideology, even sexuality. Even after these observations and rationale, Pattberg still offers little insight into the meaning of the giving of the title of Eastern or Western outside of religious designation which is referred to as Asia-centric and Euro-centric.

The literature examined so far suggests that there seems to be no unified understanding of the meaning behind the terminology outside of how the researcher utilises them for their current work. One area that can be established however, is that the terms are often used to separate the global population into two groups. For example, Naor et al. (2010) and Chen et al. (2017) both examine large data sets on a worldwide scale in which they use established characteristics and cultural mentalities from the countries they have included in their work. Naor et al. draw comparisons between their defined Eastern (Japan and South Korea) and Western (Germany, United States, Finland, and Sweden) groups using them to describe alternate dimensions of culture. Chen et al. does much the same, although with a focus on the self and behaviour within culture.

We have established that this limiting of sample size by separating data sets - in this case a global population - into two distinct groups has been utilised often, and that the rationale for doing this rarely is addressed other than for the purpose of making large groups easier to work with. While there is nothing wrong with this, the usability of a strategy that can manage and simplify substantial data sets at a time filled with an impossibly large amount

of data in almost every industry and business area is helpful (Jin et al. 2015), it is strange that little thought is given to the meaning of why East and West are used.

2.2. Terminology in Popular Culture

2.2.1. History and Rationale

The term “Popular culture” was first used by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi in 1818 who, when discussing how best to motivate families to strengthen and improve domestic life, states:

“I see that it is impossible to attain this end without founding the means of popular culture and instruction upon a basis which cannot be got at otherwise than in a profound examination of Man himself; without such an investigation and such a basis all is darkness.” (Pestalozzi 1818 p.7)

It was the mentality of the time that activities such as the reading of cheaply available literature were directly opposed to the real culture and education of higher classes. This view would stay in effect for a long time especially during the interbellum period until the end of World War II.

Change came in the 1960s which ushered in a new age of cultural influences in the form of counterculture; thanks to the baby boom after World War II, an unprecedented number of young people started to question and rebel against the constraints of their society and culture (Frank 1998). This unsurprisingly formed widespread social tensions as traditional modes of authority were being questioned alongside other previously undervalued topics such as women’s rights and human sexuality; as this tension continued, subcultures began to form which, in turn, gave rise to modern bohemianism (Anderson and Herr 2007). These new perspectives and stances on culture heralded a new mind-set in which the entertainment industry could develop; this new way of living and thinking promoted an embrace of new and/or alternate forms of creativity. This led all media forms down roads that were potentially not feasible or even possible before; the rise of foreign films and concepts coming to English speaking countries (Belton 1993), comics started to become desirable to a new demographic of reader as the new prose and nature of the comic book world made them much more appealing and less mysterious (McCloud 1993). Manga production also brought in new styles and dynamics unimplemented before along with new Manga types (such as the debut of Shōjo manga, manga for women and young girls) which were more appealing to a worldwide market (Gravett 2004).

Each medium within the confines of popular culture had begun to expand the boundaries in which they were originally confined and developed enough to retain and engage audiences in new ways (Kato 2007). Compared to the earlier years, specific styles of design and production were in full effect; each region of the world was labelling their work with their culture without realising. A consumer could indulge in any media and instantly tell where it was from based on style, writing and even cinematography. Kato uses the niche Bruce Lee movies and the works of Jimi Hendrix as examples to showcase this, and the genre of Anime does the same on a broader and worldwide scale. Despite being inspired by Disney's productions, specifically *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the stylisation of Anime included lots of flashy colours, energetic characters and simplicity - areas that made it stand out against more non-Asian animations. This led to it gaining the name "Anime" outside of Eastern countries to differentiate it deliberately from the pre-existing animation more commonly seen in the West (Clements 2013).

Another movement, like the counterculture phenomena, along with a rapid social change was the catalyst to any more fluctuations in how the world viewed media within popular culture. This new change came within a short span of time with a concept that had the potential to bring the world closer together, more so than it had ever been; the internet and the World Wide Web. Based on research into packet switching theories in the 1960s, the internet came into general use in 1995 and changed the way information was obtained (Coffman and Odlyzko 1998). It led to the rise of instant communication via email, instant messaging and the previously mentioned World Wide Web. The internet and its passage to the World Wide Web gave consumers a way to interact, develop and learn in a way that no one had seen before and at a speed that was unprecedented (Diomindous et al. 2016).

In a time of incredible change and connectivity, the simplification of complex systems or online structures into understandable and unassuming terms was helpful for the general populace, content producers and advertisers (Giovannetti et al. 2003). Use of generalised terminology, such as Eastern and Western, and abbreviations became commonplace and necessary. This adaption to a new wave of cultural understanding is an often-employed method as an essential part of social and cultural change (Crystal 2004).

By looking at the recent history of popular culture, despite there being no clear indication of when exactly the specific terminology of Eastern and Western began to be applied to popular media, it is noticeable that a divide exists if not just through a need to give media a

geographical designation alone. The idea of classifying huge groups of people into small categories is born from a desire to simplify, something explored by Hofstede who explains that the need to condense information into smaller and more manageable sections is appealing to the mass populace. Key information which is not too complex to comprehend can become almost second nature, as Hofstede states “We (humanity) simplify because we have no other choice” (1984 p. 15). It is naturally much easier to categorise and place consumers and products into lesser fields in order to allow for more basic levels of understanding and advertising. Despite the notion that such singular theories of society can be problematic or contradictory, especially in an increasingly culturally diverse time period, the lasting core strength of the ideas still hold merit and therefore are relevant to discuss (McSweeney 2002).

Other notable aspects gained from observing popular culture include a true realisation as to the speed of cultural shifts and the reactions to these movements. The faster changes come into relevance and prominence within wider cultures and subsequently, early innovators within these cultures can pick up on these trends and implement and/or adapt to them (Rogers 2003). The internet is debatably the single largest cultural addition and influencer for popular entertainment culture since the medium began. However, consumers can often be overwhelmed by information that cannot be easily confirmed or manipulated by mass belief of incorrect data due to the ongoing influences of online communities. This leads to users becoming biased in how they select and view content (Mocanu et al. 2015). As explored by Curran et al. (2016), this influence the internet holds needs to be monitored as to not allow for widespread abuse or deceptive practices to develop to the same levels. At such a critical moment in the internet’s history, clarification, helpful intervention and safe circulation of content are all needed.

2.2.2. Cultural Impact

While cultures are forever changing and can showcase the best and worst of large social groups, the nuances of these developments mean very little to the average consumers’ life. Mezulis et al. (2004) discussed this mentioning that, within cultures, people have a need to see themselves in a positive light; in their study, it was indicated that in general, people make more internal, stable, and global attributions for positive or successful events than they do for negative events or failure. Those results unambiguously supported their conclusions; that the self-serving attributional bias is nearly universal across a diverse

representation of samples varying in age, gender, psychopathology, and most importantly, culture.

While this seems like a positive finding, displaying that most people, most of the time, attribute their successes to enduring, pervasive characteristics about themselves, it revealed that they also discount their failures as unrelated to any enduring, noticeable personal characteristics. If we combine this with Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory again (1984) there lies a problem; Hofstede states that we tend to believe, deep down, that we are all the same since the average person is unaware of any other countries' cultures. Therefore we, as a species, believe that our actions are right or correct and, as a result of this desire, we are not aware of other cultural influences due to minimisation of cultural differences. This inevitability leads to misunderstandings between societies and countries.

Returning to Pattberg again, who prefaces that the use of Eastern and Western terminology stems from these half-educated ideas and misunderstandings being forced on other cultures:

The East-West dichotomy is a philosophical concept of ancient origin which claims that the two cultural hemispheres, East and West, developed diametrically opposed, one from the particular to the universal and the other from the universal to the particular; the East is more inductive while the West is more deductive. Together they form an equilibrium. (Pattberg 2009 p. i)

The idea then that simple and diametrically opposed terminology can, on the basis of being seen as an elegant answer to an unasked question, be quickly absorbed into popular consciousness and utilised within popular culture without much thought is not too outlandish; appropriate sounding rhetoric can achieve this (Brummett 2014). This is made even easier by the internet, the use of which has become commonplace in individual use, institutions and societies primarily to advance their lives (Sheehan and Young 2014). The more intense use of the internet for these means, the more of an influence the content has on the individual as a user and their self-esteem (Ouyan et al. 2017). This connected world should seem overwhelming, however; although the access to such amounts of knowledge and its effects on a user are not an issue, the potential complexities of it are. Therefore, any process or addition to online vernacular which streamlines a method of understanding is welcomed (Lynch 2017).

The influence that pop culture has is so strong, it can be the primary driving force behind social evolution. It has morphed into a form of expressive culture which directly challenges previous moral and aesthetic pretention while being able to simultaneously entertain a mass audience; this strength has forced discussion into the relation of art forms, entertainment and true culture since its conception (Danesi 2015). These effects have worldwide implications but due to the volatile content present in pop culture, a majority of which is aimed at a younger and/or immature audience, it can lead to consumers who appear to be disillusioned when they engage with and use this content (Calcutt 2016).

If we then focus on examining video games considering the previous observations, the gaming communities and cultures born from it have generated many sub-cultures within its already niche following, some of which have a large effect on the wider populous and even in some countries' cultural upbringing. Examining culture(s) is not the only way to look at video gaming; like any other medium of media there are a large number of approaches to the subject, however, as discussed by Shaw (2010) we must be reflexive and critical of both our object of study and our methodologies. Defining video gaming culture as something distinct and separate from a constructed mainstream culture encourages us to only study those who identify as "gamers", rather than more dispersed video gaming communities. Shaw also reaffirms that gaming and games themselves are a part of what we define as worldwide pop culture noting that forms of play, and engagement with the act of the play, is an intrinsic part of culture and not something separate. Shaw's work concludes that it is important to unpack why culture has been labelled in certain ways for the advancement of knowledge; the work cites various other studies that have utilised even more niche cultures that have been used in such a manner. This, for the purposes of this research, gives an appropriate justification for the inclusion of video gaming and its use in this work.

Video games as a product embody an ideology that any user should be able to engage with them and at least indulge in utilising them for any number of reasons (McAllister and White 2015). With additional accessible and casual gaming platforms, more consumers can do this with little to no difficulty (Nitz et al. 2010). The Nintendo Wii, released in 2006, inserted itself into a market of consumers who normally would not consider playing video games. It was supported by a range of new products and games to suit a set of needs that had not been widely considered until this time. For example, the *Wii Fit* (Nintendo 2007)

and *Wii Sports* (Nintendo 2006) titles became a new generation of tools to improve consumers' health and well-being while also making the idea of exercise a more consistent and enjoyable task (Graves et al. 2010). Since then, the perception of the games industry further shifted from being a child's toy to a viable way to stimulate thinking or maintain a healthy lifestyle - what it meant to be perceived as a gamer and its acceptance into culture was thrown into question on a worldwide scale (Dale and Green 2017). They also noted that it has become more noticeable than ever that video games and the industry around them are perceived in different ways across various cultural landscapes online and offline, something that has been observed before in this field (Sun et al. 2006, Hamari and Tuunanen 2014).

2.2.3. Wider Global Context

Considering the core topic of this thesis and discussion so far, there has been an implication presented that Europe as a region within the games industry has not yet emerged into the global ludo consciousness. With consideration of this point, Liboriussen and Martin (2016) identify that there have been developments in games outside the established areas of the games industry, informed from postcolonial and globalization research.

Mukherjee discussed the postcolonial thinking within video games (2018), highlighting that the video game medium and participation of play gives players a deeper understanding and experience of the postcolonial. This leads to, as Mukherjee describes, the players being put in a position to construct a perception of various civilisations and regions based on these representations. These experiences, however, are based on the developer's interpretations of environments, characters, and cultural details. Mukherjee gives examples of this, one of which being a character from the *Street Fighter* series, Dhalsim, who embodies various Indian stereotypes in his gameplay, actions and narrative in a manner which is described as flawed.

While these representations are influential to the players, they are also influential in the development process. As explored by Šisler (2008), when examining these representations with regards to Muslims and Arabs, the misinformation and misrepresentation in games has influenced Arab game designers and local production. They continue this by noting that they have found that genre is also important with regards to how cultures and regions are portrayed, in this case for example, that action and first-person shooter games typically

present the Middle East as negative. Šisler concludes that despite some attempts from mainstream markets to transcend these culturally biased representations, video game academics and developers are in dire need of more systematic and well-researched understanding of alternate cultural areas and, as they refer to it, the perceived ‘Other’.

However, postcolonialism has been criticised for essentialising cultures. Chibber (2013) suggests that postcolonial studies present cultures as fixed categories, therefore, a concept of any perceived differences in an East and West divide is much less significant. This is largely in part to postcolonial theory, as Chibber describes it, relentlessly promoting Eurocentrism with the West being a region of rationality and democracy and the East being a miasma of tradition and religiosity. This concept of Orientalism, first explored and detailed by Edward Said (1978), not only highlights the cultural divide across East and West but also, according to Said, is due to an implicit cultural bias denoted by a binary sense of westerners and a perceived non-Western ‘other’, in this case, Eastern. This divided view reinforces cultural stereotypes and provides people with a limited understanding of the East. This is not limited to Western regions though as Occidentalism (Carrier 1995), a term drawn from a critical examination of Said’s work in anthropology, details the Western stereotypes and influence in cultural works of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese origin. Carrier explains that these terms are a double discourse with both sides occasionally admitting some similarity, but still maintaining marked differences.

Over time this divide began to be integrated into global culture along with video games becoming a larger part of global consciousness. Due to this, in recent years video games became reappropriated and resignified according to the characteristics of different social groups (Penix-Tadsen 2019) to a point in which we now simply accept outdated characterisations of various cultures when the reality is much more nuanced (Penix-Tadsen 2016). This advancement of culture in games development was explored by Consalvo who concluded that, at the time of study, the global digital games industry had successfully become a hybrid of specific East and West markets stating that “game creation is now unmoored from national borders and cultures, and has become its own sphere of influence, defining its own technoregion” (2006 pp. 133). Although, Consalvo does note that despite the games industry’s development, it still considers local markets and cultures and that as the field grows, game developers would be likely to start adapting their products to further individualised sub-cultures or groups, with a basis in appealing to more personal aspects of

consumers aside from their nationality. Kerr (2017) mirrors this observation writing that while the industry became focused on this amalgamated market, at a macro-level referred to as Eastern and Western, when producing content for a global setting the production teams still drew from their local environment. This was linked with a need for the developers to appeal to various consumers as they would have different perceptions of “fun”, “humour”, and “drama” for some examples. These considerations would not just be limited to the product’s development, but also how it is communicated and marketed as well.

Kerr (2017) also looked to the differing situations of game development outside of the established market through various companies in what Kerr describes as areas which see less successful publishing. These areas are seeing what the literature describes as a cultural transformation regarding the development of video games. Penix-Tadsen (2016), for example, has found that in recent years play has begun to hold a new significance in Latin America and that development of video games has been impacted by the cultural contexts that have emerged from Latin America’s gaming communities. This has led to, as Penix-Tadsen summarises, a shift in cultural attitudes regarding video games with the increasing awareness and understanding of the communities allowing for a more cohesive shared space for gamers, developers and industry professionals, thus demonstrating the way in which cultural factors have shaped the development of video gaming in this region. Even regions that acknowledge that they retain their own culture, despite it not being as distinctive as other established areas, have developers who look to implement their cultural identity into their products, as examined by Paul (2005) with regards to Canada. As Paul concludes, from the time of writing, new generations of designers would challenge and critique works which would lead towards a new generation of Canadian games that showcase aspects that are distinctly more Canadian. This effect has been documented by various researchers exploring various regions. The Czech Republic, for example, has a relatively stable and self-sufficient game industry at present, but they recognise that they can only affect the wider global market through independent (indie) games, despite a rich history with video games (Švelch 2018). In France, the population is consciously aware of video gaming and the act of play is linked to other perceived positive practices (Rufat, Ter Minassian and Coavoux 2014). This widely accepted stance allowed French developers to become bolder in what they can offer to the games industry, though just through the adventure genre and experimentation, referred to in the literature as the ‘French Touch’

(Montagnon and Blanchet 2019). Teipen (2008) mentions that this region, referred to by Kerr as European, notably does not predominantly contain countries which are leaders in the industry despite some, such as the Swedish industry, orienting their development towards a global market. For example, Germany, despite having a history in games with an international recognition of the “German Games” label for board games, has been identified as developing country in the games industry for a long time and has only recently received any global recognition (Wolf 2015). Poland also sees this effect; titles which aimed to reenforce its national identity and history have been poorly received because of their inaccuracy and the influence they could have on future cultural understanding within games (Sterczewski 2016). Despite some franchises seeing global acclaim and documented observation of Polish developers’ willingness to collaborate and innovate (Klimas and Czakon 2018) there are still barriers which hold the region back from seeing global acknowledgement (Bieliński 2013, Wolf 2015). Other countries within this region are noticing the positive impact and financial significance of the gaming industry. Serbia has identified this development and has taken steps to make the country more appealing to the wider industry while being beneficial to the domestic gaming industry which is seeing noticeable development and growth (Baltezarević, Baltezarević, and Baltezarević 2018). In doing so, it would help in Serbia’s process of transition towards the global digital economy (Pitić et.al. 2020).

The idea of development with a local influence as part of it and a recognition of the effects the games industry has on consumers and/or potential market growth applies to Kerr’s definition of less published areas, in this case referring to them as European, and extends to Spain (Checa-Godoy, A. 2009), Italy (Bittanti 2004), Ireland (Kerr and Cawley 2012) and more. There is a debatable exception with regards to the United Kingdom; there has been discussion towards the impact that this country had on the wider gaming industry and culture due to its emergence during the 1980s with regards to its influence (Gazzard 2013) and global reach (Wade 2016). However, while some products created in the United Kingdom incorporated their “Britishness” into them, which is more fluid than would be perceived as this draws from cultures as part of the United Kingdom’s component countries (Webber 2020), most sought to appeal to a global audience, and while the United Kingdom has maintained a strong presence, its importance has been reduced in recent years (Wolf 2015).

2.3. Summary of the Literature

To study any aspect of culture, no matter how niche or abstract from traditional research norms, the researcher must be aware that this is a field that is forever changing and advancing in subtle and often unpredictable ways that are dictated by hidden discourses and ideology in societies. Because of this, researchers need to make sure that they take an ample amount of care as they manage their relationships with these obscure and shifting forces of which they, and their work, are a part of. A positive facet of this approach is that the options for study remain open, with the potential for multiple forms of data to be produced. As Holliday further explains, “The recognition that subjectivity and creativity in research is viable releases researchers to employ everything they bring with them to make sense of the intercultural world” (Hua 2015 pp. 33).

This applies even more so to the field of video games due to the fast-evolving nature of the industry it is a part of and its growing effects on wider cultures and societies outside of its own established communities and the limits that they have as a digital entertainment medium. Muriel and Crawford expand on this noting the many ways in which video game culture represents and affects society. They claim that video games and their culture appear as the beta version of a society that is soon to become a reality:

“...video game culture helps us visualize the ontological and sociopolitical articulations of agency in contemporaneity, the fundamentals of video games that anticipate a society that is progressively becoming an assemblage of technologically mediated experiences that connects different realities, situations, and cultures, and the video gamer identity as the epitome of identity construction in contemporary society”. (Muriel and Crawford 2018 p.12)

Whether video games deserve to have this strength to change cultures and people in them, along with the merits of video games as art form, are still heavily debated (Paul 2018). These are important topics but while they are noteworthy of recognising and do have relevance to the overarching field of the work, they are not a focus of this study and subsequent research into these areas will not be required.

Importantly, the confirmation of the use of the Eastern and Western terminology within video games has been shown to be an underdeveloped field. The literature includes works which contain latent theories into alternate and emerging ideologies, and therefore terminology. This is something that has been considered previously by Pattberg (2013); who reaffirms the dichotomy of the use of Eastern and Western by confirming the different

cultures' ways of thinking and philosophical values but relents in their critique that there are parts of this which do not fit as well as intended. Vignoles et al. (2016) takes this further, with regards to the dichotomy of being culturally defined as Eastern and Western, concluding that there is more diversity than two cultural models in the world and that researchers in further work should not ignore or shut down any exploration into new forms of culture different from the existing scope.

With regards to wider culture and the idea of emergence, the video game industry has seen attempts to create an individual market definition for the 'other' or less published areas, but there is an acknowledgement that the defined East and West are still the more dominant markets (Teipen 2008). While this could be linked to the European video game market's lack of large hardware platforms or major publishers throughout the industry's history when compared to the Eastern and Western studios, Latorre, while agreeing with this, argues that more importantly, this other market has not had a 'story' (Latorre 2013). This story, a cultural understanding on a presentable level, would allow the market to build its own mythology, find motivations through recognising its past, and learn from its errors faster thus allowing for a future which has, in Latorre's words, "more determination, energy and a clearer course" (2013 pp. 150). Though some steps have been taken to give regions within this market their story, as seen with countries like the United Kingdom and its hybrid Britishness (Webber 2020) and France's French Touch (Montagnon and Blanchet 2019), it has not reached or influenced the wider global market in the way Eastern 'Japaneseness' (Consalvo 2016) or Western 'American Games' (Pöhlmann 2019) have. Notably, smaller developers within this region have been able to undertake rapid internationalisation (Cunningham et.al. 2012 and Teipen 2008) while maintaining a strong presence in alternate sectors within the games industry and retain their creative traits (Latorre 2013 and Kerr 2017). Overall, while the European region has seen some emergence in parts, a lack of a clear definition, or story, and no consistent recognisable effect to the global games market, does not indicate a comprehensive emergence according to the literature.

With consideration of the above points, it is important to define terminology when considering the goal of advancement or clarification of knowledge. Without clear and understandable definitions, content and explanations, academic or otherwise, can become difficult to comprehend and lose clarity over time (Mehu et al. 2012). As shown, this is

especially true of works examining culture, but when combined with video games, another field which also sees accelerated growth and change, this point becomes even more important to consider.

Chapter 3. Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to define the East/West divide in the video gaming industry through examination of existing content within field generating primary data along with information gathered through original publications. This will then further establish the growing European influence within this global market through the analysis of video game titles in recent years. The goal is to provide an accurate method to continuously ascertain the meaning behind the use of notable geographical terms within game culture and the games industry as well as showcasing the current dichotomy and how it has expanded. This expansion has been tentatively referred to as “European” (James and Fletcher 2015b). This is achieved using a model (James et al. 2013) as part of case studies which deconstruct the reward systems of video games and links them to where they were created and what elements of their design were drawn from this location.

The model can also be used to identify and analyse video games as well as be used as a design tool to decide upon the appropriate mechanics for video games with a specific target market. This work has implications for the ways in which video games will be made, advertised and taught due to the deepening of existing literature into the East/West divide and the resulting new areas for study.

The key results will, with regards to the current gaming climate, its current geographical markets and methods of design, clarify and then define these terms for wider use within the video gaming fields. The analysis and the results of the research produce qualitative and quantitative data sets, outlining the parameters of the new perspective.

The core of the thesis will seek to answer the following question; is there a European voice in games design? This is an area which looks beyond the culturally utilised dichotomy of Eastern and Western classifications which is limiting to a field as large and creative as the video games industry. The thesis and study included will therefore answer this question by discussing the following research questions and subsequent hypotheses:

1. Is there a dichotomy in the way that we see entertainment media?
2. What is the perceived East/West divide within the video games industry?
3. What alternate beliefs/preconceptions exist beyond the divide?

Hypothesis 1: A European (or alternate) perspective on video games is present to a degree outside of the existing East/West dichotomy and because of this, a conformation and updating of terminology that is currently used within the video gaming industry is needed.

Hypothesis 2: This European or alternative perspective has ways to more effectively design, produce and market video games to these geographical locations as well as influence titles outside the traditionally viewed perspectives.

Chapter 4. Methods and Approach

The main study was carried out along with a supporting study, which developed on four original works and one co-authored publication. The supporting study was designed to be a basis for the main study and forms a part of the primary source of data utilised in this thesis and its conclusions. This chapter of the work will describe the processes of both of these studies as well as the purpose, participants, how the studies were conceived, and design and methods used (Table 1).

	Supporting Study	Main Study
Purpose	To determine if an alternate perspective of the East/West dichotomy is present within the gaming community's cultural consciousness.	To explore popular video games released from 2013 through to 2018 and create case studies on each to showcase the East/West divide and European perspective in the video game industry.
Participants/Tools	Video games industry specialists; young adults within game education and academia.	Video games and their online/offline fans.
Data Collection	Presentation and discussion within focus groups.	Small case studies consisting of data reviewed against a developed model and a netnographic review.
Analysis	Inferential.	Descriptive.
Intended Outcomes	General views of the current video gaming industry.	A pattern in developed popular video games which can be attached to the terms of East, West and Europe.
Publication(s)	B, C, D	A, D, E

Table 1: Study procedures used in this thesis.

4.1. Support Study: Analysis of Social Consciousness.

4.1.1. Procedures

Ethical approval for this research was granted by Staffordshire University's ethics committee. The aim of this brief study was, as highlighted in the literature review, to further understand and clarify the Eastern and Western divide that exists within the social consciousness in the video gaming industry. To accomplish this, engaging with active and dedicated members of this social area was the first consideration of potential participant types. The strong nature in which consumers of digital games forge attachments to their products means that this participant type would be the most knowledgeable of the field to engage with. Fournier (1998) talks about this forging of strong bonds to products, though explains this occurs only after the product is available for mass consumption, as it is then able to secure brand loyalty, forge self-connection, enable commitment and create intimacy, thus making this a strong part of the criteria for inclusion in the work.

With the focus of this study being the examination of the level of understanding of the wider gaming community's belief in geographical based video gaming trends, terms and their subsequent perceived meaning, groups which represent the community are the most suitable way to gather a consensus (Dixon et al. 2010) and were selected as the required participants. Participants needed to be over the age of 18 years old and were made aware of topics of the research (Bell 1993). Therefore, all discussions and analysis were completed in locations and at events which were age restricted, such as academic conferences and universities. Participants also could self-select out of the study after they were informed about it and given a choice to join it after they had concluded their activities or sessions at the locations visited. If they chose to join the study, they were provided with the fullest information concerning the nature and purpose of the research via the presentation and discussion throughout (Nigel 2001). In the case of this study, these consisted of academics, developers, journalists and students within the field of video games and their design or production. These participants are representative of a wide sample of not only the gaming community, but also of the currently understood Western gaming industry.

To achieve a level of engagement with the participants, the use of focus groups was chosen as a structure for the study. Focus groups are used to obtain information by creating an atmosphere of comfort and respect for the participants; they are given the freedom to share their opinions without any fear of being judged, which is a setting that would be the most

appropriate for this study considering the topic in question and the locations they would be completed in. Though there are concerns over the use of focus groups; participants can fabricate answers and, due to the nature of working with groups of people, dominating individuals can influence the outcome(s). However, if the researcher has prepared for these situations enough, they are still useful and offer usable data towards understanding the homogeneous group (Krueger and Casey 2014). The focus groups would be used to sample and examine the target population's common views and understanding of the games industry (Hulley, Newman and Cummings 2007). They provide an insight into the beliefs that underline the participants behaviour within video gaming spaces and offer a perspective on the wider understanding of a preconceived global ludo dichotomy. Their descriptions of the experiences and comprehension of the field would give informed data on how members of this space organise their experience(s) and give meaning to it (Carey and Asbury 2016). Those descriptions from these sessions would be recorded through specific key words and commonly used phrases representing the interpretations and opinions given by the participants, which they will decide upon themselves as a group to conclude with. As explained by Poels et al. (2007), these views have many uses in the study of video games as these video gaming educated individuals have a shared definition of basic concepts and are essential for video games as a scientific field to progress.

The use of interviews would then be an extension of the focus groups' discussions as a method to obtain more in-depth information around participants offered knowledge when required. A research interview seeks to gain the meaning and factual understanding of the participant. This requires the researcher to acknowledge what is being discussed but also to make sure that they observe the explicit descriptions and meanings expressed by participants parallel to what is being said between the lines of the descriptions (Kvale 2007). With the field of video games containing many niche areas of study such as multiple genres, play styles and cultures, gaining views into the wider approach of the topic by gleaning these from dedicated participants would be an asset. This allows for a smaller sample size with a focus on understanding common perceptions and experiences (Guest et al. 2006). There are also fewer ethical problems in using this method within focus groups as the questions emphasise opinion and specific video game views with all participants being willing to contribute.

4.1.2. Approach

This study was structured to complete specific objectives which would produce empirical data sets (Table 2). This would be filtered into three different sets of qualitative data representing the areas covered in the focus groups, Eastern, Western and Other/Alternate. The first objective would be to encourage the participants to engage in an activity relating to the focus of this study, the goal being to examine and record the participants' raw and honest view of the topic. The data gathered would be minimal at this stage as this would be used to help the participants to begin to clarify their knowledge of the subject. Providing the participants with something to interact with for this task, in this case a map of the world, allows for a more nuanced discussion in later stages of the study. It would enable them to evaluate and display their thought processes rather than limiting their options with alternatives, such as giving targeted questions or having them producing a list in response to the prompt.

The second objective would be to allow the participants to discuss this topic and deliberate among themselves with their own words and expressions. The goal here was not to listen to what the participants were saying, but to look beyond them to determine the emotions and key thoughts and views behind them and record those. The final objective would then be to engage with the groups and informally interview them about their final thoughts and opinions. The goal here was to allow the participants to concisely explain what these industries and their cultures are to them, drawing from their previous conversations. These could come in the form of singular words to short phrases, but regardless of choice, it would have to be brief and representative of the group.

Time (in Minutes)	Content	Objective	Participant Activity	Assessment
00:00 - 00:10	Introduction to the group and explanation.	Explain subject matter and the focus of the study.	Observe and adapt to study conditions.	Verbal feedback through examination and questions.
00:10 - 00:20	Present opening questions to allow the participants to begin thinking about the subject area.	Ask participants to indicate what they believe the global game culture split to be. World map provided with pens for further indication.	Give initial thoughts and understanding of the divide with little influence from the study itself.	Identify common opinions and thoughts. Note if the participants understand the topic and if any could be disruptive.

00:20 - 00:30	Presentation and discussion of the current state of the East/West dichotomy in gaming.	Fill in any basic knowledge gaps to inform the participants of current research into this topic and start a conversation around this area.	Observe and give views, opinions and feelings about the topic.	Record the terminology used along with any phrases or stand out responses.
00:30 - 00:55	Ask participants to define the Eastern and Western game industry and explore any other areas that could be uncovered.	Allow the participants to create a final group consensus on their thoughts and views on this topic as well as consider the alternatives if any were found.	Present definitions and representations of the industry as a group. If mentioned, offer alternatives or mention outlying areas.	Record the final chosen terminology and note any discussion into alternate areas.
00:55 - 01:00	Finalise all focus group goals and allow participants to leave.	Gather up all the data and make sure that it is how the group wants it to be presented. After doing so, wrap up the study and allow the participants to finish and leave.	Make sure the researcher has taken down the correct information so that they have not been misrepresented and then complete the focus group.	Use the participants to double check their data and confirm any outstanding thoughts.

Table 2: An example of how a focus group study would be run. Times are based on an average but were subject to change depending on the number in the groups. 1 hour would be appropriate for a maximum of 15-20 participants.

This study was completed on 150 participants, all of whom were given the same presentation (see Appendix B) consisting of the outlined discussion points including visual aids within the presentation and physical handouts. This was a simple map of the world which the participants were encouraged to draw on to show their understanding of what and where terminology of Eastern and Western means or applies to them inside their specialist subject field. This task was optional but ended up being helpful to both the researcher and the participants; by completing it, the groups were able to highlight their exact current understanding of the topic. The researcher then could note the exact amount of care that the participants gave about the topic based on response to the task, the speed on completion and the methods used to complete the request; something that was useful for the duration of the study in creating a more permissive environment (Kruger and Casey 2014).

4.2. Main Study: Longitudinal Examination of the Cultural Evolution and Impact of Video Games

4.2.1. Procedures

To further showcase the divide within the video gaming industry, with regards to the methods of marketing, design and production, a longitudinal study of video games released from 2013 to 2018 was conducted. At the end of the study, 250 video game titles from every platform accessible during the timeframe were critically analysed by the author. These titles were selected based on their release dates and/or when they reappeared into the online consciousness due to popularity, notoriety or being remade for a current gaming audience.

Not every video game produced has an impact on other video games and the cultures in and around them. However, studying as many titles as possible at the time of their release, remake or re-emergence into social consciousness, allowed for an immediate evaluation of the games' presence within the video gaming industry. This data could then be expanded upon retrospectively if the titles made more of an impact due to any potential reason. Studying video games through this approach made sure that the information and social reception to the games, recorded with a netnographic review, would be as accurate as possible. Each title was also studied to a level of understanding and skill that, at a minimum, a player deemed as average would have. In some cases, this led to titles being completed or finished, in others to a time in which all the content of the game had been experienced or learnt to a reasonable extent. These values are cited as critical to Aarseth (2003), who explains at length that when gathering information on video games, using data from as many sources as possible, and engaging with the sources to a degree of competent understanding is essential.

As this study took place over multiple years, the data gathered was also used to highlight any pattern changes within the examined parameters over time which, in later sections of this thesis, have been observed and commented upon. This is a further boon to the study, as the successful use of video games in any research should include titles which are systematically multidimensional (Donchin 1995).

4.2.2. Approach

The video games were first examined by utilising a model from previous work (James et al. 2013) which is used to clearly identify a video game's reward systems. This was then

cross-referenced with a netnographic review from cultural perceptions of the video game from the time of its release, gathered through purposeful play of the title, an observation of online forums and reviews of the title and, if any, social impact the title had. This generated a triangle model specifically for the title with a brief breakdown of the video game itself using cultural code words (Hyatt and Simons 1999) which can be used to represent large amounts of data and re-used and updated if needed (Rapaille 2007). These evaluations and subsequent model were then mapped to a geographical pattern of game design methodology which produces a reasoning for the use of 'Eastern', 'Western' and 'European' as terminology (James and Fletcher 2015b).

To gain a full assessment of the titles studied, specific information would have to be collected on each title. Aside from the name of the video game, the developers of the title, including where development primarily took place, would need to be recorded. These are the initial factors which would lead to a clearer geographical designation after all the data was gathered. To begin, the inclusion of the primary genre for each title was recorded as this can give an extended insight into the average player type of said titles (Arsenault 2009). Individually, this would not be viable but due to the sample size of video games studied, more accurate conclusions can be drawn into the motivations for playing these video games. In this case, the data would be examined against the geographical designation since, as outlined by James and Fletcher (2015a), a player's choice to play games of a particular type, and in a certain way, are important factors when you are attempting to comprehend the consumers of these products. This information is also beneficial when identifying which particular elements of the product are, at the time of the video games inception, positively received and adopted into the gaming consciousness when compared to other influences on, potentially, a worldwide scale (2016).

This ideology of understanding the cultural impact through social consciousness is further utilised by recording the average review scores of the video games. Video game reviews are still one of the most widespread forms of discourse about games. Despite the debate surrounding their quality or importance (Cox and Kaimann 2015), these reviews have a significant influence on the ways in which all types of consumers, from casual to competent, view, understand and discuss video games. Zagal et al. (2009) confirm this, concluding with an established dialogue between the consumer public and the developers in a variety of different ways, although they do relent that this is not always to either side's

benefit. The score a video game is given is an important factor in this; Johnson et al. (2014), in a study examining a video game consumer's relationship with game review scores, concluded that they are useful in getting a sense of a majority's critical opinion(s) of a video game and help to distinguish particularly well-received titles from alternate poorly received ones. However, they argue that a score does not reflect the complexities of actually playing a video game and that websites, such as *Metacritic.com* (2001b), which aggregate a median of all reviews, are given too much influence in the industry with regards to the negotiations between publishers and developers (Khan 2015), as well as purchase choices being made by consumers (Johnson et al. 2014). For this study though, the majority view is what is required; for this reason, the *Metacritic* website was the main source for locating reviews and obtaining the weighted average scores that have been recorded. The site explains this system being utilised to give the best indication of how a product is received since the data displayed is calculated based the results and conclusions from respected critics and comes from a wide variety of sources (Metacritic.com 2001a).

In normal circumstances, the time taken during a study is not recorded unless it is a highly specific part of the work. Gameplay time may not seem like a valid piece of information to include as a data set due to the nature of the topic and misconception of the idea that it would just be a researcher "playing games" but again, as Aarseth (2003) explains, there is an ethical implication with studying games; as researchers, we should play all titles that we comment on or use in our cultural and aesthetic analysis to such an extent that what we use in our examples at least matches the level of play achieved. For the purpose of this study, every video game recorded was played and observed from the viewpoint of playing as an average video game consumer; as previously mentioned, this would involve a combination of playing the game while reading reviews and observing fans/players who played these games by briefly joining the communities around them. This process allowed for an ease of navigation when gathering the data on the games and understanding their impact as it allowed for a broader understanding of the conversations and influences around these titles and their reception, controversial or otherwise, as shown by Nelson et al. (2004). These observations would make up the notable code words and netnographic review.

The code words, as mentioned previously, would be made up of the most common and standout words or phrases that are used in these reviews referring to the video game(s) being studied. Srinivasan (2013), when talking about the potential of the creation of code

words for forms of media studies, points out that embracing the use of code words allows researchers to better comprehend the digital world's potential with its diverse communities and various cultural voices. This collective unconscious that the generated code words represent allows for a varied and conceptually honest view of the titles. This is because they are drawn from multiple sources, in this context the reviews and online commenters, with only one aspect in common: the subject area. The process and methods of gathering this data proposed by Rapaille (2007) were utilised in this study; key words were recorded based on how often they were mentioned, how important they were to the overarching discussion and how emphasised they were by the contributors, all of which were parameters that are simple to identify. As Schreck and Keim (2013) explored, examining this type of online textual content allows for further situational awareness of the participants focus and has the potential to let researchers further understand any evolution of situations that may develop as well. To maintain a consistent set of information and to avoid as much bias in review or comment selection, the review aggregator website *Metacritic* would be further utilised due to its mix of content and its influence, positive and negative, within the video gaming industry (Schreier 2015).

Action	Reasoning	Result
Locate the exact version of the Video Game played on Metacritic.	So that the correct information can be collected for the study.	A page containing a collection of reviews and player feedback of the video game to draw from.
Read all reviews/comments for the selected video game.	Allows that the key code words can be determined and recorded.	A varied collection of key code words and phrases that represent the video game.
Review the words recorded against the reviews/comments.	Ensure that the correct words have been recorded and to check the work/data gathered.	A complete collection of the key words and phrases are as good representation as intended by the online audiences.
Record the words on the study spreadsheet.	For ease of viewing, searching and comparison.	The completion of the code words and additional data being added to the overall study.

Table 3: The process of obtaining the cultural key words for the video games played in this study.

The netnographic notes gathered consisted of the researchers' notes on their cybercultural experiences and all relevant areas of the culture and community, recorded at the time of the video game's release or as close to it as possible. These notes would summarise the impact that the game left on gaming and internet culture, as well as any change the title could have brought to the gaming industry, in this case, referring to lasting effects the title may have created such as establishing new approaches to gameplay, marketing methods or its continued social presence within gaming culture, to name some examples recorded (Appendix C). This approach was proposed by Kozinets (1998) who defines this as a qualitative method created specifically to investigate the differing consumer behaviour, cultures and communities present in an online setting. As is the norm with netnographic study, this will often be presented as textual data, consisting of posts online, transcripts of online play sessions or recounted experiences from online engagement.

While this method is suitable for this study, as with the dynamic and anonymous nature of any online presence or information, there is a plausible risk of consumers consciously or unconsciously altering the social representation being studied; this does not even include the potential for social desirability bias which can arise due to the nature of the individuals being examined (Kozinets 2002). James and Fletcher (2015a) explored how some players can drastically change perceptions of video games based on adoration or anger; either way, the results are usually warped due to inflated ego or passion. However, regardless of this potential risk, Kozinets (2015) still believes this to be an important method; he elaborates on the importance behind the utilisation of netnography in a continuously advancing technological market, noting that, due to increased online social diversity, there is a need to better identify and classify important structures and styles in these deep communities. This method further requires the researcher to have an understanding of previous ethnographic methods along with the knowledge of how to navigate their intended social environment (Kozinets 2015), seen for example in prior research by Aarseth (2003). This factor is present here due to the authors academic and industry experience along with a history of engaging with multiple fields within the video gaming industry.

With all the previous information compiled together, the video game(s) were designated a reward triangle model based on the work by James et al. (2013). This triangle, when applied to video games, allows for a title to be easily identified through the systems present within it while also quickly showcasing the rewarding aspects for players. Though initially

conceived to be an asset for design documentation and market review, the model has also found application in academia due to its efficiency in portraying these design elements in video games in a clear and concise manner. While alternate frameworks for game design and research, such as the MDA model or “6-11 framework”, offer insight based on design iterations/implementations (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek 2004) or engagement through emotions (Dillon 2011) respectively, the triangle model considers these areas and showcases the application of them from the title in a complete comprehensible diagram.

Each side of the triangle represents a different theory of reward; intrinsic, extrinsic and social play. These theories are then broken down into more specific designations with a focus on being more personal, material or competitively based, as represented by the points of the model; in this case they are referred to as, Own Goals, In Game Achievement, Material Gain, Competitive Achievement, Leaderboards and Beating Friends. The strength of these themes in video games would then be highlighted on the model with a designation of either colour or pattern. For the purpose of this study colour was chosen, therefore, green would represent a predominant amount, yellow an average and an absence of a colour meaning little to none present. While collecting the data, it was found to be impractical to create a triangle diagram for every video game. Instead, to fit in with the pre-existing data collection process the triangle would be represented as just its sections (Figure 1), though it can be converted back to a triangle for more direct representation when needed.

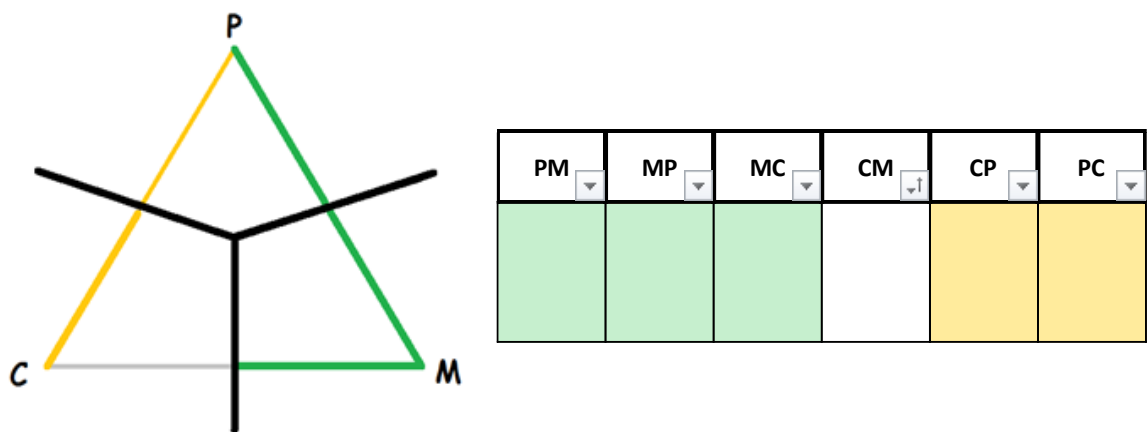


Figure 1: An example of the 3 corners of reward triangle model (seen left) being represented in spreadsheet form (seen right). Each side of the triangle retains its colour and is abbreviated to variations based off its points; Personal, Material and Competitive.

The method for determining which sides to complete in the triangle model links, in part, back to Aarseth’s views of the levels of engagement with video games that academics

should adhere to (2003). In this study, since all the 250 video game titles were played to such a degree as designated by Aarseth, the systems in place could be identified confidently and with little room for error due to the expert knowledge obtained through play. This was further improved by the information learned from online engagements via fan discussion and cultural understanding of video games in virtual scenarios (Kozinets 2015).

Finally, a geographical designation was given to each video game. This was based on multiple factors drawn from the data collected, including the designated triangle given. As shown by James and Fletcher (2016), based on information gathered through use of the previous model, a video game's systems and structure give a strong indication of its influences. These can be traced back to a preconceived location defined as an Eastern or Western title in online and offline cultures. However, an emergence of a differing designation over the last few years has become present and, according to previous work, should be defined as European (2015b). This, in combination with the physical location of development and the development teams that primarily worked on and produced the title, led to three options to be assigned: Western, Eastern and European.

To ensure that all designations were as close as they could be, a final check was completed at the end of the study before conclusions and data were gathered. This was not only to check all the title's designations, but to account for any new additions to the video games in forms of wide sweeping changes in the core game mechanics, downloadable content or any new additions to a field inside the video gaming industry. This re-examination of data was completed for every process in this study with another examination being undertaken to begin the creation process of a tentative set of preliminary results, a method which is useful in preparing for the final presentation of finalised results (Copland 2015). The final collection of data was then presented with different sections of a spreadsheet which could be searched and reorganised easily (Figure 2).

Cultural Code Words		PM	MP	MC	CM	CP	PC		Geo-Designat	Netnographic Notes
Unsettling, gripping, exceptional, unique, heavy, shocking, convoluted, patience									Eastern	Game opened up players to the genre Spawned an anime, other games etc Violence and gore made the game a hit online and memeable
Refined, disturbing, smart, dark, ridiculous, improved, disturbing, bizarre, slow									Eastern	Got more attention due to the previous game Higher scored but less attention due to setting and darker tone Plot confused many, took an anime to explain Quickly forgotten by online players for other Danganronpa media
Enthralling, intense, adventure, tough, grand, challenging, unique,									Eastern	Noted for its improvement to the series and cementing the devs in the industry Difficulty became a meme, used a lot online Very popular, played for a long time and used as a standard in
Nostalgic, epic, sadness, accessible, polished, beautiful, intense, enthralling									Eastern	Final game in the souls series due to devs wanting to move on Fastest selling game from Bandai Easier than before which annoyed some players but allowed for a bigger audience Western release was filled with issues. Eastern was fine?
Easier, dumb fun, buggy, forgettable, accurate, quite entertaining, frustrating									European	Same game again, didn't change much or add anything new Marketing was a joke and the female torso was gross Game is fun but it is dumb repetitive fun to be played with friends and that's it
Appealing, Shocking, claustrophobic, refreshing, gory, solid, distinctive,									Western	Fresh air for the horror genre, gameplay twist Popular when it came out but more popular after the sequels Brought the horror genre to the forefront of the industry, jump scares used from this
Shocking, great, polished, frightening, blockbuster, fresh, thrilling, tense									Western	Added more to the same formula, multiplayer etc Main Character talks now, caused some stur but it was ok Your mum hates dead space 2, caused debate but mostly just funny Violence in games issue raised from this

Figure 2: An image example of the final layout of the data collected throughout the main study; specifically, the gathered code words, system designations, geographical designations and the netnographic notes. Each section was carefully considered to make obtaining results and drawing conclusions as simple and effective as possible. The full data set can be found in Appendix C.

4.3. Consideration of Bias and Limitations

With regards to the support study's participants, they were an accessible population which is mostly represented by white males and those who identified themselves as persons who enjoy video games. They all were also engaged within locations in the United Kingdom and predominantly spoke English. This type of Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic participant (WEIRD) is often viewed as the "standard subject" and is representative of a lot of populations despite the knowledge that populations vary considerably (Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan 2010a). Though this is a limitation of those in the focus groups, it is a difficult aspect to alleviate as those who join into these cultures rapidly adapt to the same thought process driven primarily by horizontal cultural transmission (Mesoudi, Magid, and Hussain 2016). In any further iterations of this study or if it were able to be repeated, it would be completed with other populations that are deliberately different from the United Kingdom based participants with some cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural assistance to give the results a firmer empirical footing (Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan 2010b).

In the support study, the locations were selected to gather willing participants who would want to provide correct and accurate information, with a good basis of knowledge to draw from within the subject area, along with a serious treatment of the process. This allowed for the assumptions of the data gathered to be as accurate as possible, even if some of the assumptions with the data or biases the participants themselves have cannot be directly proved. By taking these steps, the delimitation is impactful enough to allow the gathered information to be appropriate without becoming unusable (Verma and Abdel-Salam 2019).

The researcher involved with the collection of the data in the main study also falls under the same classifications above and is a WEIRD factor, along with a lot of the sources of the data. On this subject, Gosling, et.al. (2010) concludes that while no single method can change research involving the internet over-relying on WEIRD samples, they are able to ameliorate the biases found in more typical research samples. This in turn can help WEIRD researchers navigate and utilise WEIRD samples in tandem with the ethnographic, developed into netnographic, methods discussed by Kozinets (2015). As before, with the previously mentioned knowledge of navigating the social environment in question and reflective data generated from this understanding, cross-disciplinary assistance would have given the data further support in its reasoning, though in its current state the final

collection is still a concise amalgamation of the video games and their online reception and perception.

The main study is also limited by the single person view of the video games played and the personal bias in the way they would be deconstructed and observed online based on personal preferences. These range from general areas, such as predominantly utilising English language websites or the use of an aggregator website, to more specific ones, such as enjoyment and perceptions of specific genres through an established Western lens. If repeated, multiple observers would be utilised to reiterate and further confirm the evaluations and data gathered with more variance in viewpoints and biases. However, due to the uncontrollable method of sampling that is the types of video games being released and with levels of engagement required, known biases were able to be mitigated to the best of researcher's ability with the understanding that all research is susceptible to bias and that the aforementioned steps, detailed throughout this chapter, were taken with the studies to address these at all stages (O'Dwyer and Bernauer 2013).

Chapter 5. Data Presentation and Initial Results

5.1. Supporting Study

5.1.1. Initial Stage

Of all the 150 participants involved in the focus groups, every participant took part in the activity, and subsequent study, indicating what their personal understanding of the global game cultures currently were. These were based on their comprehension of the topic with regards to their part in the global gaming community being, as mentioned previously, within academia, a developer, a journalist or a student within the video gaming field. Beginning with the initial activity, the participants used three distinct methods of identification along with voicing their thoughts on the subject matter.



Figure 3: The image presented to all participants of the supporting study.

The first, and most popular method, with 82 participants choosing to do so, was using a line on the image to indicate their understanding. This line could be a single line cutting the globe into two distinct sections which implied that whilst the subject had a view, it was either unimportant to them or that they were extremely confident in their vague comprehension. Other participants used a degree of care to draw a line across differing continents in a precise and, in some cases, highly specific manner.

Using a firm line as a method for indication in general implies a level of certainty, but this variant showcased that the participant had a solid idea of what the split should be to them

and that they had strong opinions on specific areas of the world which, to them, were defined as East and West. We can see drastic examples of these lines in Figure 4. The participant on the right has taken great care to draw their line around parts of Europe, specifically cutting out countries in East Europe such as Poland, Ukraine and Greece and the entire continent of Africa.

Conversely, the participant on the left has drawn a line directly in the middle of the paper with no definition at all. This participant type would typically be more difficult to engage with initially as their views would be based on preconceived personal views. However, these participants were usually open to more discussion and the eventual sharing of their group's thoughts.



Figure 4: Example of two different types of line drawn by participants of the supporting study.

41 participants elected to draw a circle, or circles, around the world map to highlight their views. These were varying in shape and size, not unlike the more specific lines drawn by other participants, ranging from large vague circles which when completed ending up covering big areas of the map across multiple continents to multiple smaller circles which singled out precise countries. From the start of the studies it was noted that those participants using circles had a consistent issue; 32 of them presented maps in which parts of Europe, Africa and Australia were undefined or had just not been included. This was

followed by an expression of confusion of where, if at all, these countries would even be placed within these parameters. 11 of these 32 participants would either not circle these areas deliberately, again more so with Australia than Europe, or, in the remaining 21 participants' case, cut through parts of them while trying to circle other areas.

As before, the use of the circles reveals a lack of understanding regarding this matter but with a different focus. Due to the specific nature of using a circle as an indication method, this implies that, outside of their selections, the participant was unsure of any other options available to them. While a line is a clear split, a circle can be manipulated and warped leaving gaps, as seen in Figure 5. The participant on the left has drawn two specific circles to portray their views but in doing so has ignored Africa. This is a strange oversight as the participant made a conscious point to highlight Australia as being a Western country but has ignored such a large part of the world. Conversely, the participant on the right has definitively circled most of the Asian countries for their definition of Eastern but has noted that everything else outside of this selection is Western. This participant type was more understanding of the subject from the beginning of the study due to their pointed view set and were just as open to discussion as the previous discussed group.

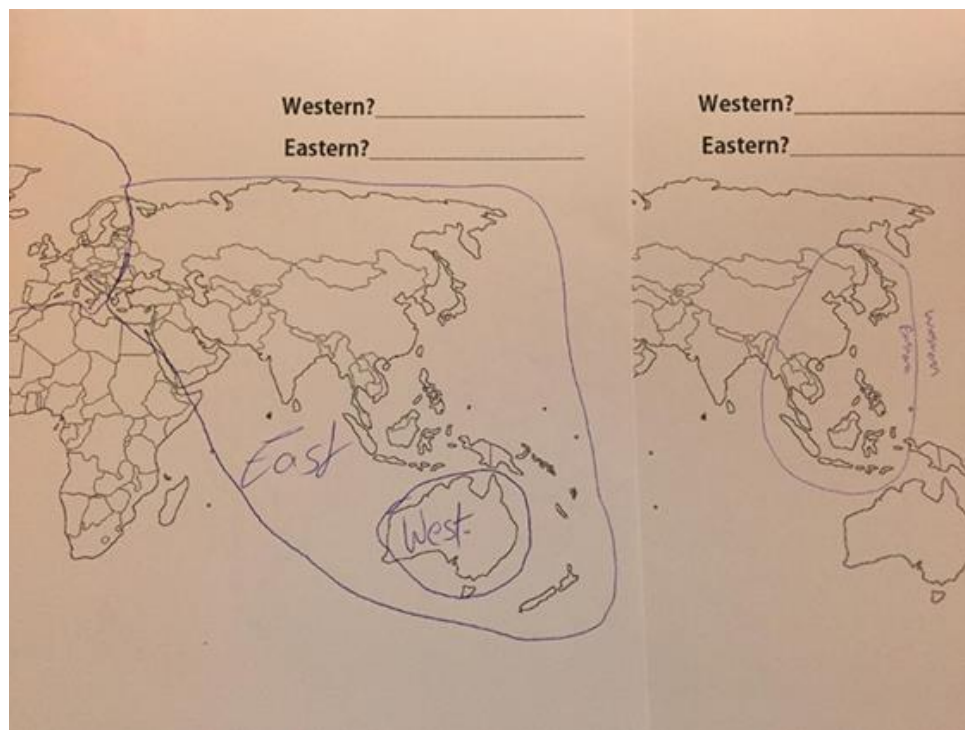


Figure 5: Example of two different types of circle(s) drawn by the participants of the supporting study.

The last few participants chose alternate ways of expressing their opinions using the map. Often this was via a mixture of the previous methods, starting with a line but then adding circles or more lines to try and elaborate any areas they were not sure about; these include, again, Africa, Australia and parts of Europe. The shading method, as seen on the left in Figure 6, was also employed as well. These approaches initially would seem to imply that these participants were more confused than confident in their decisions, however, the opposite seemed to be the case. Of the 27 participants, 25 utilised these methods in an additive process, returning to their task to add more areas. This displayed a desire to think and adapt after the fact as they were willing to keep working on the task instead of just finishing it with any form of definitive answer. Of course, not all fell into this category; those participants who chose to disrupt the process are also included here. For example, on the right of Figure 6, we can see a participant who has used a circle to draw around the entire globe. When questioned on their choice to do this, the participant stated, “There are no differences in the games industry” and pointedly returned their drawn-on map to the amusement of the group. It might be assumed that these participants would be a negative influence within the groups they were a part of, but in fact the opposite occurred. Along with those who elected to use these alternate methods, these participants were much more likely to ask questions as well as being much more vocal during the later sections of the study. This led to a lot more debate from the participants on the topics which, in turn, created a much clearer and representative set of results from the groups, in part to the frequent assertion of conflicting views and a need for extra clarification.

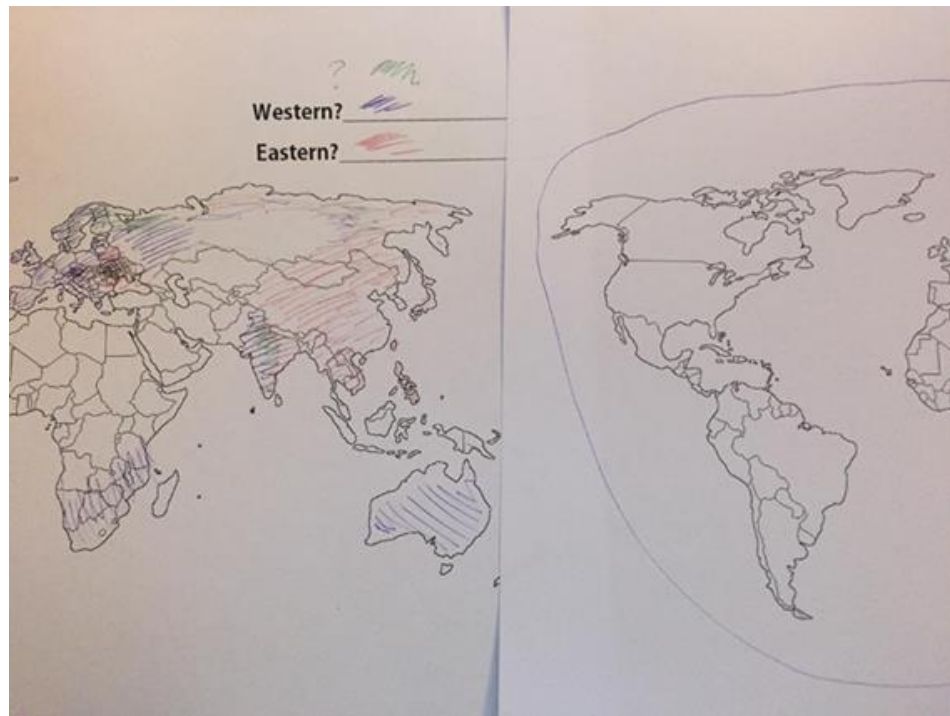


Figure 6: Example of two alternate types of indication drawn by participants of the supporting study; one with more detail and one meant to be disruptive.

From this initial stage of the study, it became clear that the participants did not have a strong understanding of the global gaming culture divide or even what it was. All the participants completed the task which did as intended; the participants were now made aware of their own subconscious views and influences which allowed them to better comprehend their choices for the next part of the study. Resistance to the topic and discussions surrounding it were limited as well.

Though this task does not directly impact the main results from this study, it was a necessary step to establish an understanding and receptive setting for the participants in their groups. It was also a notable help to the author as they were able to identify any problems or large misunderstandings manifesting and react accordingly to them since they could potentially skew the results and conclusions generated from the supporting study. The inclusion of this data set also offers further clarity into the concepts utilised and the participants who took part in this study; this gives further context for the later results produced in this work.

Western	Eastern	Alternative
Action	Anime	Academic
Addiction based	Arcades	Balanced
Boring	BOOBS	Comedic
Can't do horror	Competitive	Driven by small companies
Cinematic	Complex	Esports
Corporate	Consistent quality	Europe
Day 1 DLC	Dating sims	Experimental
Elitism	Dying	Free to play
Expensive	Fantasy	Indie
FPS	Figurehead driven	Isolated
Free to play	Gimicky	Minecraft
Hollywood	Grindy	Mobile
Kickstarter	Heavy in culture	Modding
Lack of quality	Innovation	More daring
Large	Japan	More depth
Money-making	Mobile	More indie
Not diverse	More interesting	More original
Open world	Niche	More use of their culture
Overhyped	Nintendo	Not USA
Overused ideas	No handholding	Retro modern
Pay to win	Polished	Serious games
PC master race	Professional	Silly
Prejudice	RPG	Smaller in scope
Realism	Sequel based	Youtubers
Relies on stereotypes	Sexist	
Repeats	Sony fans	
Rich	Special art style	
Spoon fed	Story driven	
Unfinished	Stuck in the past	
Varied	Unrealistic	
Violent	Weird	
Zombies		

Table 4: The most common words and phrases recorded from the discussion phase of the study. The words in bold were specifically chosen by the groups as the most prevalent and representative of the subject area.

From the outset, there was an assumption from the author that the discussions and subsequent summaries would deviate in such manner that, when examining them, there would be little to no consistency or such an amount that patterns would not be able to be ascertained. From the first few sessions however, consistent perspectives and views started to emerge which were reflected in the key words recorded (Appendix A).

As all the participants were a part of the currently perceived Western gaming industry, as they are classified as predominantly WEIRD, residing in a country in Europe and influenced by the media in this region (as discussed in section 4.3.), this was the first area brought up for discussion. This was also to further ease the participants into talking more openly as, at this stage of the study, it would require self-reflection combined with their

own views of their field. It was perhaps this that led to many of the responses concerning the perceptions of the Western gaming industry to be negative or criticised.

5.2. Western Discussion

Of the eight focus groups, the smaller groups, such as focus groups 4 and 5, fostered a lot of negative feeling towards the initial topic and therefore the words and phrases recorded had an aspect of anger or disappointment behind them. Violence, or the description of media being violent, was a common theme throughout all the groups but also came up more often in smaller group sessions. This view came attached with video game genres; Action, FPS (First Person Shooter) and to a lesser extent, the apocalyptic idea and setting of fighting zombies in video games. While the larger focus group 1 mirrored a lot of these statements, they added another side to these, citing a sense of elitism in the way the Western industry presents itself, by bringing up the online trope of the concept of the 'PC master race' mentality being a problematic influence.

This disappointment that the participants held toward their own perceived industry was implied often, as many participants pointed out the overused and exploitive design strategies that developers were adopting in not just in top tier video game industry (AAA) products but free to play titles as well. Every group held these views and, despite this study being conducted throughout the end of 2014 to late 2015, they turned out to be an extremely accurate guess towards the future of the Western gaming market when compared to the data gathered in the later years of the main study (section 6.2.2. and Appendix C).

The genre discussed the most was the FPS; this video game type had become a representation of the Western gaming industry to the participants with many of the views and perceptions being built on either an understanding of how this genre became popular, or simply a fatigue for it. The repetitive nature of this game type had made them not only unappealing but also, according to the participants, allowed for a lack of quality to become common in releases. These views were not just locked to the FPS genre, but other genres, such as the frequent Action genre, were also presented as examples of this.

This "corporate overlord" mentality with its grip on the gaming industry was elaborated more so in the larger focus group 1 when compared to the more smaller focus groups, such as groups 5 and 8, who focused more on perceived individual elements which are problems. The participants presented an industry which would develop and create

overhyped products for the masses, which were not as diverse as they could be, and relying on the use of stereotypes to give their products an appearance of the exciting elements they lacked. A comparison to Hollywood was drawn here, with the participants comparing video games to expensive productions that were highly cinematic in nature.

This theme of the Western gaming industry being seen to focus on more mainstream products was referred to often; the participants claimed that the casual gaming market was being spoon-fed titles which treated them as if they were unable to play them and required help in some manner. This lack of respect towards the player was further elaborated on as being a result of specific large companies observing that their audiences would generally like anything they decided to do, citing acts such as including day 1 downloadable content or including pay to win aspects in their video games. This money-making mentality was a frequent complaint and became the focus of a lot of conversations during the study.

Specific areas also had attention drawn to them; one such area raised was the nature of areas of design within the video game market. While the participants would comment that the Western gaming industry had a focus on trying to create realistic products, mentioning the overuse of the word 'realism' in advertisements for titles, the methods used in these games were always viewed as poor or overused. This turned out to be due to the repeated use of ideas from previous instalments which led to the attempts becoming boring and, yet again, relying on stereotypes from within gaming culture to try and scare players.

Open world was another idea which was mentioned as a specific issue, although was mentioned as both a positive and a negative. The larger focus group 1 mentioned that the Western industry's focus on creating these cinematic and realistic products naturally led into a larger setting which would translate into an open world setting. During this time period, the open world setting for video games was often included in marketing as a selling point but, as pointed out by the participants, would suffer from being overhyped and would be released in an unfinished state. The positive side of open world titles according to the participants was their varied content which allowed for repeated playthroughs or long play times.

Unfortunately, there was little other positive discussion within all the sessions. Rather, the negatives would come with a caveat, for example, while debating the nature of cinematic video game titles and the elements that made them, the participants would relent and

comment that the realism and action in them were enjoyable. Independent titles were also viewed positively; the effects of crowd funding platforms, such as *Kickstarter*, and the video games that they could and had produced were noted as being varied and, despite often being released in incomplete or reduced states, in direct contrast to the money focused industry they were a part of. However, whilst this according to the participants is a good side of the industry, it was overshadowed by the effects of mainstream titles and the casual consumers craving for constant gratification offered in repeated AAA titles. As before, since this study, the quality of independent titles and the ways in which the industry views them has improved.

After clarifying with the respective groups, the key notes of their perception of the Western gaming industry were selected and recorded. Each group was then tasked to summarise their collective views using the points they had raised (Table 1 Western column). Figure 7 showcases the most prominent conclusions drawn by the participants.

5.2.1. Initial Analysis

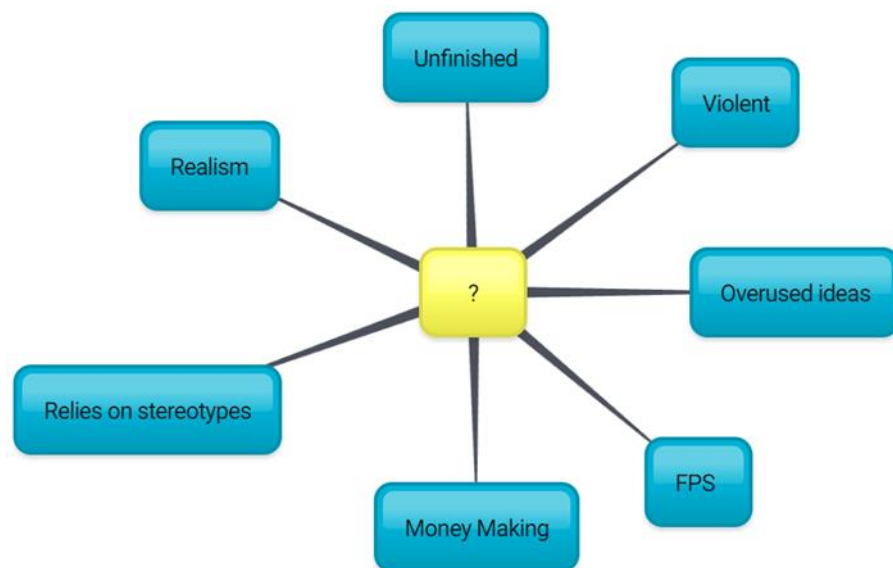


Figure 7: The common words and phrases that the participants chose to summarise the Western gaming industry. This area had the most suggestions of all the areas that were discussed.

According to all the focus groups, the perception of the Western gaming industry is not a positive one. It is difficult to draw an alternative conclusion from the discussions and the eventual assumptions that the participants gave as their commonly used words, such as ‘violent’, ‘money making’ and ‘relies on stereotypes’, have clear negative connotations.

The exception to this is the inclusion of the 'FPS' genre and the focus on 'realism'. Certain video games are often given this title due to this aesthetic theme of being realistic; video games such as the Fallout, Elder Scrolls and Call of Duty series have all had the moniker of Western attached to them in their marketing and in online culture. These games all followed a pattern of focusing on real and gritty scenarios in a mixture of modern, high fantasy or post-apocalyptic settings and are often from a first-person perspective. These types of video games became popular in the 7th generation console era, reinforced by the release of titles such as *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (Infinity Ward 2007); an FPS that shook up the current state of the genre with its focus on faster paced gameplay and a modern setting; and *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (Bethesda Game Studios 2006); a Western RPG (Role Playing Game) with high production values and deep high fantasy lore to keep consumers engaged played from a first person perspective.

There is also an argument to be made that this negativity is more a set of criticisms which the participants wished to be addressed. The 'overused ideas' phrase ties into the previous titles mentioned; the Call of Duty series for example has produced a Call of Duty title every year since *Call of Duty 2* (Infinity Ward 2005) was released. This has led to various levels of franchise fatigue (Geraghty, Palumbo and Sullivan III 2007) with the games over the last decade with fans being disappointed at change or the lack of advancement in the series in terms of narrative or mechanics (BBC 2014b, Sebastian and Whitehead 2008). 'Unfinished' is a reference to the released state of an increasing number of video game titles that are shipped with noticeable issues or parts of the game omitted. This is due to a post release patch approach for video games which has become increasingly popular for development companies to fall back on and, during the time of the study, was a common trait in video games. For example, a game mentioned by participants, *Sonic Boom: Rise of Lyric* (Big Red Button 2014) suffered from constant problems throughout its development (Osborn 2015) which led to the game being released in a noticeably unfinished state (Metacritic 2014). Even games from well-established franchises such as Star Wars were treated much the same; *Star Wars Battlefront* (EA DICE 2015) did not include a lot of content on release leading to a disappointing reception (Seitz 2015) not improved with the choice to fill out the title with future downloadable content via a season pass (Reiner 2015).

5.3. Eastern Discussion

The Eastern gaming industry discussions offered a drastically different set of topics that were covered. Although the smaller focus groups did focus on individual problems within the Eastern industry, seen in focus groups 3, 4 and 5, and the large focus group 1 also mentioned some general issues, the reaction was much more positive than anything critically examined before.

Anime as a form of media and aesthetic was brought up in the beginning of a majority of the discussions. The consistency of the niche style was perceived to be much more interesting when compared to the Western approach. This view was held for a few reasons, the most popular being due to the amount that Eastern developers draw from their culture during the development of their titles. The participants talked about this interesting focus for a while, but each group offered up different aspect of the approach.

Sexism and the treatment of women in Eastern video games was one of these focuses; the unrealistic portrayal of attitudes and body parts, referred to by the participants as 'BOOBS', being the topics brought up most often. While these points were raised frequently, they were overshadowed by much more positive outlooks of this industry as whole. This does not mean that the participants ever made light of this negative topic, it was never perceived as a good aspect of the Eastern gaming industry but treated much the same as the criticism in the conclusions given about the Western industry; as an area that needs to be reviewed and changed.

Another focus when talking about anime was the fantasy setting and genre within video games. RPGs and the innovations that the Eastern industry brought to the genre were praised often with participants citing games such as the Final Fantasy series coming to Sony consoles revolutionising the way the RPG was viewed in Western markets. This level of consistent quality from the genre was a focus for the participants. The story driven RPG is a big part of the Eastern gaming markets identity, regardless of the grind associated with playing them, and the sequels to these titles maintain this position.

When considering the Eastern industry, as much as the participants mentioned Sony as a company, Nintendo came up more often. The respect the participants had for Nintendo's innovations and quality was matched only by their dislike of the gimmicks which cause the company to stutter in the market. Through discussion of Nintendo, focus groups 4 and 6

discussed the figurehead driven approach that companies employ to give titles and projects further acclaim. Prominent developers such as Shigeru Miyamoto and Hideo Kojima were talked about as embodying this idea, using their prestige from past works to sell newer titles to consumers. While this is a strategy used by Western based companies as well, it seems to be noticed more when employed by Eastern developers as this topic did not arise in any of the sessions involving the Western industry.

This idea of the Eastern industry being stuck in the past was a continuing perception across all the groups. However, this was expanded upon in different ways; the larger focus group 1, likely due to the recent release of the latest Souls title in *Dark Souls 2* (FromSoftware 2014), focused on the lack of assistance or handholding that Eastern video games offer. The smaller focus groups spoke of the effects but fixated on the complex nature of Eastern video games compared to Western, mentioning that it is this which makes titles feel difficult and therefore niche. Competitive video games fell into this discussion as well. The participants all agreed that the Eastern players are much better at navigating the intricacies of competitive gaming and therefore, the demand for more interesting and arcade-based video games comes from this market. The professional approach towards video games while starting in a competitive setting led focus groups 2, 5 and 7 to mention the conduct of companies, such as Nintendo again, and how they act with their consumer market. The consistent products which are polished to a high standard have placed them in a position which the participants seemed to value as throughout the study Japan was frequently used as representative terminology when referring to the Eastern gaming industry.

Japan was at the forefront of all the groups' minds when exploring what the Eastern game industry meant to them. Considering the terminology recorded and discussed, along with the larger focus group 1 constantly mentioning it as part of their explanations for other talking points, this makes sense as most of the assumptions that the participants had across all the discussions had a foundation in Japanese development or perceptions.

In all the groups, the Eastern gaming industry was always summarised to be a positive one with weird areas which, despite being niche, were still considered enough of a problem to be highlighted by the participants. The most prominent example of this was the idea that the industry was stuck in the past with its sequel-based releases and sexist views; despite the serious nature of these points and the implications behind them, the participants would

still maintain the view that the Eastern industry had more interesting titles which contained additional innovative content over the Western industry.

In comparison to the Western gaming industry discussions however, there was little or no criticism or suggestion of how to change this outside of focus group 2. The participants in this group maintained a line of thought that if the Eastern gaming industry did not change its practices, their market would die off. This view was the most aggressive one to be held by a group but at the end of that group's study, they also conceded that the Eastern industry produces polished and again, more innovative titles than other regions. It can be inferred that perhaps since the participants themselves had no ties to this market they had little investment in it and did not want to insist on change, unless they were an active fan of the region. Even participants who spoke highly of the Eastern industry all deferred to the companies, Nintendo and Sony, rather than the entire Eastern industry, offering up suggestions for specific video games instead of the broad changes demanded of the Western industry.

As with the Western industry, clarification was obtained by questioning the groups and they summarised their collective views (Table 4 Eastern column). Figure 8 showcases the most prominent conclusions drawn by the participants.

5.3.1. Initial Analysis



Figure 8: The common words and phrases that the participants chose to summarise the Eastern gaming industry. This area had the most erratic results and words collected.

While the perception the participants had was mostly positive according to their discussions, with words such as ‘consistent quality’ and ‘polished’ being recorded, most of their conclusions and final words did not mirror this. From examination of the participants code words, Eastern culture is seen as being quite insular. This notion of being ‘stuck in the past’ in combination with the industry being ‘heavy in culture’ which, when concerning Asian countries, is steeped in traditional values and holds views which are not wholly considered to be appropriate in other cultures today speaks to this point. Even if these values were acceptable, the perceptions of them are not optimistic and this has been reflected in the participants’ discussions. However, there is an alternative way of examining this. Since causing the reinvigoration of the entire gaming business in the early 1980s, the Eastern gaming industry has been at the forefront of the development of video games business. They have created some of the more risky and innovative products in this market today, and each act has been endeavoured with a perpetual strength that is unique to the gaming industry (Situmeang 2016). Perhaps then this insular nature is not a desire to stay separate but simply a desire to work in a specific way without outside assistance. The participants touched on this point briefly when speaking about the professional nature of Eastern game developers in that, due to their products often being ‘unrealistic’ or ‘fantasy’ based, considering alternate views or processes would make their complicated job, and sometimes even the product, even more ‘complex’.

While no genres were mentioned to a degree in which the groups placed them in their summaries, the ‘story driven’ aspect is interesting when taking the number of occasions RPGs were brought up alongside them. Around the time of the study, few traditional Eastern RPG titles had been released. However, a mixture of this and the Action-Adventure genre, became more prevalent with titles such as *Dark Souls 2* (FromSoftware 2014), *Bloodborne* (FromSoftware 2015) and, mentioned by later groups in the study, *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes* (Kojima Productions 2014). Titles like these carried on the strong story aspect in video games using alternate forms of storytelling through player exploration and gameplay. These narrative methods were well received and, based on the perceptions of the participants, continued the view that the Eastern gaming industry’s products are story driven.

Story driven video games are not limited to just the Eastern market, but the participants only chose to talk about this during Eastern discussions. It is not clear why few

comparisons were drawn to the Western industry, considering the amount of criticism given to that area by the participants. Looking at the prevalent words the participants concluded with, there is an argument that can be made that these words could also be applied to the Western gaming industry. The difference, once again, comes from the emotional stance that the groups took when talking about the Eastern industry; by being positive the words recorded took on a new meaning. The best example of this is the idea of Eastern gaming industry being more ‘professional’. The participants would use this terminology with regards to not just how Eastern companies would act and portray themselves within their market, but also to how they manage and present the products they make. As before, professionalism is present within the Western gaming industry and a lot of the points raised can also be seen in Western produced video games.

These mixed views presented by the participants strongly imply that they see the Eastern industry as something complicated compared to the one they feel they are in. This rationale is perhaps why this feeling of complexity is passed on to the video games created in that industry. For example, *Bloodborne* is a gothic fantasy action role playing game produced in Japan by FromSoftware (2015); it follows on from the Souls series which is known to be a difficult series to play due to this perceived complexity concerning mechanics, progression and comprehension of story. Interestingly, the game’s settings are based in Western lore and feature eldritch horror elements that are seen in traditional Western RPGs as well. The participants referred to this title often, along with other instalments of the Souls series, but also included video game series from Nintendo, such as Pokémon and The Legend of Zelda, in this as well. These titles are rated to be suited for a younger audience suggesting that they would not be difficult to play. However, the participants still included them citing the complexities that can arise from playing these titles in a professional manner. The best example given concerning this was the competitive aspect and preparation required from professional Pokémon players; the mechanics to produce Pokémon with specific skills, powers, moves and natures are more than the average player would seek to accomplish.

5.4. Other Areas Discussion

The final set of discussions presented the participants with the difficult task of attempting to see past their now established views of the gaming industry. The groups explored potential areas that either the other discussion points lacked or if there were areas which differed from Eastern and Western. While there were fewer points raised (Table 4 right column), there was still a fair amount of conversation.

To begin, the larger focus group 1 mentioned parts of the gaming industry that had not been examined so far and were important to individual participants. A common area brought up was the experimental field of video games. The participants initially elaborated on this by mentioning the market for serious games; although this market is utilised worldwide, the participants believed this field was external to the other markets. When elaborating, the discussion focused more on the perceived daring approach to development fuelled by smaller companies being able to create their own products without restrictions. Focus groups 2 and 3 brought this topic up and seemed to be using the terminology of serious games incorrectly, however, other sessions referred to them directly by citing them as educational and military based products. Experimental games also led to discussions about the video game modding community, but this topic was passed over quickly whenever it was brought up.

The ‘academic’ side of video games was mentioned during this stage. This is likely due to the participants in this study coming from academic and industry-based settings themselves. However, some individuals took this further and related the academic area of video games being more prolific in Europe than other regions. This idea of the Eastern and Western industries lacking depth behind the production of their products was a common theme. The larger focus group 1 held a perception that, when compared with the other industries, European developers released more independent video games that not only have further integrated use of their culture, but also the ability to create titles which were deemed as more daring and original. The concept of being ‘Not the USA’ was consistent throughout all the groups; each group using different rationale and terminology such as this to separate this field from the other industries discussed. When talking about specific video games embodying this, *Minecraft* (Mojang 2011) came up often as an example due to its balance between being a video game which has depth but has, as the participants explained, ‘silly’ moments as well.

The concept of video games being ‘comedic’ in nature was yet another point that came up frequently as a part of the groups’ discussions, commonly with video game examples. These included the aforementioned *Minecraft*, the LEGO games and so-called YouTuber games like *Goat Simulator* (Coffee Stain Studios 2014) in the later groups. The LEGO series of video games have always been known for their humour at the expense of the licensed properties which their titles are based upon, including Star Wars, Marvel Comics and DC Comics properties. This, in combination with the simple gameplay, which has remained mostly the same throughout these video games’ time in the market, has allowed these titles to stay in the participants’ consciousness enough to be mentioned in some form during the study. The same effect had occurred for titles like *I am Bread* (Bossa Studios 2015) and *Goat Simulator*. These video games had simple premises and methods of play compared to other titles released during the time of the study, but their absurdist humour and online presence capitalising on these characteristics enabled at least one participant from every group to mention them.

YouTube and content creators on the platform were discussed, with focus groups 6 and 7 citing popular online personalities, such as PewDiePie, as being a rising influence on video games and how they are seen around the world. At the time of this study, YouTubers were steadily gaining influence on how games were marketed. This was recognised by the participants as their discussions mentioned that even smaller companies can make a big impact if the right influencer gives them enough support. An example of this phenomenon can be seen with the Five Nights at Freddy’s (FNaF) series, though not mentioned by the participants, a title which was placed in a specific situation which led to the series becoming popular. YouTubers with large followings, in this case most prominently Markiplier and PewDiePie, released gameplay videos of them reacting to the jump scare based gameplay of the FNaF series. This led to a single developer receiving enough feedback, acclaim and income to not only create multiple sequels to this title, but also to produce books, start the process of developing a feature film and various merchandise based off the characters. As before, this phenomenon is not limited to any region of the world and the participants did not indicate this. Titles such as *Flappy Bird* (dotGEARS 2013), another independent developer title, and *PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds* (PUBG Corporation 2017), an online Battle Royale game, also received a massive amount of external support leading them to become the leaders in their genres during their peak (BBC News 2014a and Hicks 2017).

5.4.1. Initial Analysis

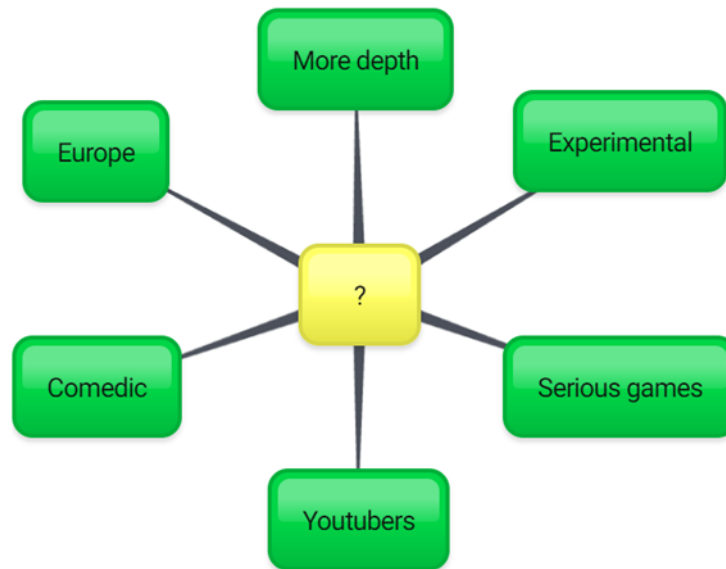


Figure 9: The common words and phrases that the participants chose to summarise any other or alternate areas of gaming industry. This area had the least results of all topics discussed but the most variety.

The participants' conclusions stood out when compared to the previous discussions. The perceptions were neutral in nature with participants electing not to set a topic as being inherently bad or good as they had done before. This was most likely due to a level of apprehension towards these discussions; none of the focus groups felt confident on everything they talked about within this discussion topic, except for their conclusions and a few notable areas.

The idea of a European influence in the gaming industry, along with those games being experimental, was mentioned in some way by most groups, though it was reached in various ways as mentioned previously. This neutrality, in combination with the participants being in a European country, could be an explanation as to why they came to these conclusions. This would imply that there is an aspect of location bias towards the perceived industry that people, notably participants who are in an active and deep part of the industry, view themselves to be a part of. This type of bias could be a problem in data analysis (Egger and Smith 1998). However, regardless of whether this is the case, when presented with an alternative the groups all explored it and came to the same rough points of discussion in every session. This displays that, even if there is an unconscious bias based on location, there is a conscious desire for Europeans in the gaming industry to be viewed as their own area, even if they are unsure on how to exactly articulate that process or were unaware of the potential of this area to begin with.

5.5. Main Study

5.5.1. Initial information

Over the duration of the study, 250 video games were critically examined for this work, with a playthrough of the titles as well as netnographic observation and participation in the titles' online and offline communities. The data recorded from this is presented in its entirety in Appendix C. Any video games referred to as a part of this study are designated a number throughout this chapter. This refers to their place within the table with their statistics, observations and geographical designations, for example, *Monster Hunter Generations* (125). Any observations or statements about the video games in this chapter have been decoded from the netnographic data included in Appendix C, in line with the data analysis methods developed by Kozinets (2015) and should be referred to there if made.

Year	Western	Eastern	European	Total
2013	18	28	16	62
2014	24	25	9	58
2015	14	18	9	41
2016	18	21	9	48
2017	12	14	10	36
2018	1	4	0	5
Total	87	110	53	250

Table 5: Breakdown of the number of video games played during the duration of the study.

Table 5 above gives an insight into the video games studied. Most notable is the difference in number between the geographical designation of the games, a title given based on the results from the supporting study. Due to gathering evidence of the European area seeing some partial yet not comprehensive emergence (section 2.3.), which is relatively misunderstood by video game consumers (as established earlier in Chapter 5.), it is understandable that fewer titles would be categorised in the area when compared to the other two.

While the number of titles played per year started to reduce in number as the study continued, the overall ratio of Western, Eastern and European titles played stayed the same throughout each individual year, with the most games being played with an Eastern designation and the least in the European designation. Though this could be a coincidence, a likely explanation for this is due to the release of the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One in late 2013 and the Wii U in late 2012. Since a new console generation was in its infancy, titles

from both the old and new generations were released to capitalise on the new platforms and round off the older ones. This need to capitalise on changing platforms does not apply to mobile or PC releases due to the consistent nature of their releases, but the number of titles studied from the previously mentioned consoles would have an impact in the data gathered regardless.

5.5.2. Engagement Hours

Hour Fields	Western	Eastern	European	Total
100+	7	20	1	28
50 to 99	2	11	2	15
25 to 49	14	25	5	44
10 to 24	42	43	34	119
5 to 9	22	11	11	44

Table 6: The varying amounts of hours spent studying the video games.

While most of the video games had an engagement time of under 25 hours in total, the number of Eastern titles with over 100+ hours engagement time stand out compared to the other areas. This is due to the number of Eastern designated RPGs that were played as this genre typically requires a much longer time to complete due to the focus on longer sweeping narratives. The average engagement time for the video games studied is 15 hours per title, although this does not account for the true time of the video games that were played for 100 hours and above. For example, *Overwatch* (139) is categorised as 100+ hours but, at the time of the study concluding, the title had been played for around 400 hours. Some of the video games in this 100+ field, such as *Yu-Gi-Oh Duel Links* (249) and *Pokémon GO* (157), are portable or mobile games which allowed for them to be studied or played at the same time as other titles due to automation or specific timing require to engage with the product. Finally, some video games are compilations of other video games, for example, *Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 Remix* (99), or have content which was consistently being updated, such as MMO (Massively Multiplayer Online game) and MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) titles like *Runescape 3* (172) and *Fortnite: Battle Royale* (77). These titles therefore fall into the 100+ hour category due to a need to engage with multiple pieces of content and media that were available and relevant to the product.

Hours	Western	Eastern	European	Total Hours
100+	7	20	1	2,800
90	0	1	0	90
75	0	2	1	225
70	1	0	0	70
60	1	1	0	120
50	0	7	1	400
40	3	9	0	480
35	0	1	1	70
30	5	9	2	480
25	6	6	2	350
20	6	11	3	400
15	16	17	11	660
10	20	15	20	550
5	22	11	11	220
Total				6,915

Table 7: A compilation of the total number of hours studying the video games.

From May 2013 until March 2018, a minimum of 6,915 hours of time, or 288 days, have been dedicated to studying the video games in this study (Table 7). This total does not include the extra hours from being in the 100+ hour field nor does it account for any video games being played simultaneously, but it gives a concept of the time involved with this study. After a video game was completed, the examination of the reception and online presence of the title did not stop in order to ensure that any new content or important changes could be discovered and reviewed quickly; however, this time has not been included in table 7.

Genre	Western	Eastern	European
Action-Adventure	12	15	7
Action Role Playing	1	13	3
Adventure	3	0	3
Arcade	0	1	0
Augmented Reality	1	0	0
Battle Royale	2	0	0
Beat em' Up	0	0	1
Card Game	2	2	1
Dating Sim	1	1	0
Drawing Game	0	0	1
Endless Runner	0	0	1
Fighting	4	12	0
FPS	14	0	8
Gacha Game	0	3	0
Hack 'n' Slash	1	2	1
MMO	1	0	1
MMORPG	1	1	1
MOBA	2	0	1
Platformer	6	15	9
Puzzle	3	3	4
Racing	0	1	3
Rhythm	0	1	0
Role Playing Shooter	3	0	0
RPG	5	27	0
RTS	0	1	1
Shooter	1	1	0
Simulation	3	1	2
Sports	4	0	0
Strategy	2	1	2
Survival Horror	10	3	3
Third Person Shooter	4	2	0
Visual Novel	1	4	0

Table 8: The number of video games studied split into their genres.

In total, 32 different genres of video games were released and studied during the duration of the study. These genres were the most common and accepted definition for the video games which were studied, provided by the developers or dictated by key mechanics. Of these, 6 genres, Arcade, Augmented Reality, Beat em' up, Drawing, Endless Runner and Rhythm games, were only played once. As the focus of the study was to examine video games based on release time and their perceived impact on social and gaming culture,

these genres were, during the study, simply not popular or, in the case of the Augmented reality game *Pokémon GO* (157), extremely new and influential to an unprecedented extent (Duffy 2016 and Kain 2016).

The Action-Adventure genre contained the most titles played at 34 in total. However, this genre is widely used for titles in the video games industry as it contains subgenres such as stealth, first person, third person and immersive games. Since these subgenres offer little in terms of defining themselves outside of being an Action-Adventure title, they were also placed in this category. The RPG and Platformer genres also played often with 32 and 30 titles respectively. The Platformer genre is unsurprising as it is a simple game type which has been repeated throughout the history of the video gaming industry's lifetime. However, the RPG genre being as predominant was unexpected; the RPG genre is another which can be split into subgenres, such as MMORPG and Role-Playing Shooter, and these alternates have enough differences to warrant their own sections. Considering this, the number of RPGs remaining is surprising.

After these genres, the number of titles drops off by nearly half for Action Role Playing, Fighting, FPS and Survival Horror video games. This is in part due to these being loose subgenres of the existing genres or, in the case of Fighting and FPS, having little representation from areas of the gaming industry. This drop-off occurs again with the rest of the genres that ended up containing 6 or fewer games. This can be partially explained; some of these titles are niche subgenres, such as Hack 'n' Slash and Beat em' Up, and others are genres that have a market dominance, for example, since its release *Hearthstone* (87) has been used as a comparison for other digital card games to strive towards and during the time of this study had not been displaced from this position.

Western Genre	Hours					
	100+	50 to 99	25 to 49	10 to 24	0 to 9	TOTAL
Action-Adventure			4	7	1	12
Action Role Playing				1		1
Adventure					3	3
Augmented Reality	1					1
Battle Royale	1			1		2
Card Game	1		1			2
Dating Sim				1		1
Fighting				4		4
FPS	1	1	4	7	1	14
Hack 'n' Slash				1		1
MMO				1		1
MMORPG		1				1
MOBA	1		1			2
Platformer			2	4		6
Puzzle					3	3
Role Playing Shooter	2			1		3
RPG			1	2	2	5
Shooter				1		1
Simulation			1	1	1	3
Sports				2	2	4
Strategy				2		2
Survival Horror				3	7	10
Third Person Shooter				3	1	4
Visual Novel					1	1
Total	7	2	14	42	22	87

Table 9: Breakdown of the hours studying the video games with a Western designation.

By examining the regions separately, 87 Western designated titles were played during the study making up 34.8% of all video games included. The most played Western genres were the First-Person Shooter (FPS), closely followed by the Action-Adventure and Survival Horror genres. This is consistent with the perceptions of the Western industry by the focus groups, in being fixated on the FPS genre with games that focus on violence and the idea of being realistic. These genres also had a lot of time put into them to be analysed appropriately due to ongoing content and updates to the titles. This is also present in all the Western video games studied over 100 hours. For example, *Destiny* (43) and *Destiny 2* (44) are massive MMO-like Role-Playing Shooters which, over the course of the main study, released multiple expansions and updates which drastically changed parts of the games and therefore led to a lot of time being dedicated to these titles. As before, this is

consistent with the perceptions of the industry being money-making through use of downloadable content.

Eastern Genre	Hours					TOTAL
	100+	50 to 99	25 to 49	10 to 24	0 to 9	
Action-Adventure	1	1	3	8	2	15
Action Role Playing	5	1	3	4		13
Arcade					1	1
Card Game	1	1				2
Dating Sim					1	1
Fighting	2	2		6	2	12
Gacha Game		1		2		3
Hack 'n' Slash				2		2
MMORPG	1					1
Platformer	3	2	2	4	4	15
Puzzle				3		3
Racing				1		1
Rhythm				1		1
Role Playing Shooter						0
RPG	6	3	11	7		27
RTS				1		1
Shooter				1		1
Simulation			1			1
Strategy				1		1
Survival Horror				2	1	3
Third Person Shooter	1		1			2
Visual Novel			4			4
Total	20	11	25	43	11	110

Table 10: Breakdown of the hours studying the video games with an Eastern designation.

A total of 110 Eastern designated titles were played, which accounted for 44% of all the video games studied. The most played Eastern games genres were Role Playing Games (RPG) by a wide margin, followed by Platformers and Action-Adventure titles in equal amounts and then Action Role Playing and Fighting games. As with the Western industry, the RPG genre being prevalent in varying forms along with the fantasy themes aligns with the existing cultural perceptions of the industry observed through the supporting study's focus groups. RPG titles by nature take a lot longer to complete and fully understand due to a focus on story and in-depth gameplay. Since the Action Role Playing is a subgenre of RPGs, it is understandable why these two make up over half of the titles in the 100+ hours field. The remaining titles follow the same pattern as the Western ones before; they are

predominantly video games which required multiple playthroughs and consistent attention due to updates or new content being developed for them.

European Genre	Hours					TOTAL
	100+	50 to 99	25 to 49	10 to 24	0 to 9	
Action-Adventure			2	4	1	7
Action Role Playing		1		2		3
Adventure				2	1	3
Beat em' Up					1	1
Card Game		1				1
Drawing Game				1		1
Endless Runner			1			1
FPS				8		8
Hack 'n' Slash				1		1
MMO				1		1
MMORPG	1					1
MOBA				1		1
Platformer				6	3	9
Puzzle				1	3	4
Racing			1	2		3
RTS				1		1
Simulation					2	2
Strategy			1	1		2
Third Person Shooter				3		3
Total	1	2	5	34	11	53

Table 11: Breakdown of the hours studying the video games with a European designation.

Finally, 53 European designated titles were played, the remaining 21.2% of all the video games examined. The most played European game genres were Platformers, closely followed by First Person Shooters (FPS) and then Action-Adventure titles. These genres are a mixture of the other two studied industries' most popular genres, which is consistent with the perceptions of this area of the industry. Compared to the other regions, much less time was spent on these titles. One explanation to this could be the more experimental side of these titles, an example of this can be seen with *Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle* (115); a Real Time Strategy (RTS) game which is a genre that the Super Mario franchise has never previously utilised. The concept and production were an attempt to branch the Mario universe out of its Platformer focused games by making a new concept to see if players would enjoy it (Nintendo of Europe GmbH 2017). In this case, the title was well received as it allowed audiences to be more receptive to popular video game series taking further risks or combining genres (Jackson 2017).

This approach can be seen from an alternative side when considering the video games which were designed to be a constructed experience, shorter by nature and again experimental. *Inside* (95) is a Puzzle game which can be completed fully in under 5 hours, it is not graphically advanced when compared to AAA titles and was not produced by a sizeable company. However, the clever narrative and message that the title delivers in combination with puzzles, which not only teach players about the world in which the game is set but also provide a challenge, made the title impactful (Wiltshire 2017) and within the confines of debate of it being considered art (Bourgonjon et al. 2017). This is further in line with the perceptions of what a European gaming market can produce, based on the supporting study.

The genres of video games studied and the extent to which the top genres were experienced during the study have, in all areas, matched up with the cultural perceptions that were observed in the supporting study. This is to be expected as the perceptions were and are, based off the gaming industry's previously released titles. The industry produces products to appeal to as wide a player base as possible, thus creating a cycle which repeats itself until displacing industry or online cultural change occurs, as discussed by Zackariasson and Wilson (2010)

5.5.3. Genre

Genre (2013)	Western	Eastern	European	Total
Action-Adventure	3	5	2	10
Action Role Playing	0	4	1	5
Adventure	0	0	1	1
Arcade	0	1	0	1
Beat em' Up	0	0	1	1
Endless Runner	0	0	1	1
Fighting	1	1	0	2
FPS	3	0	2	5
Hack 'n' Slash	1	0	1	2
MMORPG	1	1	1	3
MOBA	0	0	1	1
Platformer	1	8	2	11
Puzzle	1	0	1	2
Racing	0	0	1	1
RPG	0	5	0	5
RTS	0	1	0	1
Simulation	1	1	0	2
Strategy	1	0	0	1
Survival Horror	4	0	1	5
Third Person Shooter	1	0	0	1
Visual Novel	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	18	28	16	62

Table 12: The genres of the video games studied in 2013. Only the genres of titles played have been included.

Platformers and Action-Adventure video games were the most studied during 2013 (Table 12), with the majority of these being Eastern designated titles. The most variety of genres were present in the European titles studied, but they also had the fewest number of video games examined during the year overall. Survival Horror, Action-Adventure and FPS were the highest number of titles examined in the Western industry while Platformers, RPGs and Action-Adventure titles were the more frequent from the Eastern industry. This is consistent with the pattern from the entire study including the European titles played being a mixture of both regions, Platformer, FPS and Action-Adventure. A noteworthy observation is the number of genres which gained traction due to premises which were appealing to online influencers on platforms like YouTube and Twitch. The biggest of these can be seen when examining the attention given to *Flappy Bird* (74), a mobile title which was elevated into the public eye due to its difficulty, negative attention and controversy around its production (Heilmann 2014). This led to video game genres that would not normally be considered due to a lack of relevance, such as mobile gaming

movements and Arcade titles, to be included due to the online and offline communities' reactions towards them, a trend which would continue in future years.

Genre (2014)	Western	Eastern	European	Total
Action-Adventure	5	2	1	8
Action Role Playing	1	3	0	4
Adventure	1	0	0	1
Card Game	1	0	0	1
Dating Sim	0	1	0	1
Drawing Game	0	0	1	1
Fighting	0	5	0	5
FPS	3	0	1	4
Gacha Game	0	1	0	1
Hack 'n' Slash	0	2	0	2
MOBA	1	0	0	1
Platformer	2	2	2	6
Puzzle	1	1	2	4
Racing	0	1	0	1
Rhythm	0	1	0	1
Role Playing Shooter	2	0	0	2
RPG	0	4	0	4
RTS	1	0	0	1
Simulation	1	0	1	2
Sports	1	0	0	1
Survival Horror	2	2	1	5
Third Person Shooter	2	0	0	2
TOTAL	24	25	9	58

Table 13: The genres of the video games studied in 2014. Only the genres of titles played have been included.

2014 is much the same as 2013. However, fighting games overtook the Eastern market over RPGs (Table 13). Each year a different genre seemed to have a sudden growth in releases. This can potentially be attributed to the industry being conscious of social trends and adapting releases to capitalise on a trend, in this case though, the fighting games in question were all sequels to existing franchises which were due for a newer version and, when considering *Super Smash Bros for 3DS* (207), alternate forms of release. The European industry also did not produce a lot of products, but the titles released during this time had a noticeable effect on the industry; *Alien Isolation* (2) was released after a year which contained a resurgence of Survival Horror titles and was part of a franchise which has had a noted poor reputation within the gaming industry (Weber 2014). Despite this, the title was well received and raised the standards for other horror video games to follow with

techniques and design elements which future games in the genre would adhere to (Keogh and Jayemanne 2018).

Genre (2015)	Western	Eastern	European	Total
Action-Adventure	3	3	2	8
Action Role Playing	0	3	1	4
Adventure	0	0	1	1
Dating Sim	1	0	0	1
Fighting	1	1	0	2
FPS	2	0	2	4
MMO	0	0	1	1
MOBA	1	0	0	1
Platformer	0	2	1	3
Puzzle	1	2	0	3
RPG	2	4	0	6
Sports	1	0	0	1
Strategy	0	1	0	1
Survival Horror	2	0	1	3
Third Person Shooter	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	14	17	9	40

Table 14: The genres of the video games studied in 2015. Only the genres of titles played have been included.

This pattern of releases continued into 2015, although there were multiple titles which began to start pushing boundaries in the industry. Games such as *Heroes of the Storm* (88), *Life is Strange* (107) and *Pokkén Tournament* (166) challenged existing genres and took up a large space within the industry and social consciousness as a result. The traditional yearly release video game franchise titles, with scheduled and consistent release periods, were present, such as *Call of Duty: Black Ops 3* (23) and *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* (6), but the aforementioned ambitious titles overshadowed them. The clearest example of this can be seen with *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (225); a critically acclaimed title worldwide due to the care and effort put into all areas of the product over its many years of development based on multiple articles and reviews (Metacritic 2015a). 18 titles during this year can be identified as following this experimental approach and all of them are from a wide variety of genres across all areas of the gaming industry, though most are designated European titles at 7 out of the 9 total games examined. Despite 2015 containing a lower number of video games studied, this year's titles, as *Alien Isolation* (2) had done the previous year, had a focus on setting new standards which would be seen again in the later years of the study.

Genre (2016)	Western	Eastern	European	Total
Action-Adventure	1	3	1	5
Action Role Playing	0	1	1	2
Adventure	2	0	1	3
Augmented Reality	1	0	0	1
Card Game	0	2	1	3
Fighting	0	1	0	1
FPS	6	0	1	7
Gacha Game	0	1	0	1
Platformer	1	1	1	3
Puzzle	0	0	1	1
RPG	1	11	0	12
Shooter	0	1	0	1
Simulation	1	0	1	2
Sports	1	0	0	1
Strategy	1	0	1	2
Survival Horror	2	0	0	2
Third Person Shooter	1	0	0	1
Visual Novel	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	18	21	9	49

Table 15: The genres of the video games studied in 2016. Only the genres of titles played have been included.

2016 continued the genre trends set in 2015 although two are prominent; FPS and RPG, for Western and Eastern markets respectively. These stood out due to the release of major and highly anticipated titles which were redefining these genres in the AAA industry, such as *Overwatch* (139) and *Final Fantasy XV* (67). The European industry fell into the background again in terms of the number of titles studied but, as before, this was due to innovation from more noticeable markets. Despite this reduction in numbers, the genre variety and impact the titles from this market kept the industry in the forefront of online consumers consciousness with titles such as *No Man's Sky* (135) and *Inside* (95). 2016 cannot be discussed without including the worldwide phenomenon of *Pokémon GO* (157); a title that is credited as the product which pushed the Augmented Reality (AR) genre and the concept of these games into public and online consciousness (Wingfield 2016).

Genre (2017)	Western	Eastern	European	Total
Action-Adventure	0	1	1	2
Action Role Playing	0	1	0	1
Battle Royale	2	0	0	2
Fighting	2	2	0	4
FPS	0	0	2	2
Gacha Game	0	1	0	1
MMO	1	0	0	1
Platformer	2	2	3	7
Racing	0	0	2	2
Role Playing Shooter	1	0	0	1
RPG	1	3	0	4
RTS	0	0	1	1
Shooter	1	0	0	1
Sports	1	0	0	1
Strategy	0	0	1	1
Survival Horror	0	1	0	1
Third Person Shooter	0	1	0	1
Visual Novel	1	2	0	3
TOTAL	12	14	10	36

Genre (2018)	Western	Eastern	European	Total
Action-Adventure	0	1	0	1
Action Role Playing	0	1	0	1
Card Game	1	0	0	1
Fighting	0	2	0	2
TOTAL	1	4	0	5

Table 16: The genres of the video games studied in 2017 and 2018. Only the genres of titles played have been included.

The titles produced in 2017 were a direct result of the changes that had been occurring in the industry alongside the reveal and release of a new Nintendo console, the Nintendo Switch. Notably, the FPS genre did not have much representation due to it being split into differing subgenres, the most influential of these being *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (154) and then *Fortnite: Battle Royale* (77). This Battle Royale genre had been in the background of the industry for a few years with titles that did not leave any impact on the industry. However, with the influence of online live streaming productions such as Twitch and YouTube, this genre quickly reached new levels of popularity. Since then, a video game's genre became an important factor in what consumers would watch online, especially Battle Royale games based on their systems and gameplay dynamics (Ahn 2017).

Due to the study's conclusion in early 2018, not many video games were examined. Titles from the previous year were also being updated and given extra content as well into 2018. Regardless of this, the titles released were an important insight into the future of the industry with the high production values and innovations in roguelike independent game genres being bolstered by the trends set by the previous year.

5.5.4. Review Scores and Locations

Genre	Score %				
	100-80	79-60	59-40	39-20	n/a
Action-Adventure	19	12	2	1	
Action Role Playing	10	5	2		
Adventure	1	5			
Arcade			1		
Augmented Reality		1			
Battle Royale	1	1			
Beat em' Up		1			
Card Game	3	1			1
Dating Sim		2			
Drawing Game		1			
Endless Runner		1			
Fighting	8	8			
FPS	12	10			
Gacha Game		2			1
Hack 'n' Slash	2	2			
MMO		1			1
MMORPG	2				1
MOBA	2	1			
Platformer	13	12	5		
Puzzle	6	3	1		
Racing	2	2			
Rhythm	1				
Role Playing Shooter	1	2			
RPG	21	10	1		
RTS	1	1			
Shooter	1	1			
Simulation	3	3			
Sports	4				
Strategy	4	1			
Survival Horror	6	8	1		1
Third Person Shooter	4	2			
Visual Novel	4	1			
Total	131	100	13	1	5

Table 17: The average review scores for all the video games explored during this study.

When considering the scores of the video games played for this study, it is understandable that over half of them would be given an average score of 80% or higher as popular titles naturally review well. Other titles which received much lower scores were included due to the impact they had as a result of either being poorly made and therefore receiving a lot of focus and criticism, for example, *Sonic Boom: Rise of Lyric* (182), or controversy which

put them into the forefront of the online consciousness, such as *Mighty No.9* (123). Titles which received an n/a score were not able to be reviewed due to their genre or being in an unfinished state, yet still were in the public eye. *VRChat* (236) is an example of this; being an MMO title which was in the early stages of development but received a large player base due to the attention brought to Virtual Reality, therefore becoming a product to be studied.

Western Genres	Score %				
	100-80	79-60	59-40	39-20	n/a
Action-Adventure	6	4	1	1	
Action Role Playing	1				
Adventure		3			
Augmented Reality		1			
Battle Royale	1	1			
Card Game	1				1
Dating Sim		1			
Fighting	2	2			
FPS	9	5			
Hack 'n' Slash		1			
MMO					1
MMORPG	1				
MOBA	2				
Platformer	3	2	1		
Puzzle	3				
Role Playing Shooter	1	2			
RPG	3	1	1		
Shooter	1				
Simulation	2	1			
Sports	4				
Strategy	2				
Survival Horror	3	6	1		
Third Person Shooter	2	2			
Visual Novel		1			
Total	47	33	4	1	2

Table 18: The average review scores for all the Western video games explored during this study.

The review scores for titles in the Western industry ranged from 32% to 95% creating a median score of 80% for the region. The FPS and Action-Adventure titles were rated highly with the top scoring titles produced in this region being the same genres, *Bioshock Infinite* (16) and *The Last of Us* (214), respectively. Of the five highest rated Western video games, one is an Action-Adventure and three are FPS titles all from AAA

development companies. However, the fourth highest rated Western title is an independently produced RPG, *Undertale* (233). Though this could be an anomaly, the title made a lot of changes to the traditional RPG genre by blending the gameplay with Action game elements and focused on a story which was unique in concept (Seraphine 2018). This led to it becoming an online and offline cult video game and receiving critical acclaim in both Western and Eastern markets (Metacritic 2015b).

The Sports genre also was scored well with all titles being rated 80% or higher though three of them are part of franchises with the remaining video game, *Rocket League* (171), being a new concept to the genre and subsequently being rated on average higher. The Survival Horror genre also saw this effect with the *Five Nights at Freddy's* (69) games making up six of the titles studied out of the seven titles in the series included in the study.

Eastern Genres	Score %				
	100-80	79-60	59-40	39-20	n/a
Action-Adventure	10	4	1		
Action Role Playing	8	3	2		
Arcade			1		
Card Game	2				
Dating Sim		1			
Fighting	6	6			
Gacha Game		2			1
Hack 'n' Slash	1	1			
MMORPG	1				
Platformer	7	5	3		
Puzzle	1	1	1		
Racing	1				
Rhythm	1				
RPG	18	9			
RTS	1				
Shooter		1			
Simulation	1				
Strategy		1			
Survival Horror	1	1			1
Third Person Shooter	2				
Visual Novel	4				
Total	65	35	8	0	2

Table 19: The average review scores for all the Eastern video games explored during this study.

The Eastern industry review scores ranged from 49% and 97%, creating a median score of 81% for the region. The RPG genre has eighteen titles rated over 80% with the Action-

Adventure and Action Role playing genres scoring just as well. Although not having lots of titles within the higher score bracket, the highest rated game was *Super Mario Odyssey* (206), a platformer title tied with *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (216). The top ten scoring titles are made up of these aforementioned genres except for *Bayonetta 2* (14), a Hack ‘n’ Slash title which would be an anomaly. However, it is a part of a series which gained much critical attention due to its development being restricted to the Nintendo WiiU (McWhertor 2012). Sequels also commonly receive similar scores with the exception of titles that try to change an established formula, for example, *Pokémon X and Y* (164) and its sequel product, *Pokémon Sun and Moon* (162), received the same average review score despite being three years apart, yet they both retain the same core systems and mechanics. When compared to *Final Fantasy XV* (67), a main title in the franchise, and *Final Fantasy Explorers* (60), a product which tried a new approach towards traditional “Final Fantasy” gameplay, the alternate method on average scores much lower.

European Genres	Score %				
	100-80	79-60	59-40	39-20	n/a
Action-Adventure	3	4			
Action Role Playing	1	2			
Adventure	1	2			
Beat em' Up		1			
Card Game		1			
Drawing Game		1			
Endless Runner		1			
FPS	3	5			
Hack 'n' Slash	1				
MMO		1			
MMORPG					1
MOBA		1			
Platformer	3	5	1		
Puzzle	2	2			
Racing	1	2			
RTS		1			
Simulation		2			
Strategy	2				
Survival Horror	2	1			
Total	19	32	1	0	1

Table 20: The average review scores for all the European video games explored during this study.

The review scores of the video games in Europe ranged from 54% to 95% producing a median score of 79%, the lowest of all the regions. As expected, the top scoring genres

were an amalgamation of the popular Eastern and Western genres, Platformers, FPS and Action-Adventure, respectively. The highest rated title was *Grand Theft Auto V* (82), a AAA developed Action-Adventure title which is part of a famous ongoing series and one of the highest selling video games of recent years (Murphy 2016). Unlike the other regions, the highest rated titles are from a variety of genres with six different types being present in the top ten.

An obvious difference is the number of titles in the 79-60% range compared to 80-100%; this is the only region in which this is present. Conversely though, European titles only had one title, *Sonic Jump Fever* (188), with a lower score than 60%. This focus on the 79-60% score range is likely due to the perceived experimental nature of video games that are produced from this region, therefore receiving lower scores based on user expectations.

Countries	Total
Australia	2
Austria	1
Bulgaria	1
Canada	16
Denmark	1
Finland	1
France	8
Japan	105
Netherlands	1
Poland	2
Sweden	11
Switzerland	1
United Kingdom	27
United States	72
Vietnam	1

Table 21: A list of all the countries in which the video games in this study were developed.

Video games from fifteen countries were played during the study with the majority being developed in Japan and the United States. Seven of the countries only had one title examined likely due to the parameters of the study. These locations were the initial basis for the geographical designation.



Figure 11: The cultural code words for all the Eastern designated video games examined also presented as a word cloud.

While ‘fun’ is mentioned in the Western code words, it is a more commonly used word with regards to Eastern video games, being used nearly twice as much as any other words for the region. This is followed by more positive terminology such as ‘fresh’, ‘accessible’ and ‘solid’ again. The singular words are, as before, a mixture of positive and negative. Commonly shared words are notably, ‘solid’, ‘addictive’ and ‘beautiful’ in near equal amounts.

Chapter 6. Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter will now critically examine the data that has been gathered through the studies undertaken. This will include utilising previous research in the forms of academically peer reviewed papers, the participants comments and their conclusions as outlined in Chapter 4. Methods and Approach. The discussion of what these results mean for the research goals of the thesis will then lead into general conclusions.

6.1. Supporting Study

The supporting study showcased a difference in perspectives which became a common theme for the rest of the data that followed; there is a divide in how the video gaming industry is viewed by the respondents and this divide is forged by a set of preconceptions. These are grown from not only a personal mentality, but from the video games that they play and interact with. This is demonstrated by Greitemeyer and Mügge (2014) who found that, depending on the content, video game play does affect people's social behaviour, as well as cognitive development and health, which can have short and long-term effects on them. This was also explored by Šisler et.al. (2017); the development of video games and their subsequent consumption have become inseparable parts of global culture and its worldwide flows.

Despite initial reservations, the participants had clear ideas on how to divide the gaming industry. Their conclusions presented an initial cognition that the gaming industry is viewed with pessimism. This effect does not seem to matter whether they are loyal consumers to the market or those who are further involved with video game cultures, such as video game developers or students in the same field; they viewed and evaluated their industry with a negative impression to begin with and one of hesitation when pressed for an alternative. This negativity was primarily directed to the Western industry, the area that the participants considered themselves to be a part of. These perceptions and the participants' conclusions speak to a consensus that, while the Western gaming industry has a notorious presence in video gaming culture, there is a need or a desire to learn from the acknowledged mistakes of relying on stereotypes and being too violent. These problems are something that the participants want to be changed and, by admitting and highlighting the problem, there is a belief that this can be achieved, a feeling explored at its most critical in previous work (James and Fletcher 2015a). While the participants themselves may not all be classified as fans, they still hold an interest in the future of the gaming

industry which places them in the mindset of a fan (James and Fletcher 2015a); the difference being that rather than an obsessive focus on a singular product, the entire industry's practices are the area of attention for the players. The idea of examining external factors with video games, identifying past mistakes and poor concepts from the industry, and subsequently seeking improvement is a known concept in Western thinking (Weick and Putnam 2006) and is demonstrated within the discussions that the participants presented during all the sessions. This prosocial stance within game cultures shows that players are able to experience the games they play with more empathy and consider them in a manner to benefit others in-game and in reality, a concept also explored by Muriel and Crawford (2018).

This mindset is further enforced through the observed and recorded interpretations of the Eastern gaming industry. Initially there is a direct contrast as the views towards this region were much more positive. As with the Western perceptions, the terminology and examples given by the participants was consistent through every focus group. While this consistency can be considered questionable, there is plausible explanation; the shift in emotional tone and lack of comparison in the participants' discussions alludes to a mentality in which the industry that other consumers have and their situations within it, look better than the participants' own, even when this may not actually be the case, as shown by Wilson et al. (2011). Keeping this in mind, the participants' choice of concluding terms for the Eastern industry makes more sense. They chose to leave the more egregious and problematic language behind and instead present a mixture of terminology which can be interpreted in different ways depending on how the individual feels, not just the more obviously negative and self-critical Western conclusions.

With a comprehension of both industries being consistent with the participants, along with a confidence in answering and concluding their thoughts, the hesitance when discussing new and upcoming areas of the gaming industry was noticeable. Despite this, the groups included the European perspective or view each time. This can be explained as a bias, since the participants themselves are classified as being European. This bias is difficult to alleviate (Montibeller and Von Winterfeldt 2015) but even if it was present and we assume that it was included in all results, the conclusions that the participants came to, even if flawed or factually incorrect, still fall within the goal of the study. The participants not only identified existing constructions of a divide, but they could also formulate the concept of new and upcoming areas in the gaming industry, as well as suggesting what these could

be. Regardless of whether they were wrong or misled, the choice and awareness to do this shows that these fields exist and are known to the participants. If the study could be repeated, gathering additional information on the participants with regards to their gaming background would also help to reduce, or at least make it easier to identify, any bias. This would allow for further understanding of choices and conclusions made about the other regions, as learning about the video games the participants enjoyed would give a clearer insight into why they perceive the industries as they do, something showcased in previous work in this area (James and Fletcher 2016).

Looking to the concluding words produced by the focus groups also reinforces the idea of the divides being based in the video games consumers' play; the FPS genre is a representative of the perceived Americanism of the Western gaming industry just as much as the RPG is of Japan, the representative of the Eastern industry. Examining the data sets implies that the alternative industry should be referred to as "European" as this was the terminology used regarding this area. Though the lack of a distinct genre does disrupt the pattern, the replacement, being a compilation of the other upcoming fields such as esports and specific descriptions, makes the difference as they allude to an idea of an area outside the established dichotomy as discussed by James and Fletcher (2015b).

To improve the results and further refine the conclusions obtained, the study could also be repeated within the regions that have been defined by the participants, the United States and Japan, to further compare the data and examine if these perceptions are consistent worldwide. However, this could not have been done as a part of this thesis as these locations were not readily accessible. Although hypothesised as being the areas that the participants would detail based on previous works and literature review, these were not confirmed until the concluding stages of the project. The participants themselves would also have to match the parameters of the ones included in this study, although in more standardised amounts to allow for clearer level of understanding. A maximum of 30 participants per focus group would be a suitable number for this purpose as this is a better number of participants to manage and could generate more consistent results (Carey and Asbury 2016).

The work completed achieved its goal as a process of being the initial groundwork for answering the thesis' research questions in that the perceived view of an East/West divide not only exists but is understood by the consumers who engage with it. Unexpectedly, they

understand this through the products, in this case video games, that they have played or interacted with online more so than the societal values that they may hold, making the products that are produced more important than ever before. The field of video games within culture is ever expanding and clarification of what consumers want, and their comprehension of the worldwide market, is important with titles increasingly transcending cultural boundaries (Markovits and Green 2017) and norms (Griffiths 2018).

Returning to the goal of the supporting study, not only has the alternate perspective of the gaming industry been considered by this sample of participants, but they also provided a set of basic parameters to define these regions. As mentioned before, some of the definitions are critical in understanding how a region is viewed, such as the FPS genre for the West and RPG genre for East. However, by looking at the participants' conclusions there are still common traits that were not provided by their individual groups answers but when combined, emerged as patterns.

The Western market, despite being assumed to have a lack of quality, is seen to be considered to create strong products with a level of excellence to whichever genre is prevalent. During the period of this study for example, there were titles that the participants referred to and criticised but still received good reviews and were enjoyed by the general gaming populace. For example, *Watch Dogs* (Ubisoft Montreal 2014) was an open world Action-Adventure title with a focus on realism, and included day one DLC and corporate-based design aspects. However, even with all these supposed negative areas, the title was still enjoyed and sold well enough to receive a sequel title, *Watch Dogs 2* (Ubisoft Montreal 2016), a few years later.

PC gaming and the attitudes that come along with this gamer type were also exclusive to the Western discussions. The participants rarely made this exact distinction outside of mentions of the common online trope of PC players being the 'PC Gaming Master Race'. However, the other conclusions were made with consideration of the titles being played on all platforms including the PC and critical terms, such as 'elitism' and 'lack of quality', came with reasonings of releases on the PC platform. This pattern was confirmed by the absence of all PC discussion when concluding the Eastern discussions. This was replaced by a focus on consoles and handheld gaming, with Nintendo and Sony products as well as arcades mentioned often in combination with the video games referenced being exclusive to these platforms.

As mentioned previously, the Eastern market also had a negative undercurrent despite most of the discussion being positive in nature. Initial conclusions of the data seem to still be correct in this regard; however, these undertones are acknowledged as being a part of Eastern culture, therefore making them acceptable due to the participants' perceptions of Eastern video games being better. This misunderstanding of culture can also be seen in how the participants downplayed the idea of the mobile gaming market in Eastern countries. Considering the relevance of mobile gaming in Asian countries even during the years of the study (Jin 2017), this is a noticeable omission. This is likely due to the lack of mobile gaming titles, and by extension handheld, being viewed as important at this time in the Western industry; most of the innovation or attention had come from Eastern made products, such as *Flappy Bird* (dotGEARS 2013), or was seen to be exhausted by audiences through franchises such as the Angry Birds series of mobile titles.

Continuing this line of thought, the alternate area being defined as European makes sense as an assumption that the participants would make. After clarifying the Eastern and Western industries the remaining facets within the industry must be addressed here and, as seen with the number of fields included, the conclusions are varied. Obviously, the gaming industry at the time of the study was not keeping the independent market, esports, modding and academic circles out of gaming culture or consciousness and the European title does not imply that these areas were exclusive to this alternate region. However, the participants used this part of the study to voice aspects that they had an interest in and with terminology such as 'not USA', 'more use of culture' and 'more original' being used along with descriptive words like 'comedic', 'silly' and 'balanced', it would be difficult to not conclude that the participants believed in the concept of a European side to the gaming industry; whether this thought was a conscious one or not. The descriptive terminology again is key in confirming this; regarding the alternative areas, a prominence of humour along with video games bringing in elements from their culture are not only a direct difference to the other regions discussed, but also are unique to this area.

Finally, the participants' conclusions also indicate that the currently defined European area is expanding. The words used, such as 'isolated', 'experimental' and 'more depth', imply a sense of the field wanting to achieve more and escape from a sense of isolation. This is understandable as, at the time of study, the discussed fields were on the verge of reaching new heights within the gaming industry. The eventual creation of accessible yet professional esports organisations, video games made as part of a modding community and

the attention given to independent titles, such as the Overwatch league, *Sonic Mania* (PagodaWest Games 2017) and *Cuphead* (StudioMDHR 2017) respectively, all released soon after this study's completion, confirm this. The rise of streaming platforms like Twitch and YouTube Gaming have allowed these fields to emerge into the online gaming culture at a fast rate (Gandolfi 2016). As a result, the ability for consumers to sample products while also allowing for an observable transparent development process on potentially any title became popular. These shifted expectations of traditional gameplay while also allowing more unique game design theories and structures from alternate sources to be at the forefront of online gaming culture (Johnson and Woodcock 2018).

6.2. Main Study

Based on the data gathered, each year of the study was allocated a triangle model (James and Fletcher 2013) showcasing the average themes and design of all the video games in that year. As explored previously (section 4.2.2.), this triangle diagram allows for the titles studied to be easily identified through the systems present within them and showcases them in a format that is quick and simple to understand.

This process was repeated for every regional designation of Western, Eastern and, founded on the findings of the research, European. The supporting study had shown that this region was prominent enough in the consciousness of the loyal consumer, as detailed by the supporting study's focus groups and the conclusions they drew, that it should receive its own designation during the compilation of this data. In this instance, as a preliminary measure the European designation would be given to titles with developers based within the continent of Europe (not restricted to the European Union) and which show the characteristics defined by previous work in this area at time of study (as explored in section 2.2.3, concluded in section 2.3. and studied in Chapter 5.). This designation would be revisited and defined as a result of the studies and conclusions drawn from them, detailed later in the thesis.

Each section of the triangle model is classified into three main areas: Personal, Material and Competitive reward, abbreviated as P, M and C respectively, and combinations abbreviated to a combination of the two, i.e. PM for the Personal-Material reward section. The colour of the section indicates the strength of this regarding the title or titles it represents; green being fully relevant, yellow being partially relevant and grey being little to no relevance. The models will be given additional context through a concise summary of the dominant trends and themes ascertained from the initial results in combination with the netnographic reviews created from every video game studied as part of this thesis.

6.2.1. Western Industry

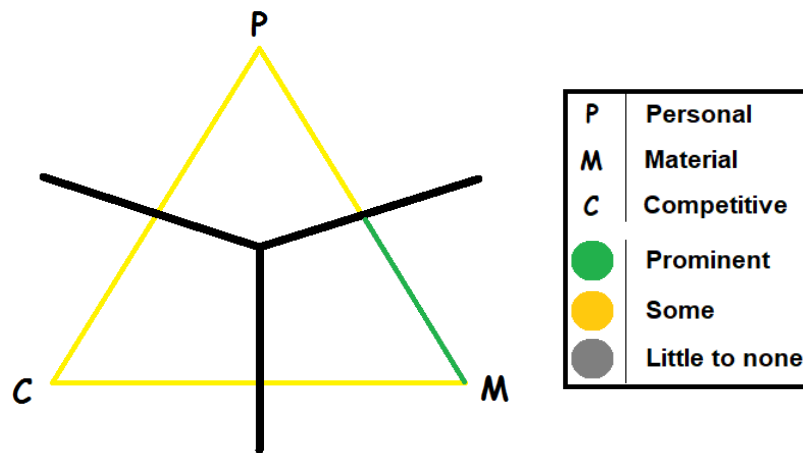


Figure 13: The 2013 Western gaming industry average.

During 2013, titles such as *Bioshock Infinite* (Irrational Games 2013) and *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013) created a standard of single player games which defined the year. Because of the success of titles like these, there was a distinct lack of multiplayer focus and more into the production quality of video games. This led to titles being more serious in nature as AAA development focused on making products with high levels of realism. Independent titles followed a similar but simpler direction with the titles released being shorter and more concise than the main market but still raising the standard of the experiences that indie games could create, as seen with *The Stanley Parable* (Galactic Café 2013) and *Papers, Please* (3909 LLC 2013). These focuses were also relevant to the new generation of consoles released late into the year; these strong titles were acting as the swansong for the current generation. As such, the focus on achievements within the parameters of the video games was going to be the most frequent as seen with the Material-Personal side of the model with all other areas being at least partially relevant (Figure 13).

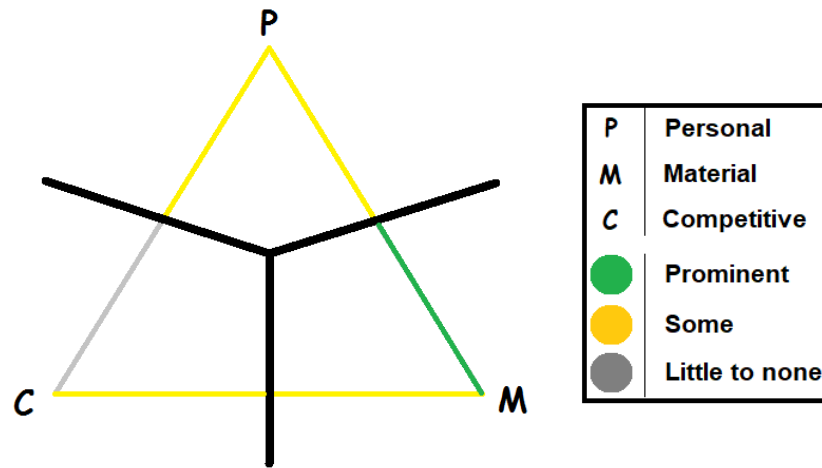


Figure 14: The 2014 Western gaming industry average.

Video games in 2014's AAA industry began to take a different approach than before; there became a focus on improving on the concepts of older titles rather than advancing new ideas. This is likely due to the new generation of consoles and the titles that are released with them taking less risks as to not spoil a new release. For example, *Infamous Second Son* (Sucker Punch Productions 2014), an early title for the PlayStation 4, was the third title in the *Infamous* series and focused on showing off the hardware advancements of the console rather than advancing the open world/sandbox video game theme, and this was reflected in its reception (Metacritic 2014). Because of this change, alternate and/or independent video games began to gain more attention, such as *Hearthstone* (Blizzard 2014) and *Shovel Knight*, (Yacht Club Games 2014) for their advancement of the strategies which come with producing an online card game and retro modern platformer respectively. *South Park: The Stick of Truth* (Obsidian Entertainment 2014), a rare turn-based RPG from a Western company, also did this by subverting many expectations as the subject matter being based on shock humour led many to believe the title would not do well. These video games were also assisted by the rise of the online influencers on social platforms, like YouTube and streaming services, being employed and sponsored to not only promote the products but work with the developers to bring in audiences which the titles would not normally appeal to. The success of this formula created a new set of standards that future titles would need to follow to make sure that they would find a place in the online market. Therefore, the model has remained the same from 2013 except for the lack of enough Competitive-Personal elements in the titles.

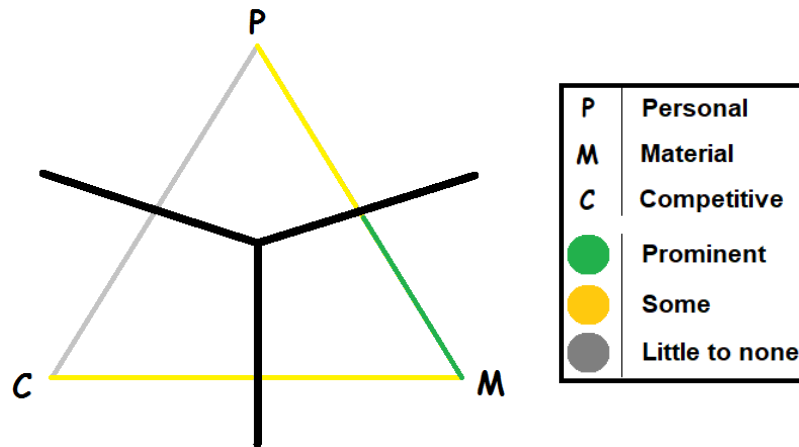


Figure 15: The 2015 Western gaming industry average.

With the continued rise of influencers and their importance for the strength of a video game's lifetime, simple yet accessible titles stood at the forefront of the Western industry in 2015. This was reinforced by a general fatigue towards more AAA titles and their perceived lack of innovation, thanks in part to new titles like *Evolve* (Turtle Rock Studios 2015) and *The Order: 1886* (Ready at Dawn 2015) which, while being technically impressive, did not impress consumers due to critical flaws in either their production or approach to extra content. Continuing franchises also saw this criticism, with titles such as *Call of Duty: Black Ops 3* (Treyarch 2015) and *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* (Ubisoft Quebec 2015), and the fans of these products noting their exhaustion with them. These factors allowed titles which would normally not gain too much attention to thrive through these consumers' desires to experience new content. Games such as *Rocket League* (Psyonix 2015) and *Heroes of the Storm* (Blizzard 2015), which had not only well received gameplay but were also watchable via influencers or other social platforms, became extremely popular. This phenomenon is perhaps best exemplified by the reception to *Undertale* (Toby Fox 2015), an independent RPG which had an emphasis on morality within video games, memorable characters and a unique version of traditional RPG combat. *Undertale* captured the online gaming community's consciousness gaining a cult status, excellent reviews, vocal fans and generating internet memes and tropes while also being interesting to watch as a spectator due to the reactions from players engaging with the title. This level of intrinsic value is why the Material-Personal side of the model remains the same as before while extrinsic aspects are reduced (Figure 15).

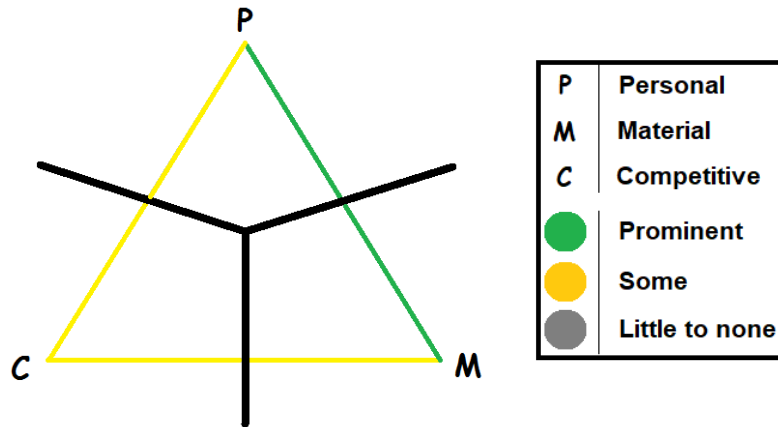


Figure 16: The 2016 Western gaming industry average.

The wave of success from the independent video games and influencer-based marketing finally came into full force for the AAA industry in 2016. Massively influential titles were released which fundamentally changed or deeply influenced areas of the Western gaming industry, all with more of a direct focus on players and their intrinsic wants and desires based on the analysis from previous years. From the release of *Overwatch* (Blizzard 2016) and the Overwatch League, a well-funded accessible esports organisation which offered salaried roles in what has generally been a turbulent field, to the remaster of *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (Infinity Ward 2007) being used to sell and advertise the more recent title in the franchise, the AAA industry was producing content that consumers wanted. The most prestigious of these was the release of *Pokémon GO* (Niantic 2016); this mobile augmented reality title based on gameplay from the Pokémon franchise was responsible for the largest social phenomenon in recent years (Kain 2016). *Pokémon GO* created a new form of interaction and social play factors for consumers which were so strong that various countries around the world brought in legal enforcement related to how and where the game could and should be played (Ono 2016). The title also changed the views towards mobile gaming again as now the average consumer could see the potential strength of the platform through the lasting effects of the video game’s social reach. This year also brought a lot of sequels to previously above average titles with improvements that were lauded; *Watch Dogs 2* (Ubisoft Montreal 2016), *Civilization VI* (Firaxis Games 2016), *Titanfall 2* (Respawn Entertainment 2016) and *FIFA 17* (EA 2016) being the most significant examples. All the new content from the mainstream gaming industry in combination with the attention garnered by *Pokémon GO* meant that the independent gaming scene was noticed much less than before. However, strong titles which continued to experiment with traditional forms of gameplay, such as *Stardew Valley* (ConcernedApe

2016) and *Firewatch* (Campo Santo 2016), kept online and offline consumers engaged with the market. These industry improvements with a strong focus on the players in all areas are why all sides of the model are completed, though the intrinsic right side of the model is fully filled as these values were so much more relevant than before.

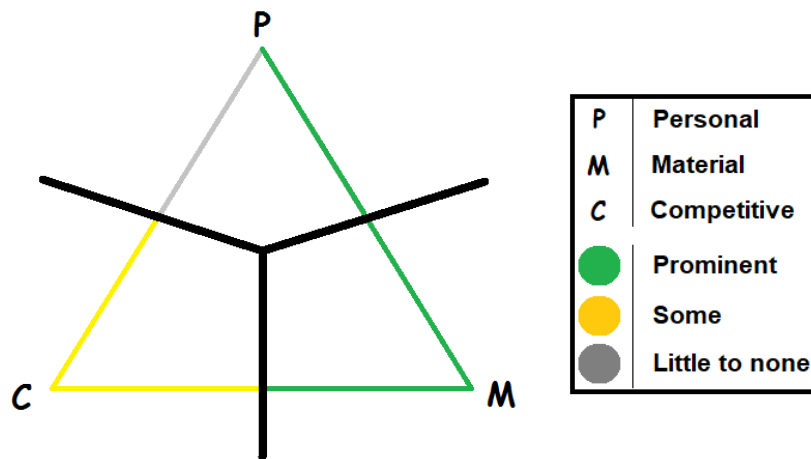


Figure 17: The 2017 and 2018 Western gaming industry average.

The final years of the study of the Western market saw the culmination of the trends and themes that had been building up over the previous years. Smaller development teams, emboldened by influencers and consumers alike, were creating video games which were well received by the general gaming market; for example, *Cuphead* (StudioMDHR 2017), *Slay the Spire* (MegaCrit LLC 2018) and *Sonic Mania* (PagodaWest Games 2017). This title was developed almost exclusively by those who had modded or created their own Sonic the Hedgehog content previously and due to this were able to release one of the highest rated Sonic titles of all time, even compared to previous AAA developed products. These effects allowed for more niche products to emerge into wider gaming culture, such as the visual novel *Doki Doki Literature Club!* (Team Salvato 2017), a genre and game type which does not often see much respect in Western markets, and *VRChat* (VRChat Inc. 2017), a virtual reality experience which, according to players, brought the VR experience to a level at which the average user can engage with and understand it. The largest change to the AAA gaming market, however, came in the form of the Battle Royale genre; a game type which was able to fully take advantage of all the factors of the previous year's innovations. The first to do this was *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (PUBG) (PUBG Corporation 2017); this title became the most popular video game to be streamed and viewed online and propelled the game, while not even being fully released, into the public consciousness (Hicks 2017). In doing so, it brought the streamers and content creators into

this spotlight and solidified the influencers effects in developing video games; to make a good product, it must be as watchable as it is playable. Throughout 2017, no other product came close to matching the dominance of PUBG until another Battle Royale game came into the spotlight, *Fortnite: Battle Royale* (Epic Games 2017). This game was able to reach audiences that PUBG could not due to its light-hearted attitude and cartoon aesthetic and quickly took over the Battle Royale audience while increasing consumer numbers even more. With the rise of *Fortnite*, the acceptance of microtransactions also reached its peak, with users able to justify the additional purchases due to the game itself being free and a desire to support content creators as well as the developers. By the end of the study, *Fortnite* had become the new face of the video gaming industry in the West. These new levels of acceptance and themes increased the prevalence of the Material-Competitive fields in video games which is reflected in the model (Figure 17).

6.2.2. Eastern Industry

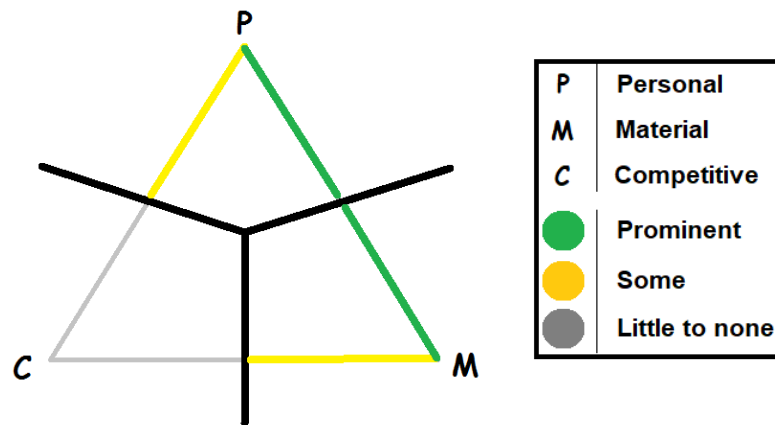


Figure 18: The 2013 Eastern gaming industry average.

In contrast to other regions of the gaming industry, during 2013 the Eastern industry focused on further releasing products which were a part of existing franchises; multiple Super Mario, Legend of Zelda and Pokémon titles took up much of the market. However, the titles were still generally well received despite their simpler nature. This is partly due to the new consoles from Nintendo, the WiiU and the newer version of the 3DS, finding a footing in the market after a difficult launch in 2012 and developers releasing software that would comfortably sell on the platforms because of their safe and formulaic design. This enjoyment of simplicity would be fully showcased in the release of *Flappy Bird* (dotGEARS 2013). Although the title received bad reviews, was criticised for reusing assets from other video games and was extremely simple in design, it became a massive hit with players. This can be traced back to online influencers who played the mobile game to ridicule it, but inadvertently turned the product into an online joke and subsequent meme therefore leading to many more consumers downloading the game. So much attention was drawn to it that the developer of the game removed the title from the market, but the demand for the game remained with some consumers even buying mobile devices with the title still installed at largely inflated prices. This focus on accessibility and simplicity leads to the intrinsic side of the model being the most prevalent; this however, leaves the Competitive side of the model behind with few titles including these aspects (Figure 18).

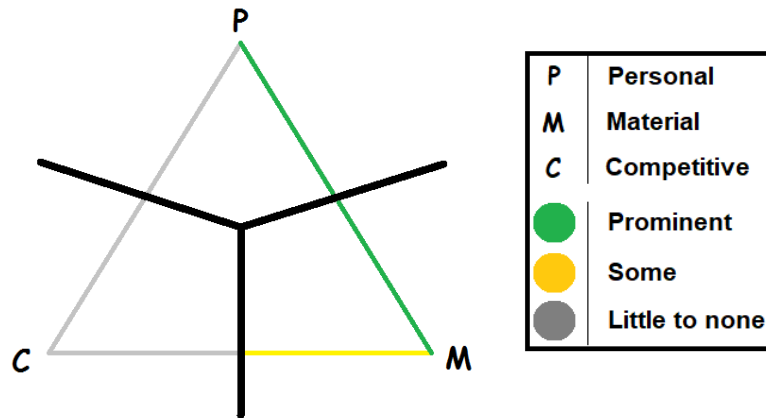


Figure 19: The 2014 Eastern gaming industry average.

After a push for simplicity in the previous year, during 2014 emphasis was placed on releasing video games with as wide an appeal as possible. This led to a lot of existing video game franchises seeing releases which were made with more Western influences, as seen with titles such as *Dark Souls 2* (FromSoftware 2014), *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes* (Kojima Productions 2014) and *Murdered: Soul Suspect* (Airtight Games 2014). The focus resulted in more variety than the norm coming from the Eastern industry; this did not just apply to genre or game type but traditional titles from the region were improved or had aspects of their design changed to be viewed as a title that should be owned by a knowledgeable gaming industry consumer. This is particularly evident with regards to difficulty in video games, showcased by *Dark Souls 2*'s gameplay; game demo quality, through the reception towards *P.T.* (7780s Studio 2014); better characterisation in genres, as seen with *Bayonetta 2* (PlatinumGames 2014); and how to give genres a worldwide appeal, through the design of *Super Smash Bros. for 3DS and WiiU* (Bandai Namco Studios 2014). These advancements set a new standard for all future releases in these genres but the most interesting of these was *P.T.*, a demo for a now cancelled video game. This experience was viewed as one of the top titles of the year, despite not being a complete game, and players hailed it as a massive improvement on the survival horror genre. Part of this was due to the association with the *Silent Hill* franchise, but the overall quality of the product still was the focal point, proven by the response from consumers when it was removed from the market, just as *Flappy Bird* (dotGEARS 2013) was the previous year. These improvements and changes meant that the industry fell back onto more familiar game types and single player experiences which caused the further reduction of the extrinsic side of the model (Figure 19).

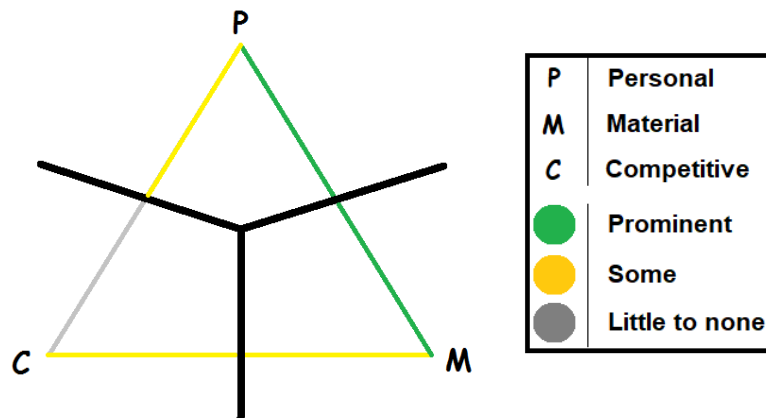


Figure 20: The 2015 Eastern gaming industry average.

After a particularly safe year, 2015 saw the Eastern industry take massive risks with the titles released. The video games maintained the quality and standards set from previous years but introduced new elements that had not been as popular before, the best example of these coming from Nintendo. *Splatoon* (Nintendo 2015) became the company's first competitive shooter, a genre and competitive subset which they had not attempted previously. This was followed by *Super Mario Maker* (Nintendo 2015), a video game which let users construct their own Super Mario stages based on assets from the series, a surprise considering Nintendo's famous lack of transparency regarding the development and design of such titles. Finally, *Pokkén Tournament* (Bandai Namco Studios 2015) subverted expectations as a fighting game rather than a traditional Pokémon RPG title. These gambles did not stop with new releases; older video games with niche followings and dedicated fans saw re-releases or remasters, for example *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask 3D* (Nintendo 2015) and *Xenoblade Chronicles 3D* (Monolith Soft 2015), which were as surprising as they were welcomed by the gaming community. These products stood out in the gaming industry because of these changes but two titles impacted the Western market more than the others; *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* (Kojima Productions 2015) and *Bloodborne* (FromSoftware 2015). Both titles received universal praise for the advancement to their genres as well as their production quality, placing them at the top of their franchises and left players citing these as some of the greatest video games ever made at the time. The advancement of quality can be explained by the developers becoming comfortable working with the current console generation therefore

allowing for these risks. This also explains the Competitive side of the triangle starting to become relevant again (Figure 20) when compared to the previous year.

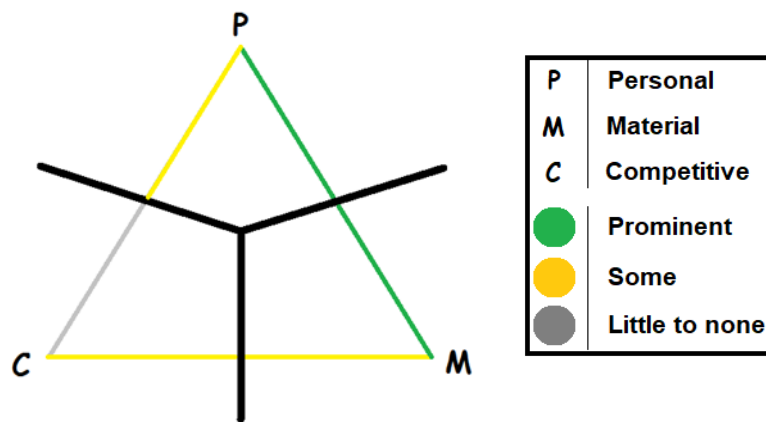


Figure 21: The 2016 Eastern gaming industry average.

The model for the Eastern gaming industry in 2016 (Figure 21) is the same as it was in the previous year which is unsurprising considering the video games released. Risky approaches kept being applied to titles with varying levels of success, but most were directed towards the RPG genre. Many variations of the genre were released but with new unique selling points such as *Final Fantasy Explorers* (Square Enix 2016), with its Action-Adventure gameplay in the style of Capcom's *Monster Hunter* series, and *Monster Hunter Stories* (Marvelous 2016), which was a traditional RPG instead of the normal Action-Adventure genre. As a by-product of these changes, the development of video games became a little more open with consumers as not only a way to reassure the online audience, but also to drive more excitement for specific areas of their titles as seen with games like *Xenoblade Chronicles X* (Monolith Soft 2016) and *Street Fighter V* (Capcom 2016). This was most prominent for *Final Fantasy XV* (Square Enix 2016), the latest instalment of the *Final Fantasy* game series, with the developers holding livestreams and development updates which showcased new elements and gameplay that would be a part of the video game, but were not previously a part of the traditional *Final Fantasy* style. These became so common that the development team were able to make changes to the final release of the product based on the reaction to and reception of the demo version of the title; this was not a common occurrence for this genre but was applauded by players. Overall, the innovations turned out to be less impactful than initially perceived and the year was viewed as a safer year with too much ambition with specific titles and common genres for the Eastern market.

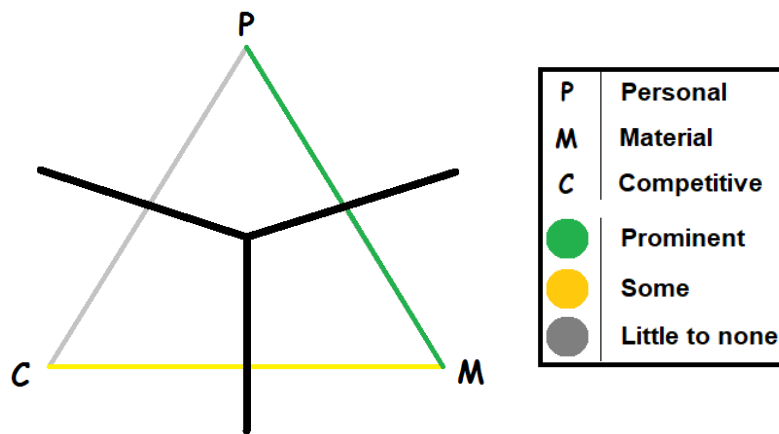


Figure 22: The 2017 and 2018 Eastern gaming industry average.

The Eastern gaming industry set a lot of new standards for video games in 2017 and early 2018. Following on from the impact of *Final Fantasy XV* and Square-Enix’s belief that if the game were not to do well it would be the beginning of the end for the single player console gaming market (Henry 2014), the quality of the single player experiences during the year were hard to ignore. *Persona 5* (P-Studio 2017) and *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (Capcom 2017) brought new life into their genres and franchises, quickly becoming the new template to draw future content from, and while along with the release of a new console, the Nintendo Switch, *Super Mario Odyssey* (Nintendo 2017) and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (BoTW) (Nintendo 2017) not only became the highest scored titles throughout the study, but also made advancements in their franchise and gameplay which caused a re-examination of how to make videos games with the same gameplay style. BoTW is particularly important as it was the launch title for the Nintendo Switch and broke all previous Nintendo launch title sales records with a 90% attach rate to the console. This led to it becoming the highest selling video game in the Legend of Zelda franchise. The high level of quality and critical acclaim from the worldwide market held up the single player market and gave the Eastern market an area to focus on due to this success. This quality was not just limited to single player experiences despite it being the focus of the year; video games such as *Splatoon 2* (Nintendo 2015) and *Tekken 7* (Bandai Namco Studios 2017) improved on their previous iterations and were released esports-ready, with online gameplay which was widely praised. The combination of these areas started to rise in the beginning of 2018. Titles such as *Monster Hunter: World* (Capcom 2018) and *Dragonball FighterZ* (Arc System Works 2018) took the transparent development process approach with a focus on creating a faithful yet polished version of a video game within these respective franchises. Although none of these titles dominated the industry on a scale

comparable to *Fortnite* (Epic Games 2017), the Eastern industry had showcased that the single player audience was still present and in demand, a point that was demonstrated later in 2018 with titles like *Marvel's Spider-Man* (Insomniac Games 2018) and *God of War* (Santa Monica Studio 2018). This is reflected again in the model for these years (Figure 22); despite the number of online titles, the intrinsic values remained fully relevant for both Personal and Material areas, the common theme for this industry.

6.2.3. European Industry

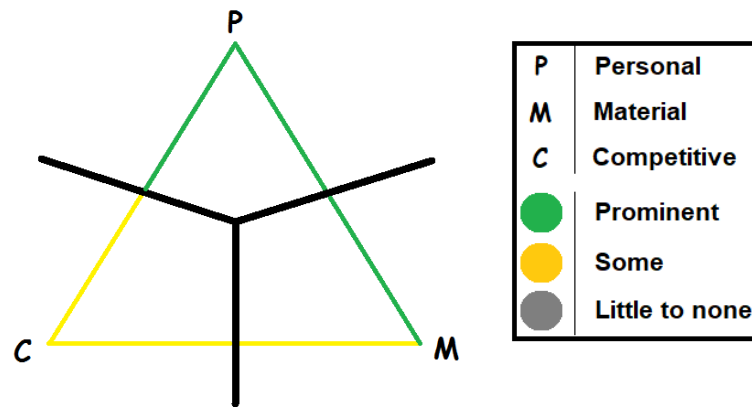


Figure 23: The 2013 European gaming industry average.

Grand Theft Auto V (GTAV) (Rockstar North 2013) had a profound effect in the video gaming industry in 2013, with the dominance of the title's popularity and standing within gaming culture meaning that other video game releases were negatively affected by it around this time. This situation was not helped with the release of a new generation of consoles, but this impact caused more independent titles from the European industry to thrive as they could publish video games without being restricted to the new platforms while also potentially creating a version for the new systems. Those independent titles took on many genres and platforms but the most influential of these were *Candy Crush Saga* (King 2012) and *Thomas Was Alone* (Mike Bithell 2012) as they exhibited qualities that other developers would soon attempt to reproduce; the dominance of a simple and funny time-gated puzzle title, and a simple platformer with serious undertones as part of the narrative that is also amusing to engage with. The variation of independent and AAA video games without a secure platform also caused considerable variation in design within the industry which manifested with a focus on the cooperative experience. Titles such as *Payday 2* (Overkill Software 2013), *Lego Marvel Super Heroes* (Traveller's Tales 2013) and *Dead Island: Riptide* (Techland 2013) were all released with attention given to placing players together into small groups or to play cooperatively allowing for a better gaming experience. An example of this is *Battlefield 4* (EA DICE 2013), an FPS which has always used small teamplay but previously only as a matchmaking and spawning mechanic. With the newest title in the series, this area became much more important as cooperation with a squad became key to gameplay and even offered a commander mode so that players could share and create tactics for their squad. These elements across the year created a model

variation not seen before, with the Personal-Competitive area being fully relevant due to a focus on the extrinsic values which come with gameplay (Figure 23).

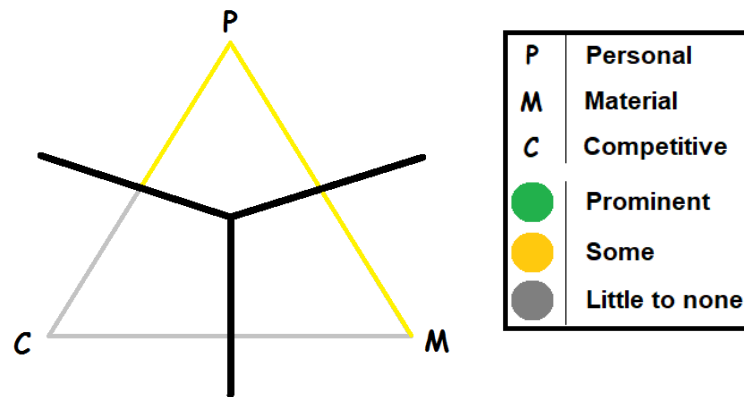


Figure 24: The 2014 European gaming industry average.

Due to the established industries creating sizeable quantities of content for the new console generation, during 2014 the European industry fell back into releasing titles in the shadows. This also meant that the video games themselves were an amalgamation of the two other regions with even the themes from those industries becoming a part of the titles. For example, much like *Flappy Bird* (dotGEARS 2013) before it, *Goat Simulator* (Coffee Stain Studios 2014) became popular in online gaming culture due to the influencers playing and mocking the title's absurdity, while *Alien Isolation* (Creative Assembly 2014) was released as a high-quality single player survival horror title with a hope to reach audiences through the adaptation of a well-known movie franchise and reviews and accounts from players online. Though there were a lack of significant video games this year, each of the titles released follow a pattern of attempting to stand out in wider online and offline gaming culture through experimentation; such as *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* (Ubisoft Montpellier 2014) focusing on the real effects of the First World War, *Pokémon Art Academy* (Headstrong Games 2014) creating a drawing game experience within the Pokémon franchise and *Assassin's Creed Rogue* (Ubisoft Sofia 2014) being a video game made for players who did not own the new generation of gaming consoles. Even the lowest scoring and least enjoyed title of this year, *Sonic Jump Fever* (SEGA Hardlight 2014), had its moment in the spotlight due to the comical nature and premise of the video game contrasting with the traditional Sonic product and gameplay. As with other regions, this approach also weakened the relevance of all the areas of the model (Figure

24). However, the Personal-Competitive area of the model remained due to the few extrinsic values that the products contain.

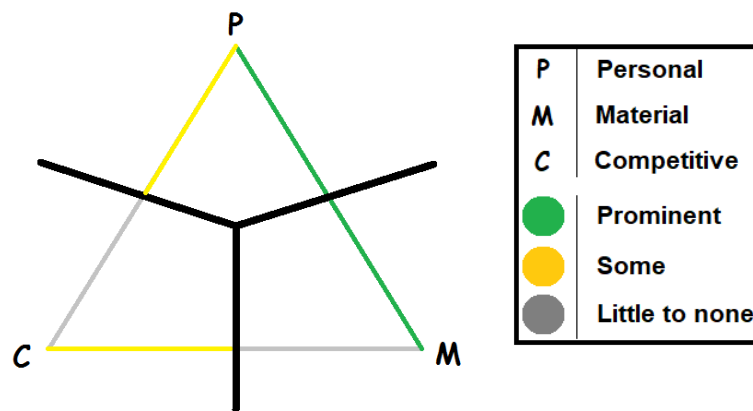


Figure 25: The 2015 European gaming industry average.

Having found a footing due to an adjustment to the current gaming climate, during 2015 the European industry produced AAA products to the high-quality standard that had been established by the Eastern and Western industries. However, the titles retained the experimental feel from previous years, with video games like *SOMA* (Frictional Games 2015), *Ori and the Blind Forest* (Moon Studios 2015) and *Life is Strange* (Dontnod Entertainment 2015) all being made to extremely high standards but taking new approaches towards their genres and subsequent gameplay. One of the most impactful of these was *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red 2015), the latest in a highly anticipated Action Role Playing series with emphasis on deep and rich storylines within a large world. *The Witcher 3*'s ambitious approach to world design, keeping players engaged through dialogue choices and worldbuilding activities (including mini games, one of which was so in depth that it became a standalone title in *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game* (CD Projekt Red 2018)) placed it in a position within the gaming community as yet another video game to be cited as one of the best games of all time. These considerations also came with a slight focus into the online side of video games, as seen with *Star Wars Battlefront* (EA DICE 2015), while still including more cooperative aspects, such as *I am Bread* (Bossa Studios 2015) and *Batman: Arkham Knight* (Rocksteady Studios 2015). These choices were all backed and affirmed by the rising number of influencers which were involved at various stages of these video games' development. Though overshadowed by other areas of the market, the European industry still was able to produce content which was relevant as well as innovative, reflected in the model with a higher focus on the core

intrinsic values (Figure 25). However, the Material-Competitive area was largely absent since many of the titles this year did not leave consumers with anything too relevant and lasting within the video games.

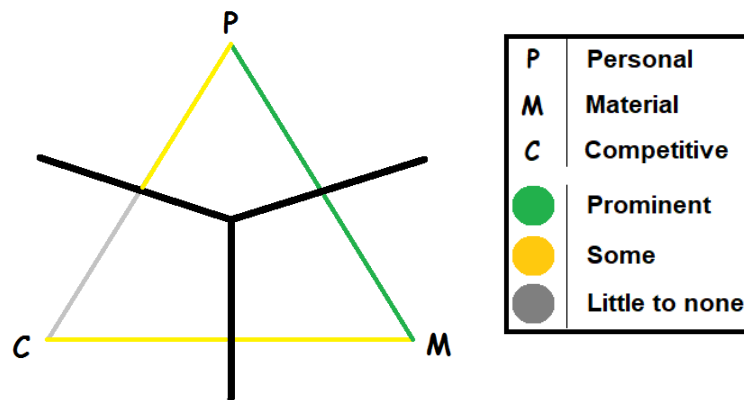


Figure 26: The 2016 European gaming industry average.

The European industry had found a niche and stayed with it during 2016. However, with this assurance of quality mixed with experimentation, a lot of titles did not perform as well as anticipated. The best example of this can be seen with *No Man's Sky* (Hello Games 2016), an open world Adventure game with a truly massive scope. The developers built the product as a video game that would redefine the space exploration and world building concepts and would challenge the complacent AAA development design process.

However, when the title was released it was underwhelming and did not contain a lot of the features that were advertised. Other titles such as *The Trail: Frontier Challenge* (22Cans 2016), *Chronicle: Runescape Legends* (Jagex 2016) and *Batman: Arkham VR* (Rocksteady Studios 2016) followed a similar pattern and were also met with disappointment. The after-effects of these titles caused the gaming industry to re-evaluate the ways in which they promote and advertise video games, using *No Man's Sky* primarily as a guide on what not to do in the future. Not all risks were unsuccessful, for example the newest Battlefield title, *Battlefield 1* (EA DICE 2016), took the FPS series back to the First World War, and despite some initial pushback from dedicated players, reviewed well and addressed gameplay issues from previous titles. *Inside* (Playdead 2016), a dark puzzle title, also created an experience for players which, while short in play duration, left many consumers referring to the video game as a work of art due to its themes and meta narrative. Finally,

Clash Royale (Supercell 2016), a mobile strategy title, became massively popular due in part to its rewarding gameplay but also due to the esports league the title released with, a rare addition for mobile-based titles. This mixture of gameplay, while varied in reception, allowed for the Material-Competitive area of the model to become partially relevant again (Figure 26) compared to the previous year (Figure 25). This is understandable as even though some of the experimental titles' risks may not have been received well in the wider gaming community, the video games still reviewed well enough to be a part of the community during this year.

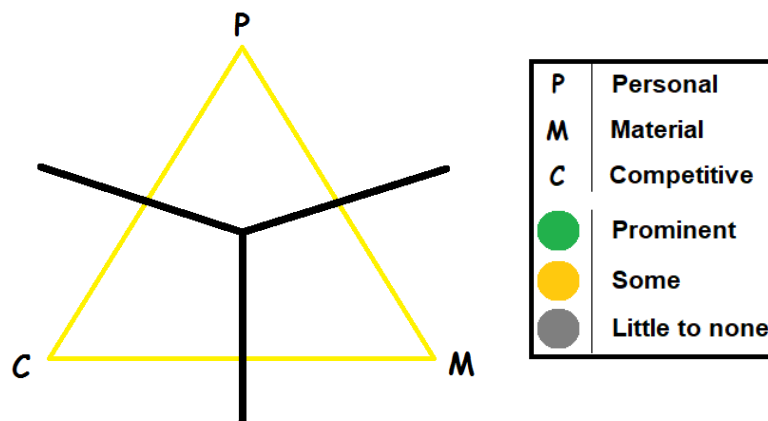


Figure 27: The 2017 and 2018 European gaming industry average.

By 2017, the formula for developing a European video game had been found and the industry utilised this. This was helped by the release of the Nintendo Switch and Nintendo's newfound willingness to work with third party developers on a worldwide basis allowing niche titles to be published on the platform due to their variances from traditional games; for example, *Wonder Boy: The Dragons Trap* (Lizardcube 2017), *Yooka-Laylee* (Playtonic Games 2017) and *Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle* (Ubisoft Paris 2017). The Mario title was the most surprising title as not only was it a European development team working with the Mario franchise, but that they produced a Strategy video game, a genre which was so far from what players were used to with Mario that it shocked the gaming community when announced. However, after this title's release, it became a beacon for the potential of gameplay and genre experimentation due to the positive reviews and experience players had with it. Other titles followed this approach with similar success, such as *Halo Wars 2* (Creative Assembly 2017), which started as an FPS series and was adapted to an RTS with card game elements, and *Sonic Forces: Speed Battle* (SEGA Hardlight 2017), a mobile multiplayer endless runner. Though most of the titles during the

year were well received, they were still seen as safe as they were utilising well known franchises or were a sequel to an existing series. This approach is why no side of the model is fully prevalent (Figure 27); the industry spread itself over a variety of titles and did not excel in any one area. Despite this, these successes would shape the following years of video games produced within the European industry as they laid a groundwork to be followed; examples in 2018 being *Rust* (Facepunch Studios 2013), with a new approach to online survival gameplay; *Owlboy* (D-Pad Studio 2016) and *Fe* (Zoink 2018), attempting new variations of the puzzle genre mixed with Action game elements; and *Sea of Thieves* (Rare 2018), with its player interaction and experiences in an online shared game world.

6.2.4. Summary

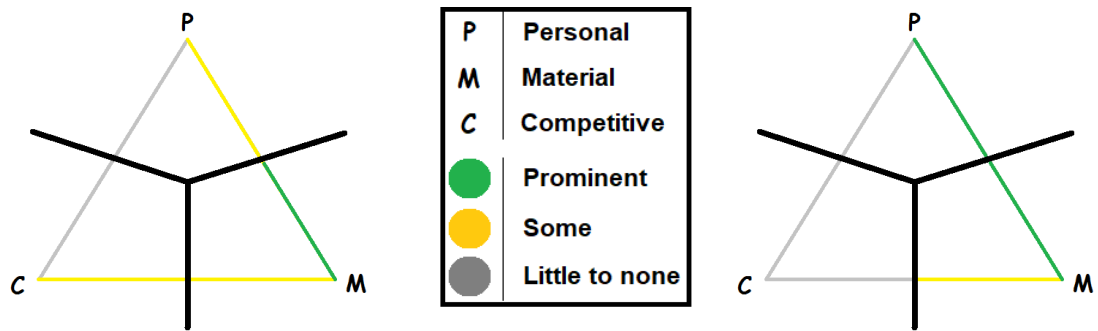


Figure 28: The model representation for the whole Western (left) and Eastern (right) video gaming industry.

Consistently across all the regions, the design approach towards video games has been intrinsically driven with a focus on material-based rewards that give the player a set of achievements to fulfil within the titles themselves. However, each area utilises this aspect in a different way. To begin, the Western industry maintains this Material-Personal focus but extends into more Competitive areas frequently, engaging in social play ideals to create an experience that is also enjoyed through the method of playing with or within a community of other consumers. This has been embodied through the rise of influencers in the Western industry space who have become a part of the production of modern video games. Their role has extended past a simple advertising strategy, with the attention of influencers being key in the lifetime of a piece of digital media. This was achieved by creating a system which moves the average consumers away from traditional consumer culture and into slightly more extrinsic systems, in this case participatory culture, as outlined by Burgess and Green (2018), with regards to fields of media they enjoy.

These roles were born from the rate of advancement within the gaming industry. Products have a low shelf life as titles which do not hold a player's interest for an extended period fall out of the online and offline consciousness quickly. This has been alleviated using fast paced reward systems which give players incentives to play for longer or repeat the experience. However, even these systems cannot keep players engaged for extended periods of time against other newer titles where the competitive or online experience is included. This approach is a simple answer to retain players for much longer as these experiences become dependent on the interactions in the social play area of the title. The concept of in-game items, which are obtained through play or external purchase, was also developed as a part of this ideology and accounts for most of the reasoning for the Material-Competitive prevalence in the Western model. It is a combination of these areas

which has led to the industry dominance of the Battle Royale genre as it achieves all these areas:

- The genre creates large online communities which are supported by influencers who are encouraged to sustain play not only for personal gain, but because they are included in the product by the developers either via production or royalties. This makes consumers who are a part of this audience feel similarly to their preferred influencer(s) about these products.
- They include a system of purchasing products within the video game which are difficult to obtain under normal conditions, therefore creating a concept of value-based rarity within the game's market, despite the products not altering gameplay.
- The fast-paced system of drawing out games for a potential big payoff combined with restarting quickly because of failure which has remained appealing since the early 3D FPS titles.
- Creating an online experience which is open enough that the players can achieve what they need through a social play setting without the need for traditional multiplayer themes but confined to a restricted location so these experiences can be controlled and amended if needed.

The Western industry has been constant in its approaches and its themes have remained extremely close to all perceptions and developments that were discussed and experienced during the studies. This is not entirely to its detriment; these have led to advancements which have fundamentally changed the way the industry has created and developed video games. However, they eventually converge into a singular product or area of the industry and this has been shown to take the field down paths which are not as consumer friendly as they once were; in this case, the fatigue with the FPS genre precipitating the influx of support for the Battle Royale titles.

The Eastern industry shifts the focus from social play and moves further into deeper facets of intrinsic systems within video games. The titles produced in this market began to be designed with the intention of leaving an impression on players as a method of introducing the necessary level of longevity. This ideology suited the existing trend of the Eastern industry excelling at creating meaningful RPGs due to the length of video games made in this genre. However, over the course of the study, this spread to more varied titles. This

quality was initially applied to consistently deemed “safe” franchises that are known and enjoyed for their concepts in specific ways to work out any problems with these new approaches. The information gathered would then be used to work on future titles leading to a point in which products were released at the top of their field, setting records in achievement or impressive design. When this state was achieved, the rest of the market could adopt the seminal strategies or methods into these varied game types leading to an influx of quality titles. During the years of this study, the Eastern markets’ focus on the intrinsic based Personal-Material design is understandable, as it was generally opposed to the other markets and therefore gave this industry an area in which it could be noticed.

While impressive video games with competitive areas or online features were created for the Eastern market, which utilised social play, downloadable content strategies or in-game purchases, these features did not suit the direction the market was heading towards and, as a result of this, were less frequently able to cause any effects within the wider industry. The single player orientated titles, which became important for further reasons outside of simply being well made, aligned with the Eastern industry’s newfound attention to the wider markets, as a narrowed experience with a video game can be easily controlled and allows for general feedback to companies that can be addressed.

The combination of advancing quality and variation of design continued the Eastern industry’s outward view of being a unique market with video games made for a sense of simple fun over other areas. It also culminated with the revitalisation of the single player focused experience being predominant over other features, and though this was still represented in majority with the RPG genre, more titles than in recent years implemented these methods. While the more Personal direction of video game design does come with downsides, the quality of the works stands out which is the most important thing, for the developers just as much as the players.

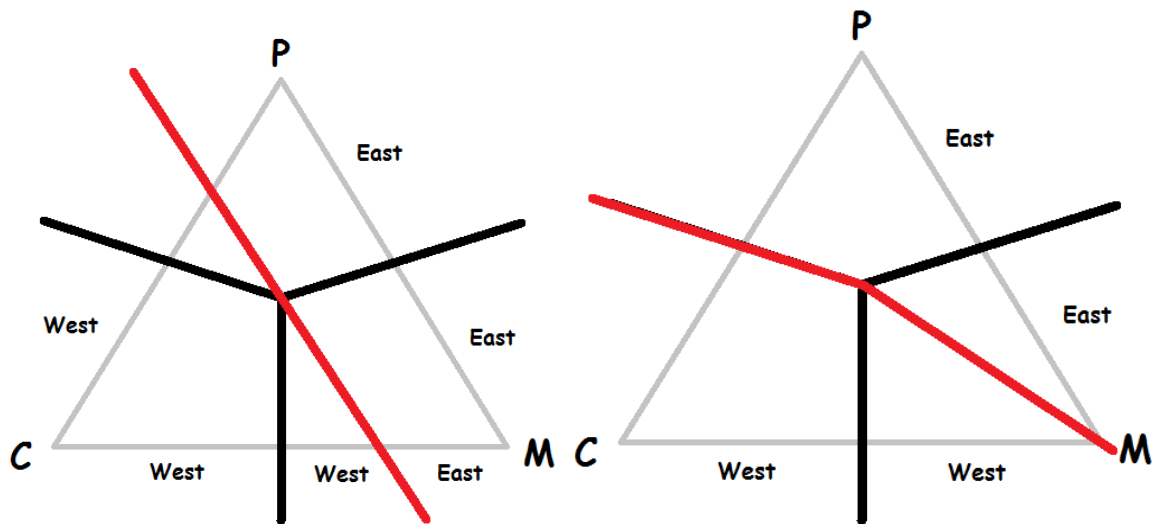


Figure 29: The East-West difference average from 2013 (left) and 2018 (right).

James and Fletcher (2015b) presented a state of the gaming market in terms of design through utilisation of the triangular model and determined that, as of 2013, the gaming industry's design focus was on average split between the Material prevalence (Figure 29 left); the Western industry was focusing on empowering players through fast paced material gain which could be showcased in a multiplayer scenarios, while the Eastern industry was choosing to focus on a player's experience with what they obtained from playing their video games and how they further used them within it. By examining the research so far and recreating this model for the time of the study, a slight change has occurred (Figure 29 right). This change is based in the Western market's advancements rather than a lack in any of the Eastern market's products. Since 2013, the Western market has rapidly moved towards a Material focused game design through the mass adoption and further cultural acceptance of downloadable content and in-game purchases. This change has come at the cost of a reduction in the prevalence of Competitive-Personal extrinsic values. Although this area is growing due to the increase in areas such as esports and public perceptions of online gaming standings, it is still a niche field within the worldwide gaming industry and the generated models and data reflect this. The Eastern industry has remained much the same, although the further emphasis on Personal values within video games and slight amount of rising global attention to the extrinsic ideals that come from the video gaming market have pushed the divide to the state above; with both regions not including enough standing in the fields to be fully prevalent.

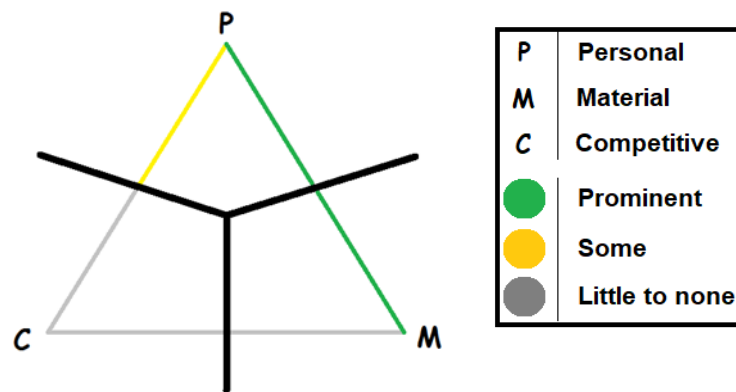


Figure 30: The model representation for the whole European video gaming industry.

The European industry presents a completely different model from the rest of the industry. While there is a similar focus on the intrinsic values to the level that the Eastern industry hold, these are taken in a more Western direction, towards a Personal-Competitive area, specifically, the ideology of engaging with players to enrich a video gaming experience. This has been accomplished through a larger focus of cooperative play, as a worldwide industry standard example, to the inclusion of intended individual achievement obtained through online and offline cross functional team play. This concept of creating meta experiences through play is not a new area in the gaming industry, though attention on the field as a consideration with game design has always been subtle (Boluk and LeMieux 2017). But due to recent gaming cultural considerations, the term has now been associated with social media services, such as the above-mentioned YouTube and Twitch, and other practices within, around, outside and about videogames. As discussed by Boluk and LeMieux, the concept, and subsequent terminology, has evolved into an experience that is based on the aboutness of itself; video games which embrace and play with the concepts and conventions of the medium creating this unique extrinsic based Personal yet Competitive range. Again, this does not mean that the Western and Eastern industries did not employ these areas, but they were dominated by other features which became more important for the industry in its entirety.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to prove and then exemplify a European voice within the worldwide video gaming industry. This chapter will reflect on and answer the main objectives and research questions of the thesis with consideration to all areas of the research, previous publications, the studies undertaken and their subsequent results. The work will arrange these into reusable definitions and then offer suggestions on how they can make meaningful changes or contributions to the video gaming industry.

Research Question 1: Is there a dichotomy in the way that we see entertainment media?

From the initial research, this thesis has argued that within the field of video games there has been a divide in the way that the industry has been viewed. This has been given the label of an East/West divide due to the perceptions of the main markets being based on Japan and the United States of America respectively. While work in media studies has often referred to these markets, they chose not to classify these industries outside of their own interpretations and without much consideration of the products themselves. With the rising importance of methods of online communication and the quality of the information that is being presented to consumers, it is vital that the material being shared and utilised is as factual and accurate as possible (Feezell 2018).

The initial research question, as detailed in Chapter 3, was to identify the exact parameters of the East/West divide through examination of the use of the terminology and cultural perceptions of popular media. The primary research determined that, for a long period of time, terminology was assigned based on the need for basic generalisation to suit mass audiences. In this case, so generalised it was reduced to a dichotomy. Due to the advancement of communication methods and societal interactions now becoming more widespread through online methods, these terms, built on perceptions and limited understanding, became the common definitions for new worldwide media classifications. When initially considered for video games, the market divide was also reduced to a dichotomy between products from the USA and Japan which in turn strengthened the continued use of East and West as the appropriate definitions. However, as the industry has advanced these have lost clarity and became a poorer representation of the worldwide gaming market and therefore needed to be redefined. This is important as the video gaming

industry is a rapidly growing field and any lack of clarity in the field could be a detriment to future products or innovations.

Research Question 2: What is the perceived East/West divide within the video games industry?

With an understanding of the rationale for the existence of the current terminology and its uses, the second research question was posed to identify the key areas of the East/West divide within the video gaming field. This was answered with the findings from the first supporting study which suggested that consumers, who are a part of gaming culture, view the industry as a split between multiple facets, consisting of the themes that state or infer an American, Japanese and ‘Not USA’ influence. While this study was just assumed to produce the initial conclusions that have been presented (Chapter 6.), the inclusion of a clear alternate field that would be seen by some as ‘European’ at that time was surprising. Based on those results and the preliminary conclusions drawn from a review of existing literature, subsequent published works, such as James and Fletcher (2015b) began to document these perceptions. This came much earlier than initially anticipated, and as the work progressed more evidence for an acknowledged dichotomy in the gaming industry and a European voice came to light over time. These were further explored through examination of player types, their attitudes and how they engage in play as well as the method of design approaches to popular video games (James and Fletcher 2015a, 2015b and 2016).

Drawing from the original data gathered, including the ongoing data from the main study, preliminary and basic definitions of what Eastern and Western mean in terms of the worldwide gaming industry were constructed:

Western Video Game: A video game that is traditionally more realistic in aesthetics and themes, based in settings and scenarios that are familiar to English speaking audiences.

Key factors:

- Focus on realism with darker themes
- Realistic aesthetics
- Cinematic in design
- Americanised content

Notable examples: *The Last of Us*, *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare*, *Overwatch*, *PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds*.

Eastern Video Game: A video game that is traditionally more focused on fantasy elements and themes that are unrealistic in nature but are familiar to Asian cultures.

Key factors:

- Focus on Fantasy even in realistic scenarios
- Stylised aesthetics
- Symbol focused
- Asian influenced

Notable examples: *Pokemon X and Y*, *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, *Super Smash Bros. for Wii U*, *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*.

These new definitions do not cover every video game made and will never be able to do so as defining aspects of video games is a continuous endeavour. They are a cultural phenomenon and will continue to evolve but, as argued by Bergonse (2017), they are still necessary to define with sufficient conditions because definitions are a tool for analysis and persuasion, and help people comprehend or convince others.

Research Question 3: What alternate beliefs/preconceptions exist beyond the divide?

With this information, and with consideration to the previous research questions, the final stages of the main study could be completed as each video game that had been studied could be given a geographical designation to further confirm these classifications. The purpose of cataloguing these popular and influential video games was to look for inconsistencies and concepts recognised by the previous research and study to identify irregularities which characterise a European title; those video games could then be assigned this new definition.

This data, in combination with all that came before it, addresses the third objective and question of the study; examining what exists beyond the East/West divide in the video gaming industry. Using the previous definitions of Western and Eastern video games as foundation, along with the cumulation of the results of this thesis, the following is proposed as the definition for a European video game:

European Video Game: A video game that is seen to focus on uncommon conceptions that are representative of values held in European countries and the amalgamation of themes and aesthetics unique to this region.

Key factors:

- Focus on theme variation and blending
- Aesthetically flexible
- Experimental focus
- Viewed as ‘not American’ but also not limited to a singular country

Notable examples: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, *Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle*, *Inside*, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*.

Hypothesis 1: A European (or alternate) perspective on video games is present to a degree outside of the existing East/West dichotomy and because of this, a conformation and updating of terminology that is currently used within the video gaming industry is needed

These definitions and the research behind them provide important contributions to the wider knowledge of video games. Firstly, this thesis explored the cultural significance of defining terminology in the field of video games, and while this area has seen some amount of research, the ever-developing nature of this specialization requires constant re-evaluation. This has been achieved for now and after five years of extensive research on 250 video games, their effects on gaming culture and the societies around them, a methodology on how to repeat this evaluation through the use of the published model (James and Fletcher 2013 and 2015b) has also been displayed. Ideally, this re-evaluation should be completed on a yearly basis as it keeps the terminology and information as relevant as possible while also providing insight into the potential future of the video gaming industry as it has during this thesis.

Secondly, the research has shown that a European voice is present within the worldwide gaming industry. While individual areas of this region of the world have been researched, with some promising developments coming from this (Liboriussen and Martin 2016 and Kerr 2017), and some amount of research into the European influence in the games industry (Latorre 2013), the previous research has utilised the outdated terminology in combination with their own definitions of what they conceive it to be. This can be seen, for example, with the definitions used by Naor et al. (2010) and generalisations by Chen et al. (2017), and within the video game field in general discussion (Wolf 2015) and more direct subjects (Anderson et.al. 2010). Furthermore, the research undertaken for this thesis has

consisted of multiple focus groups totaling to 150 participants, who were a part of various gaming cultures, which provided the general understanding of this area without entirely recognising it. This was then clarified by the netnographic research into the 250 video games studied which provided a unique examination of the current state of the worldwide gaming market but also the development of the emerging European aspect. Therefore, based on this work it is proposed that the video game industry be delineated into more areas than the established Eastern and Western, the first of which being European with the clear definitions outlined above.

Hypothesis 2: This European or alternative perspective has ways to more effectively design, produce and market video games to these geographical locations as well as influence titles outside the traditionally viewed perspectives

In defining these industries and the video games within them, further attention can be given to the designs and strategies that have had the most success and acclaim to better advance the various fields of digital game development. While the strategies from established regions may be just additions or conformation of profitable features already known, since the European area has now received a definitive and recent classification, consideration regarding the potential of the region can begin. However, based on the conclusions of the studies conducted and the video games designated as European, the following features are prominent in titles from this region and are proposed to be initial key features for the design, production and marketing of European video games:

- Specific utilisation of humour within products; this presents itself most often in forms of sarcasm, slapstick and awkward moments. Examples: *Grand Theft Auto V*, *Rayman Legends*, *Lego Marvel Super Heroes*.
- Cooperative (co-op) play in some form is more appreciated, even in small amounts as long as it is meaningful within the product. Examples: *Battlefield 1*, *Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle*, *Life is Strange*.
- Eclectic aesthetics; players are generally accepting of any aesthetic as long as it adds to the experience. Examples: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, *Ori and the Blind Forest*, *SOMA*.

Along with these, it was generally observed that products from within the European industry have the potential to influence the wider gaming industry through innovation or business practice. Games from established franchises such as *Grand Theft Auto V*

(Rockstar North 2013) and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red 2015) have an advantage in this aspect due to their worldwide brand recognition; however, titles such as *Inside* (Playdead 2016), *Monument Valley* (Ustwo Games 2014) and *Ori and the Blind Forest* (Moon Studios 2015) also set new standards with regards to games as an art form, representation in other media and presentation without this recognised acclaim. The industry can also create worldwide advancements in technology and genre with products such as *Candy Crush Saga* (King 2012) and *Clash Royale* (Supercell 2016) dominating the market in their respective fields, and *Alien Isolation* (Creative Assembly 2014) and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* showcasing large scale changes in AAA artificial intelligence and world building.

Implications and Future Work

A European voice in game design is present and it is not as unintelligible as anticipated. This research and thesis have shown that it has been a part of the industry longer than initially believed and that members of gaming culture have been aware of its existence. However, they have been unable to accurately identify it due to the combination of the region being an amalgamation of many countries with their own voices and little definition with regards to its inherent and creative features. Now that the groundwork for identification and said definition has been presented, future research and development should be made into how to utilise and adapt this area of research as to advance existing markets with regards to comprehension of game design, production and unifying the existing emerging regions into one cohesive voice which can be recognised and appreciated for its strengths as part of the global gaming industry.

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Creative Assembly 2014, *Alien Isolation*, SEGA.

Nintendo 2013, *Animal Crossing: New leaf*

Ubisoft Montreal 2013, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*, Ubisoft.

Ubisoft Sofia 2014, *Assassin's Creed Rogue*, Ubisoft.

Ubisoft Quebec 2015, *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*, Ubisoft.

Ubisoft Montreal 2014, *Assassin's Creed Unity*, Ubisoft.

Ronimo Games 2012, *Awesomenauts*

Rocksteady Studios 2015, *Batman: Arkham Knight*, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

Rocksteady Studios 2016, *Batman: Arkham VR*, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

Gearbox Software 2016, *Battleborn*, 2K Games.

EA DICE 2016, *Battlefield 1*, Electronic Arts.

EA DICE 2013, *Battlefield 4*, Electronic Arts.

PlatinumGames 2014, *Bayonetta 2*, Nintendo.

Quantic Dream 2013, *Beyond: Two Souls*, Sony Computer Entertainment.

Irrational Games 2013, *Bioshock Infinite*, 2K Games.

Jagex 2015, *Block N Load*.

FromSoftware 2015, *Bloodborne*, Sony Computer Entertainment.

2K Australia 2014, *Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel*, 2K Games.

Silicon Studio 2012, *Bravely Default*, Nintendo.

Infinity Ward 2005, *Call of Duty 2*, Activision.

Infinity Ward 2007, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, Activision.

Sledgehammer Games 2014, *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare*, Activision.

Treyarch 2015, *Call of Duty: Black Ops 3*, Activision.

Infinity Ward 2013, *Call of Duty: Ghosts*, Activision.

King 2012, *Candy Crush Saga*.

Nintendo 2014, *Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker*.

Jagex 2016, *Chronicle: Runescape Legends*.

Firaxis Games 2016, *Civilization VI*.

Supercell 2016, *Clash Royale*.

Intelligent Systems 2015, *Code Name S.T.E.A.M.*, Nintendo.

Valve Corporation 2012, *Counter Strike: Global Offensive*.

Vicarious Visions 2017, *Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy*, Activision.

StudioMDHR 2017, *Cuphead*.

Spike Chunsoft 2010, *Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc*.

Spike Chunsoft 2012, *Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair*.

FromSoftware 2014, *Dark Souls 2*, Bandai Namco Games.

FromSoftware 2016, *Dark Souls 3*, Bandai Namco Games.

Techland 2013, *Dead Island: Riptide*, Deep Silver.

Visceral Games 2008, *Dead Space*, Electronic Arts.

Visceral Games 2011, *Dead Space 2*, Electronic Arts.

Visceral Games 2013, *Dead Space 3*, Electronic Arts.

High Moon Studios 2013, *Deadpool*, Activision.

Toby Fox 2018, *Deltarune*

Bungie 2014, *Destiny*, Activision.

Bungie 2017, *Destiny 2*, Activision.

Codemasters 2017, *Dirt 4*.

Avalanche Software 2013, *Disney Infinity*, Disney Interactive Studios.

Team Ninja 2018, *Dissidia Final Fantasy NT*, Square Enix.

Ninja Theory 2013, *DmC: Devil May Cry*, Capcom.

Team Salvato 2017, *Doki Doki Literature Club!*.

Retro Studios 2014, *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze*, Nintendo.

Arc System Works 2018, *Dragonball FighterZ*, Bandai Namco Entertainment.

Capcom 2013, *Dragons Dogma: Dark Arisen*.

Hitbox Team 2012, *Dustforce*, Digerati Distribution.

HAL Laboratory 1994, *Earthbound (Mother 2)*, Nintendo.

HAL Laboratory 2006, *Earthbound 2 (Mother 3)*, Nintendo.

Turtle Rock Studios 2015, *Evolve*, 2K Games.

Ubisoft Montreal 2014, *Far Cry 4*, Ubisoft.

Zoink 2018, *Fe*.

EA 2016, *Fifa 17*, EA Sports.

EA 2017, *Fifa 18*, EA Sports.

Square Enix 2016, *Final Fantasy Explorers*.

Square Enix 2000, *Final Fantasy IX*.

Square Enix 2015, *Final Fantasy Type-0 HD*.

Square Enix 1992, *Final Fantasy V*.

Square Enix 1994, *Final Fantasy VI*.

Square Enix 1997, *Final Fantasy VII*.

Square Enix 2013, *Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn*.

Square Enix 2016, *Final Fantasy XV*.

Campo Santo 2016, *Firewatch*.

Scott Cawthon 2014, *Five Nights at Freddy's*.

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Scott Cawthon 2016, *Five Nights at Freddy's: Sister Location*.

dotGEARS 2013, *Flappy Bird*.

Scott Cawthon 2016, *FNaF World*.

Ubisoft Montreal 2017, *For Honor*, Ubisoft.

Epic Games 2017, *Fortnite: Battle Royale*.

Mediatonic 2013, *Foul Play*.

Scott Cawthon 2016, *Freddy Fazbear's Pizzeria Simulator*.

Subset Games 2012, *FTL: Faster Than Light*.

Coffee Stain Studios 2014, *Goat Simulator*.

Santa Monica Studio 2018, *God of War*, Sony Interactive Entertainment.

Rockstar North 2013, *Grand Theft Auto V*, Rockstar Games.

CD Projekt Red 2018, *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game*.

ArenaNet 2012, *Guild Wars 2*, NCSOFT.

Creative Assembly 2017, *Halo Wars 2*, SEGA.

Defiant Development 2015, *Hand of Fate*.

Mediatonic 2014, *Hatoful Boyfriend*.

Blizzard 2014, *Hearthstone*.

Ninja Theory 2017, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*

Blizzard 2015, *Heroes of the Storm*.

Square Enix Montreal 2014, *Hitman GO*, Square Enix.

HuniePot 2015, *HuniePop*.

Team Ninja 2014, *Hyrule Warriors*, Nintendo.

Bossa Studios 2015, *I am Bread*.

Sucker Punch Productions 2014, *Infamous Second Son*, Sony Computer Entertainment.

NetherRealm Studios 2017, *Injustice 2*, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

Playdead 2016, *Inside*.

Spike Chunsoft 2014, *J-Stars Victory VS*, Bandai Namco Entertainment.

Double Helix Games 2013, *Killer Instinct*, Xbox Game Studios.

Tripwire Interactive 2016, *Killing Floor 2*.

Square Enix 2013, *Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 Remix*.

Square Enix 2014, *Kingdom Hearts HD 2.5 Remix*.

Square Enix 2017, *Kingdom Hearts HD 2.8 Final Chapter Prologue*.

Square Enix 2015, *Kingdom Hearts: Unchained X*.

SIE Japan Studio 2013, *Knack*, Sony Computer Entertainment.

Square Enix Montreal 2015, *Lara Croft GO*, Square Enix.

Traveller's Tales 2013, *Lego Marvel Super Heroes*, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

Traveller's Tales 2017, *Lego Marvel Super Heroes 2*, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

Dontnod Entertainment 2015, *Life Is Strange*, Square Enix.

Square Enix 2014, *Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII*.

Sumo Digital 2014, *Little Big Planet 3*, Sony Computer Entertainment.

Edge of Reality 2014, *Loadout*.

Next Level Games 2013, *Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon*, Nintendo.

AlphaDream 2013, *Mario & Luigi: Dream Team*, Nintendo.

AlphaDream 2016, *Mario & Luigi: Paper Jam*, Nintendo.

AlphaDream 2017, *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, Nintendo.

Ubisoft Paris 2017, *Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle*, Ubisoft.

Nintendo 2014, *Mario Kart 8*.

Insomniac Games 2018, *Marvel's Spider-Man*, Sony Interactive Entertainment.

Capcom 2017, *Marvel vs. Capcom: Infinite*.

PlatinumGames 2013, *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*, Konami Digital Entertainment.

Kojima Productions 2014, *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes*, Konami Digital Entertainment.

Kojima Productions 2015, *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, Konami Digital Entertainment.

Next Level Games 2016, *Metroid Prime: Federation Force*, Nintendo.

Monolith Productions 2014, *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor*, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

Comcept 2016, *Mighty No. 9*, Deep Silver.

Mojang Studios 2011, *Minecraft*

Capcom 2014, *Monster Hunter 4 Ultimate*.

Capcom 2015, *Monster Hunter Generations*.

Marvelous 2016, *Monster Hunter Stories*, Nintendo.

Capcom 2018, *Monster Hunter: World*.

Ustwo Games 2014, *Monument Valley*.

NetherRealm Studios 2015, *Mortal Kombat X*, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

Airtight Games 2014, *Murdered: Soul Suspect*, Square Enix.

CyberConnect2 2014, *Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Revolution*, Bandai Namco Games.

Hit-Point 2014, *Neko Astume*.

Nintendo 2013, *New Super Luigi U*.

Level-5 2011, *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch*, Namco Bandai Games.

Hello Games 2016, *No Man's Sky*.

Young Horses 2014, *Octodad: Dadliest Catch*.

Moon Studios 2015, *Ori and the Blind Forest*, Microsoft Studios.

Red Barrels 2013, *Outlast*.

D-Pad Studio 2016, *Owlboy*.

Blizzard 2016, *Overwatch*.

7780s Studio 2014, *P.T.*.

Intelligent Systems 2016, *Paper Mario: Color Splash*, Nintendo.

3909 LLC 2013, *Papers, Please*.

Overkill Software 2013, *Payday 2*, 505 Games.

Atlus 2012, *Persona 4 Arena*.

Atlus 2014, *Persona 4 Arena Ultimax*.

P-Studio 2017, *Persona 5*, Atlus.

Atlus 2014, *Persona Q: Shadow of the Labyrinth*.

Capcom 2013, *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney – Dual Destinies*.

Capcom 2016, *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney – Spirit of Justice*.

Nintendo 2013, *Pikmin 3*.

PopCap Games 2013, *Plants vs. Zombies 2: It's About Time*, Electronic Arts.

PopCap Games 2014, *Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare*, Electronic Arts.

PopCap Games 2016, *Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare 2*, Electronic Arts.

PUBG Corporation 2017, *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*.

Headstrong Games 2014, *Pokémon Art Academy*, Nintendo.

The Pokémon Company 2016, *Pokémon Duel*.

Niantic 2016, *Pokémon GO*.

Game Freak 2014, *Pokémon Omega Ruby and Alpha Sapphire*, The Pokémon Company.

Ambrella 2013, *Pokémon Rumble U*, Nintendo.

Ambrella 2015, *Pokémon Rumble World*, Nintendo.

Genius Sonority 2015, *Pokémon Shuffle*, Nintendo.

Game Freak 2016, *Pokémon Sun and Moon*, The Pokémon Company.

Game Freak 2017, *Pokémon Ultra Sun and Ultra Moon*, The Pokémon Company.

Game Freak 2013, *Pokemon X and Y*, The Pokémon Company.

SELECT BUTTON inc. 2017, *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump*, The Pokémon Company.

Bandai Namco Studios 2015, *Pokkén Tournament*, The Pokémon Company.

GungHo Online Entertainment 2015, *Puzzle & Dragons Z + Super Mario Bros. Edition*.

Ubisoft Montpellier 2013, *Rayman Legends*, Ubisoft.

Capcom 2017, *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard*.

Crystal Dynamics 2015, *Rise of the Tomb Raider*, Square Enix.

Psyonix 2015, *Rocket League*.

Jagex 2013, *Runescape 3*.

Facepunch Studios 2013, *Rust*.

Rare 2018, *Sea of Thieves*, Microsoft Studios

Team Ico 2005, *Shadow of the Colossus*, Sony Computer Entertainment.

Cygames 2016, *Shadowverse*.

Yacht Club Games 2014, *Shovel Knight*.

EA Black Box 2010, *Skate 3*, Electronic Arts.

MegaCrit LLC 2018, *Slay the Spire*, Humble Bundle.

Titan Forge Games 2014, *Smite*, Hi-Rez Studios.

Frictional Games 2015, *SOMA*.

Sumo Digital 2012, *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed*, SEGA

Sanzaru Games 2016, *Sonic Boom: Fire & Ice*, SEGA

Big Red Button 2014, *Sonic Boom: Rise of Lyric*, SEGA

Sanzaru Games 2014, *Sonic Boom: Shattered Crystal*, SEGA

Sonic Team 1993, *Sonic CD*, SEGA

SEGA Hardlight 2013, *Sonic Dash*, SEGA

Sonic Team 2017, *Sonic Forces*, SEGA

SEGA Hardlight 2017, *Sonic Forces: Speed Battle*, SEGA

SEGA Hardlight 2014, *Sonic Jump Fever*, SEGA

Sonic Team 2013, *Sonic Lost World*, SEGA

PagodaWest Games 2017, *Sonic Mania*, SEGA

Sonic Team 2017, *Sonic Runners*, SEGA.

Sonic Team 1991, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, SEGA

Sonic Team 1992, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, SEGA

Sonic Team 2008, *Sonic Unleashed*, SEGA

Ubisoft San Francisco 2017, *South Park: The Fractured but Whole*, Ubisoft.

Obsidian Entertainment 2014, *South Park: The Stick of Truth*, Ubisoft.

Nintendo 2015, *Splatoon*.

Nintendo 2017, *Splatoon 2*.

Nintendo 2016, *Star Fox Zero*.

EA DICE 2015, *Star Wars Battlefront*, Electronic Arts.

EA DICE 2017, *Star Wars Battlefront 2*, Electronic Arts.

ConcernedApe 2016, *Stardew Valley*.

Capcom 2016, *Street Fighter V*.

Nintendo 2013, *Super Mario 3D World*.

Nintendo 2015, *Super Mario Maker*.

Nintendo 2017, *Super Mario Odyssey*.

Bandai Namco Studios 2014, *Super Smash Bros for 3DS*, Nintendo.

Bandai Namco Studios 2014, *Super Smash Bros for WiiU*, Nintendo.

Bandai Namco Studios 2017, *Tekken 7*, Bandai Namco Entertainment.

Numinous Games 2016, *That Dragon, Cancer*.

Beenox 2014, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, Activision.

Bethesda Game Studios 2006, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, 2K Games.

Tango Gameworks 2014, *The Evil Within*, Bethesda Softworks.

SIE Japan Studio 2016, *The Last Guardian*, Sony Interactive Entertainment.

Naughty Dog 2013, *The Last of Us*, Sony Interactive Entertainment.

Nintendo 2013, *The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds*.

Nintendo 2017, *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*.

Nintendo 2015, *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask 3D*.

Nintendo 2013, *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD*.

Nintendo 2015, *The Legend of Zelda: Tri Force Heroes*.

Nintendo 2016, *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess HD*.

Ready at Dawn 2015, *The Order: 1886*, Sony Interactive Entertainment.

Maxis Redwood Shores 2014, *The Sims 4*, Electronic Art.

Galactic Cafe 2013, *The Stanley Parable*.

22Cans 2016, *The Trail: Frontier Challenge*.

CD Projekt Red 2015, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*.

PlatinumGames 2013, *The Wonderful 101*, Nintendo.

Square Enix 2008, *The World Ends With You*.

Square Enix 2014, *Theatrhythm Final Fantasy: Curtain Call*.

Mike Bithell 2012, *Thomas Was Alone*.

Respawn Entertainment 2014, *Titanfall*, Electronic Arts.

Respawn Entertainment 2016, *Titanfall 2*, Electronic Arts.

Massive Entertainment 2016, *Tom Clancy's The Division*, Ubisoft.

Toby Fox 2015, *Undertale*.

Coldwood Interactive 2016, *Unravel*, Electronic Arts.

Ubisoft Montpellier 2014, *Valiant Hearts: The Great War*, Ubisoft.

VRChat Inc. 2017, *VRChat*.

Ubisoft Montreal 2014, *Watch Dogs*, Ubisoft.

Ubisoft Montreal 2016, *Watch Dogs 2*, Ubisoft.

Nintendo 2007, *Wii Fit*.

Nintendo 2006, *Wii Sports*.

MachineGames 2017, *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*, Bethesda Softworks.

MachineGames 2014, *Wolfenstein: The New Order*, Bethesda Softworks.

Lizardcube 2017, *Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap*, Dotemu.

Square Enix 2016, *World of Final Fantasy*.

Monolith Soft 2015, *Xenoblade Chronicles 3D*, Nintendo.

Monolith Soft 2016, *Xenoblade Chronicles X*, Nintendo.

Level-5 2013, *Yo-Kai Watch*, Nintendo.

Playtonic Games 2017, *Yooka-Laylee*, Team17.

Arzest 2014, *Yoshi's New Island*. Nintendo.

Good-Feel 2015, *Yoshi's Woolly World*, Nintendo.

Konami 2016, *Yu-Gi-Oh Duel Links*.

Ubisoft Montpellier 2012, *ZombiU*, Ubisoft.

Appendix

Appendix A: Supporting Study: Notes (as originally written)

Focus Group 1

Number of participants: 100

Notable factors: Part of a first-year Games Design lecture

Brief Overview:

- The lax nature of the lecture setting did not help the situation as much as believed. The subjects were used to interacting with differing lecturers whose style of presentation did not match the new form of testing presented to them. This created some difficult moments in the activity stage such as confusion on who the presenter was and what the point of the initial exercise is.
- The topic of the study was also perceived to be trivial at first with a few of the participants making light of the subject. This created an unwillingness to interact or pay attention to the presentation, but this soon changed after the activity section.



Western was perceived as very negative with key words like, overused and unfinished being the most prominent. While this negativity was noted as being a key point of Western gaming, they point out that not all the industry is like this as AAA companies are doing good work making games more cinematic and real for the purpose of improving the

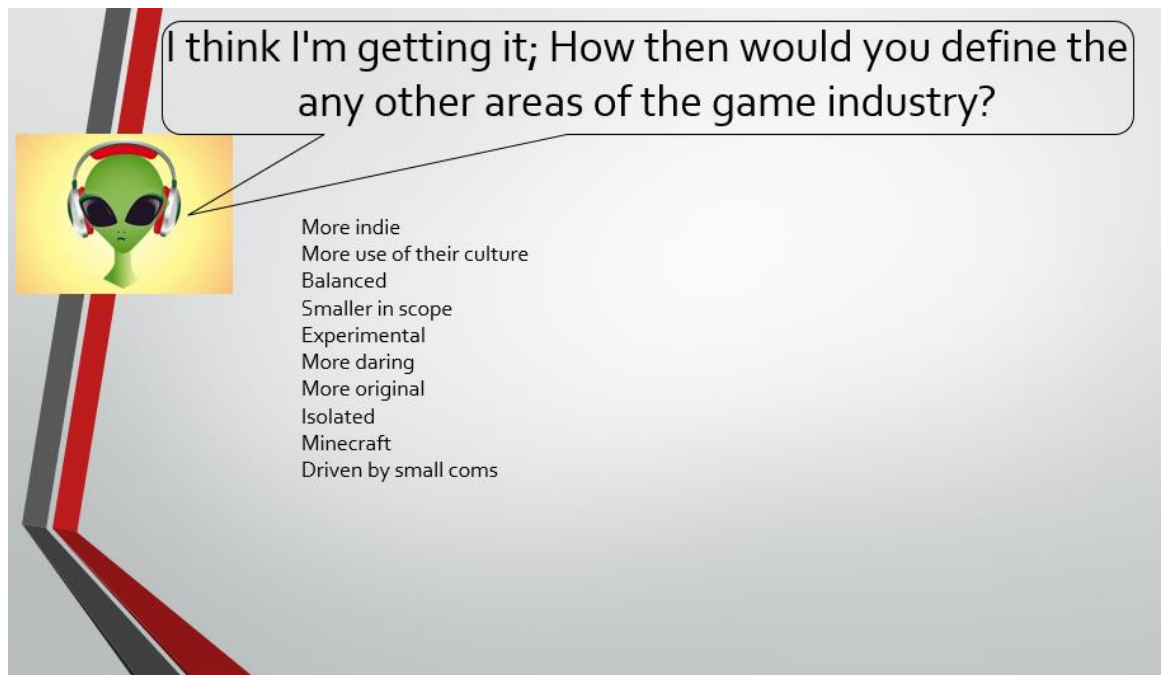
experience. Responses still negative but there was a big sense towards a want for it to be better due to suggestions coming with a lot of perceptions offered.

- CoD: Advanced Warfare
- Sonic Boom: RoL



Eastern was received more positively with the subjects pointing out the drive for quality and story driven design. Contrasted by making a large point about the heavy fantasy elements blended with the inclusion of past cultural influences not being appropriate due to the sexist tropes and perceived weird Asian influence in their game design. The subjects also did not discuss any other areas of the Eastern industry as they did in the Western discussion. Subjects pointed out that their perception of Eastern game design mostly come from their AAA titles. Small titles or demo like titles were talked about due to recent releases.

- Dark Souls 2
- MGSV: Ground Zeroes
- P.T.



The first thing the subjects talked about was that other areas seem to be more indie based and experimental. This was based off their combined experience with various smaller titles but mostly, Minecraft. The subjects also believed that any alternate games are more balanced and more original than the previous areas. Small companies allow for more innovation and since more are in alternate areas it therefore produces more and those lead to these experimental and ‘daring’ games. Unsure discussion throughout and while areas were mentioned (India, Australia and European countries), nothing specific was seen to be needed in the subject’s final conclusions.

- Minecraft
- Goat Simulator

Observations:

- While using a large focus group allowed a lot more data to be gathered quickly, the style in which it was delivered was not suitable for the large audience. 30 subjects or fewer would perhaps be more appropriate and efficient.
- Smaller groups, based on observations, would also be able to engage a lot better thus relaying their thoughts better.
- A more serious approach should be considered in future, this setting and including other lecturers was a distraction.

Conclusions:

- West is highly negative and not seen to have much quality in its design. The commercialisation of the industry has had an adverse effect on its cultural image.
- East is considered to be of higher quality but is guilty of outdated ideas and heavy reliance on old tropes and cultural themes.
- Other areas are more accepted as good but are perceived to be mostly indie. At this time, it can be assumed this is due to the lack of exposure; more focus would present companies as AAA, no advertising or mark in the culture makes them feel indie even if they are not.
- The other section was a surprise; not knowing about your own culture was not considered as much as it should have.
- Themes closely match the initial hypotheses.

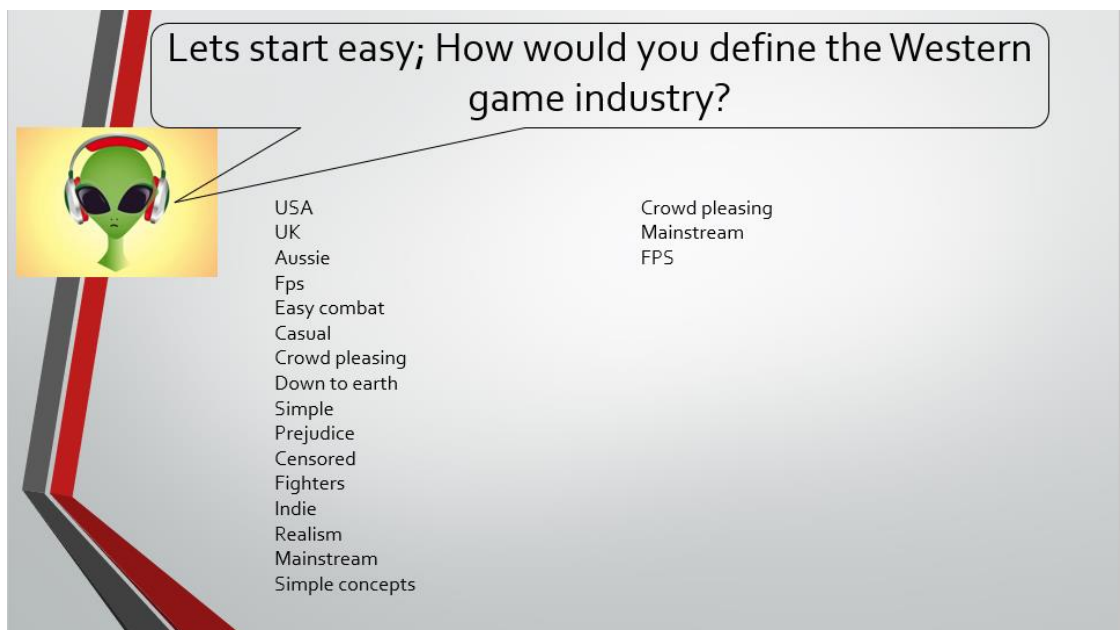
Focus Group 2

Number of participants: 35

Notable factors: Part of a second-year Games Design lecture

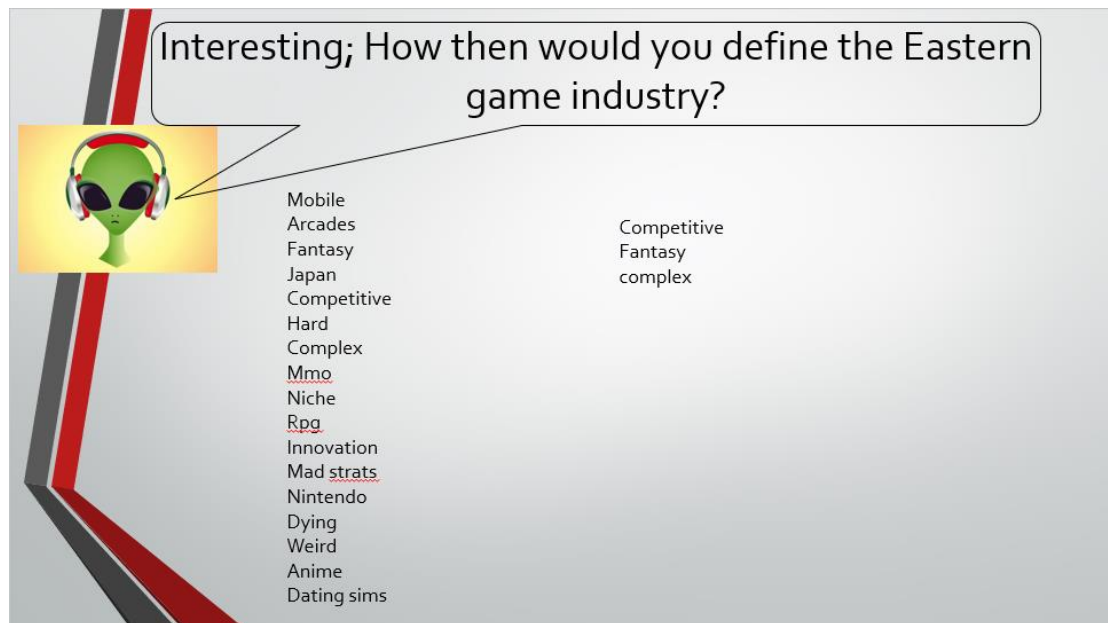
Brief Overview:

- Much better with less subjects, the subjects engaged with the topics much quicker than the larger group. Allowed for a lot more conversation overall but less results recorded due to the broader nature of the talking points.
- The topic of the study was instantly understood with the subjects being very willing to offer up their take on it, much more than previous groups.



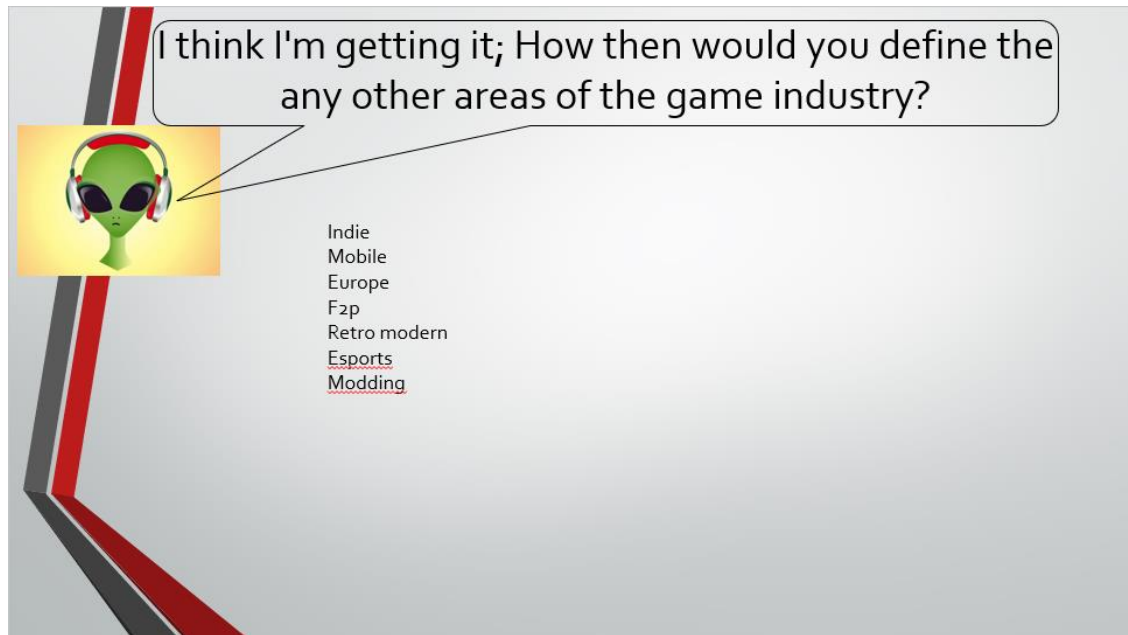
Western defined as being the USA right away, this led to more negative comments with words like simple and realism. This was combined with the UK and Australia. Not all AAA is like this as the indie games are getting better but mainstream still has a stigma on it. Crowd pleasing nature was the biggest talking point, making products to sell as much as possible regardless of ease of gameplay. FPS genre, specifically CoD games mentioned often as being the big example of Western gaming.

- CoD series, Modern Warfare and Advanced Warfare



Discussion revolved around alternate gaming types and the aspects consumers must comprehend to take part in them, but this changed after the subjects mentioned the niche nature of this. Nintendo was a big reference of the games but it was the perceived complex nature of fantasy titles and their effects on the wider industry that most of the subjects chose to focus on. Weirdness was also a big factor in discussion, directed towards titles that they don't understand like dating sims (though this was about pigeons so it's understandable?). MMOs and RPGs mentioned as well though not as much as the other products.

- Hatoful Boyfriend
- Pokémon series
- Final Fantasy series



Big focus on indie development throughout all discussion. Europe based games, as a concept, was offered up as an example quickly with the subjects agreeing that it has a retro modern style as a part of it. No video games were mentioned to back any statements up, just general explanation from the subjects around mechanics and the fields selected in their conclusions.

Observations:

- Much better size of focus group, it allowed for more discussion and development of the conclusions that the subjects gave. They were confident in what was recorded being their final thoughts.
- Subjects offered up more games for East and West than before but none for Europe despite them coming to that conclusion almost imminently.
- No noticeable problems with subjects, all understood the topics.

Conclusions:

- West is seen as being the USA, UK and Australia and these come with a negative attachment. The focus however, was on the influences from the USA and its heavy use of the FPS genre.
- East is a mix between perceived complicated games to master like fighting games in arcades and their competitive nature, along with the large number of RPGs and a focus on that genre.

- Other areas identified as being influenced by independent developers within Europe. This focus on European countries remained in all discussion throughout which was surprising but not unexpected based on the consistent theme of the subjects assigning countries to areas quickly.

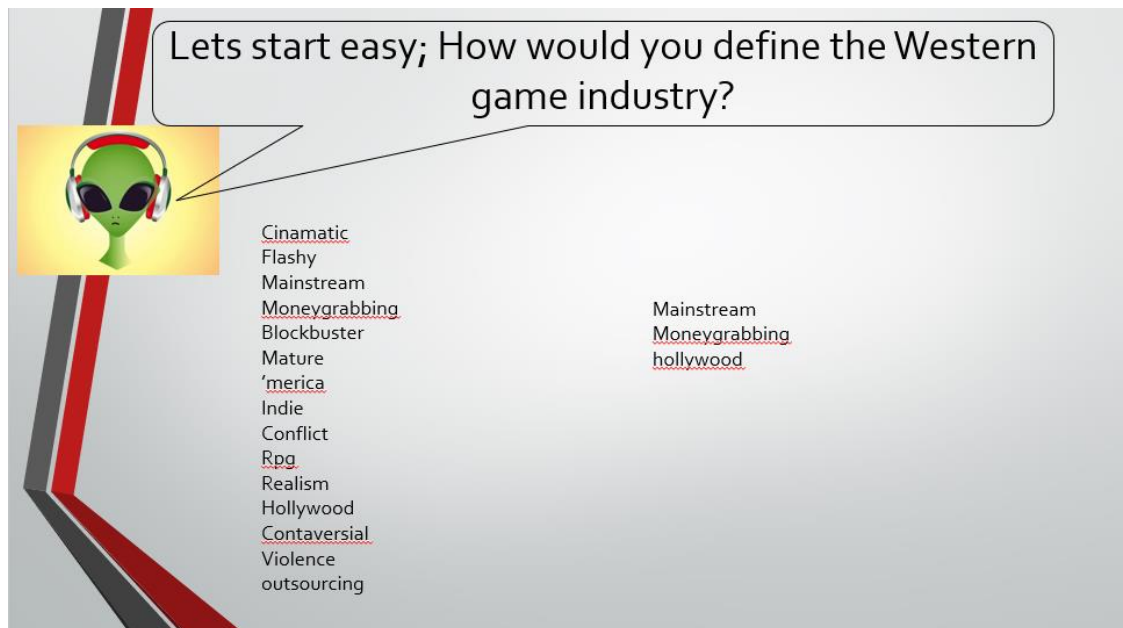
Focus Group 3

Number of participants: 15

Notable factors: Part of a first-year Game Journalism lecture

Brief Overview:

- Subjects were much more opinionated and explained a lot of their conclusions for longer periods of time. Very uniformed consensus on what they perceived and discussed.
- Topic of study was understood quickly despite extra confirmation being gathered by the subjects themselves via searching online and communication with other subjects.
- One subject circled the entire map stating that, “There are no differences in the games industry”. This subject still joined in with discussions, which was strange considering this outburst.



After a lot of initial talk about the state of the AAA industry, the subjects concluded these conversations by stating America as a big aspect of this whole area. The idea of an industry trying to make as much money as possible via any means was an underlying theme, through realism and controversial moments comments. RPGs genre brought up as examples but games from other genres were the only ones mentioned.

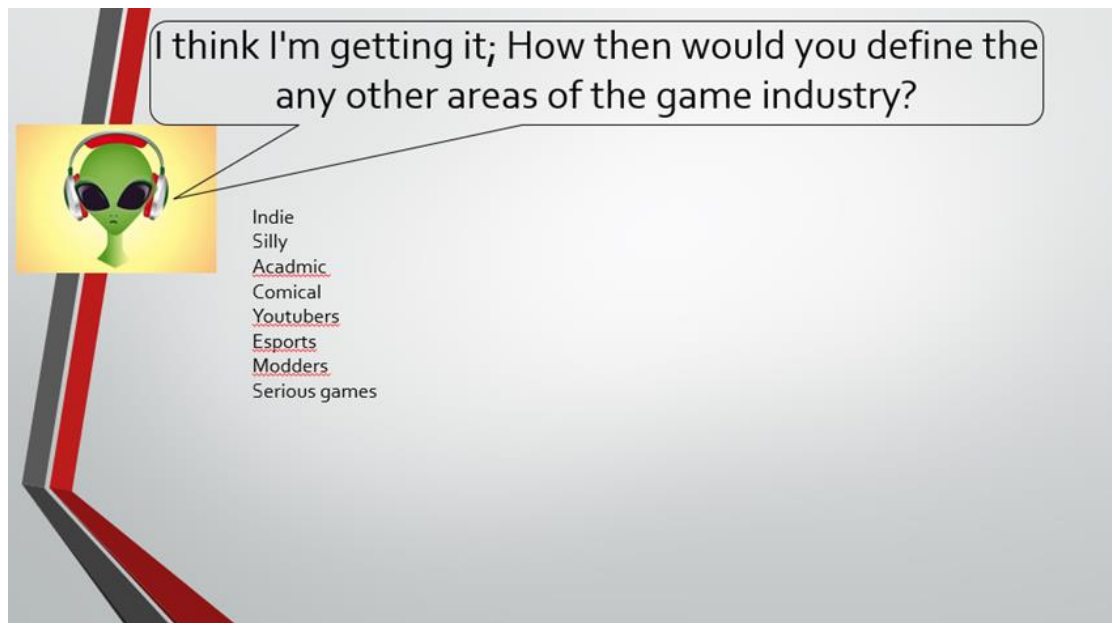
- The Order: 1886
- CoD Series, MW2 and Advanced Warfare.

- Destiny



Subjects spoke with a lot of familiarity about this industry due to an enjoyment of anime/manga, which was expressed frequently. This knowledge made the comments a mixture of positive and negative in tone since all good points were followed up with bad connotations. JRPGs and Dating sims mentioned often but only RPG games were discussed. Conversation did not deviate into any other areas, focus was always kept towards the perceived Eastern, in this case Japanese, area.

- Final Fantasy series
- Dragon Quest series
- Souls Series



Subjects talked about small companies and indie games being a big part of this area. Video games coming from alternate areas were described as funnier and subjects talked about how the influence of youtubers and modders added to this. Academic aspects coming from European countries like Sweden were also mentioned and continued with the topic of serious games (for industries outside gaming like military use and simulation games). No video games were mentioned to back any points up.

Observations:

- More opinions meant that the conclusions the subjects wanted recorded were as close to their group consensus as possible.
- Subjects did not offer up any games when talking about other areas.
- They mentioned Europe often in the other area discussions but did not conclude with it.

Conclusions:

- West is seen as being American in ideology and nature which was presented as negative. Also, a big focus on West being AAA over anything else.
- East is Japanese and has plenty of negative points but concluded as a mixture.
- Other area not concluded as being Europe, but European countries were discussed as a part of the subject's points. Also had big focus on humour and alternate gaming media outlets.

- RPG discussion during Western was surprising since Destiny was the only title of note that has RPG elements.
- Subjects very aware of other cultures when compared to other focus groups and had strong preconceptions.

Focus Group 4

Number of participants: 14

Notable factors: A group of Masters year Games Design students

Brief Overview:

- The setting was much more relaxed than usual being in a normal room and not in a typical lecture setting. Subjects seemed to be more inclined to discuss topics more openly.
- There was some confusion about the overarching focus group topic, even after the activity. Subjects became more aware of their opinions when other started to give their own.



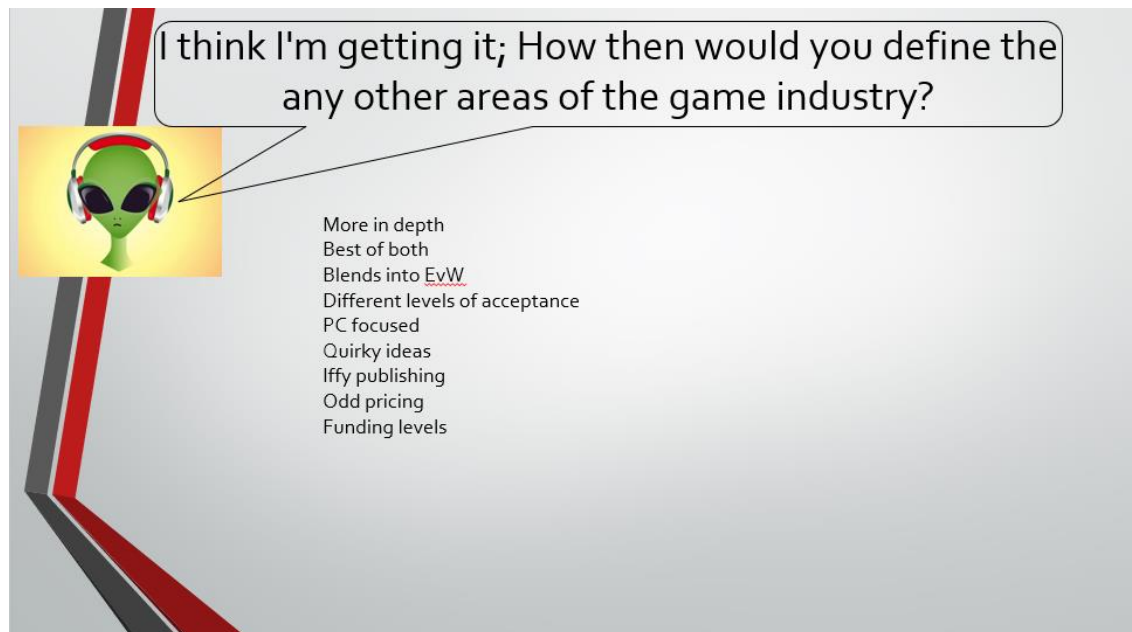
Subjects offered a lot of points and did not go into that much detail until asked to conclude them. They started with specific points and then summarised them as being American as a whole with the exact phrasing using a curse word. Most of the points focused on the areas of the industry which were irritating to the subjects such as DLC and reliance on pop culture. Conclusions were not entirely negative but still were reasoned from previous negative discussions.

- FIFA, Madden, NBA series of games
- Bioshock series
- Call of Duty series
- Five Nights at Freddy's series



Right away the subjects defined the Eastern as being just better than Western. All the discussions were area neutral and subjects did not designate a location aside from mentioning anime (as a Japanese concept) and it being a part of their overall conclusions. Subjects much more confident talking about this side of the industry and spoke about many games as a part of it. The positive perception remained throughout the entire session even when talking about negative topics such as sexualisation and risk taking.

- Dark Souls 2
- Super Smash Bros. series
- Pokémon series
- Final Fantasy series (FF 14)



The subjects took a while to start offering points as a lot of discussion took place within the group before they were confident in putting ideas out. General idea was that this area was what the East and West were not, but has the best of both fields. Minecraft was mentioned when talking about PC gaming and accompanying conversation around this topic, no other video games were mentioned directly. Indie development was a core focus point in most of the discussions but never included as a final point.

- Minecraft

Observations:

- Simpler setting eased subjects into talking a lot more between themselves which was good for the quality of their suggestions, but this led to a burnout when it came to later stages of the study.
- A lot of the same video games were used as examples with others adding their own take via suggestions.
- More relaxed setting in combination with serious approach seems to be a better approach with smaller groups.

Conclusions:

- West is seen as very American with that description being a negative one. Although the subjects were negative in their discussions, it was often followed by positive aspects to balance out the conversation.

- Eastern was all positive, even though not all the subjects were fans of the perceived culture. Not stated but the Eastern seemed to be seen as Japanese through the anime comments and cultural points.
- Other areas of discussion did not focus on any location but instead focused on worldwide development outside of the pervious East/West perceptions.
- Subjects seemed aware of both cultures and, while not offering much in other areas, accepted that other areas do exist quickly.

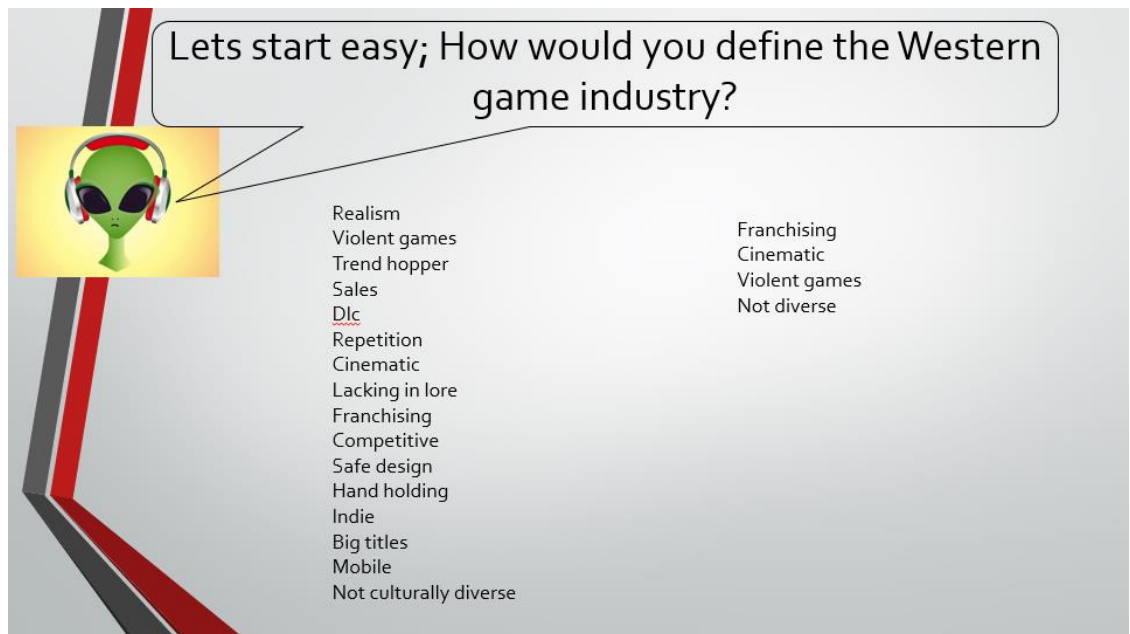
Focus Group 5

Number of participants: 13

Notable factors: Part of a third-year Game Design lecture

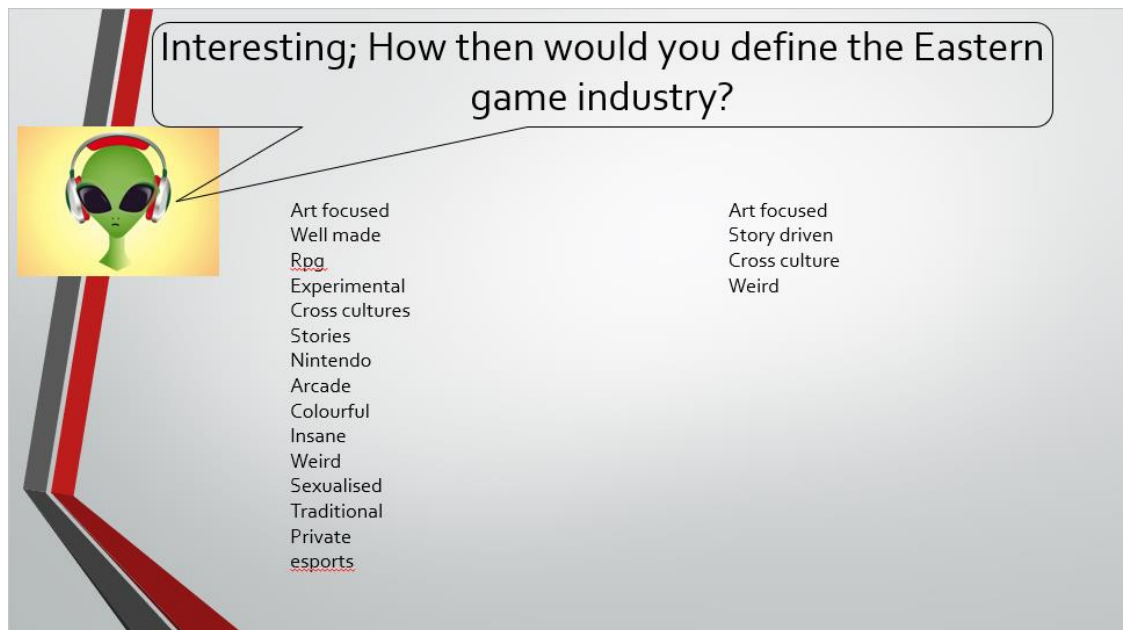
Brief Overview:

- A lecture hall setting but with a much more casual mood due to the study being done at the start of lecture. The subjects also noticeably consulted their phones/laptops to check points and formulate their opinions.
- Topic of the study understood quickly with no problems, although the subjects spent extra time on the initial activity due to a belief that it was more important to be as precise as possible.



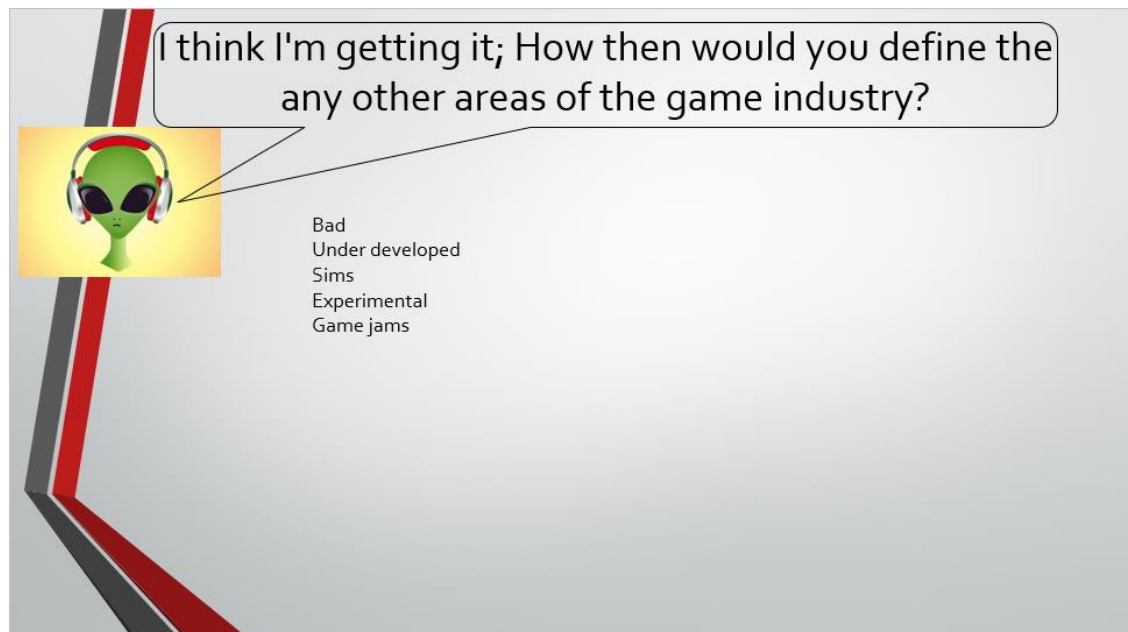
The subjects gave a lot of views extremely quickly and settled on their conclusions just as fast. Until the subjects mentioned the West not being culturally diverse no locations or games were mentioned, these being America and the Call of Duty series, and the subjects did not elaborate on these further despite this. All of the discussion was very negative with the majority of all the recorded words resulting from this negativity. The concept of not being diverse in a cultural sense was a big point for the subjects.

- Call of Duty Advanced Warfare
- Call of Duty Ghosts



The subjects gave views based primarily on a perception that Nintendo was a representation of the Eastern industry. This did not change until ‘sexualisation’, also the first negative point raised, was discussed and this was focused again on Japanese content. From that point in the study, the subjects spent a long time to come to their conclusions and were not sure about concluding with ‘cross culture’ and ‘art focused’ due to them not being entirely representative of what they believe the East to be. Subjects however said this was “the best they can do right now”.

- Pokemon series
- Mario series
- Bayonetta



After they had been so opinionated but unsure on conclusions it took them a long time to present any definitive answers to this part of the study. They also did not include any video games in the discussions. Their perceptions were best explained by the ‘underdeveloped’ suggestion which they all agreed suited their views and current understanding. As well as this something was present in this field, but they couldn’t work it out and made it seem bad in their view.

Observations:

- When allowed to do too much interpersonal research the subjects can become overwhelmed with information and this leads to a difficulty in presenting any perceptions or thoughts.
- This session showed the importance of maintaining a timeline during the study as the other areas section should have been cut short but was continued a bit longer so the subjects could be allowed to summarise accurately.
- Subjects were unwilling to label any industry, based on the group dynamic, this was due to an unwillingness to be “wrong”.

Conclusions:

- West adheres to very capitalist standards with a goal of using recent trends in big titles to make as much money as possible. This was identified as being “American” but never concluded like this.

- East is summarised by being Nintendo with undertones of negative aspects but still concluded as being more positive than other industries. RPGs and the formulas that come with the genre are also a big part of this industry.
- Something is there in the other area, but it is difficult to articulate due to this area being underdeveloped which is a bad thing.
- Subjects seemed unaware of any large cultural influences outside of basic conclusions which came down to being either diverse or not diverse. Surprising considering the amount of external confirmation used.

Focus Group 6

Number of participants: 7

Notable factors: Part of gaming journalism meetup and talk at Innovation Birmingham

Brief Overview:

- A casual setting apart from the other lectures and discussions going on over the day. The subjects were in a talkative mood, open to presenting ideas quickly and understood the serious nature of the focus group setting.
- The topic was grasped extremely quickly with the subjects eager to give their own perceptions more so than coming to a group consensus. The initial activity was said to help clarify as well with the group appreciated the task vocally.

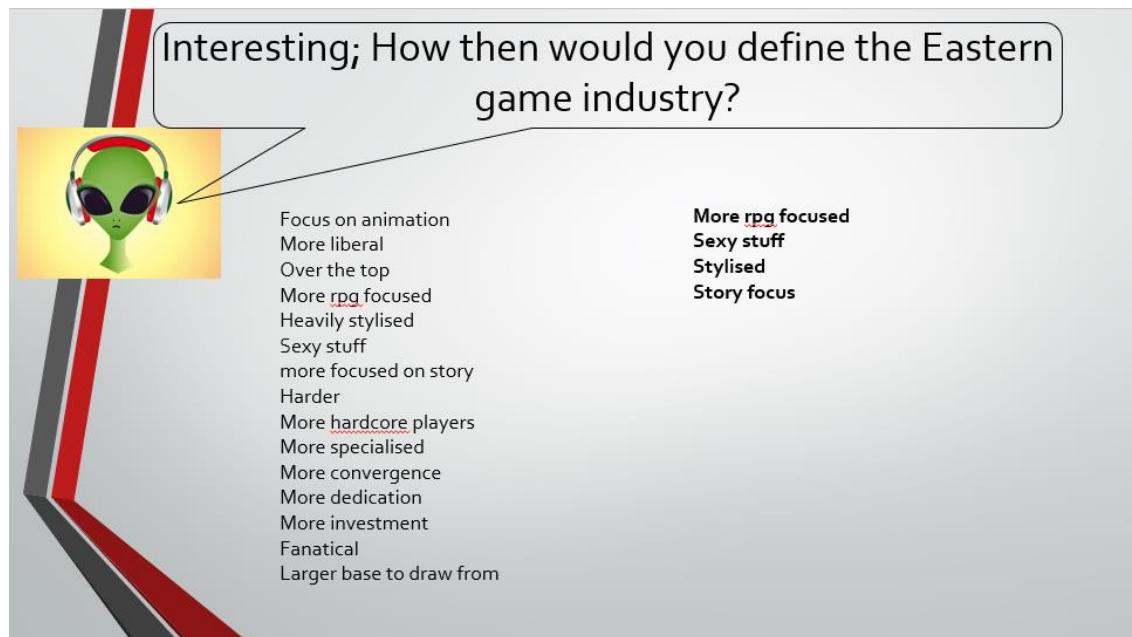
Lets start easy; How would you define the Western game industry?

Violence
Spend a lot
Quantity over quality
Focus on marketing
More realistic
Focus on current trends
More unique concepts
Think outside the box
Lack of gameplay
Unorginal
Focus on the everyday person
Focus on story and background
More graphical games
Nobody wants to look like a dick
Competitively focused
More 18+ games

Quantity over quality
Violence
More realistic
More 18+ games

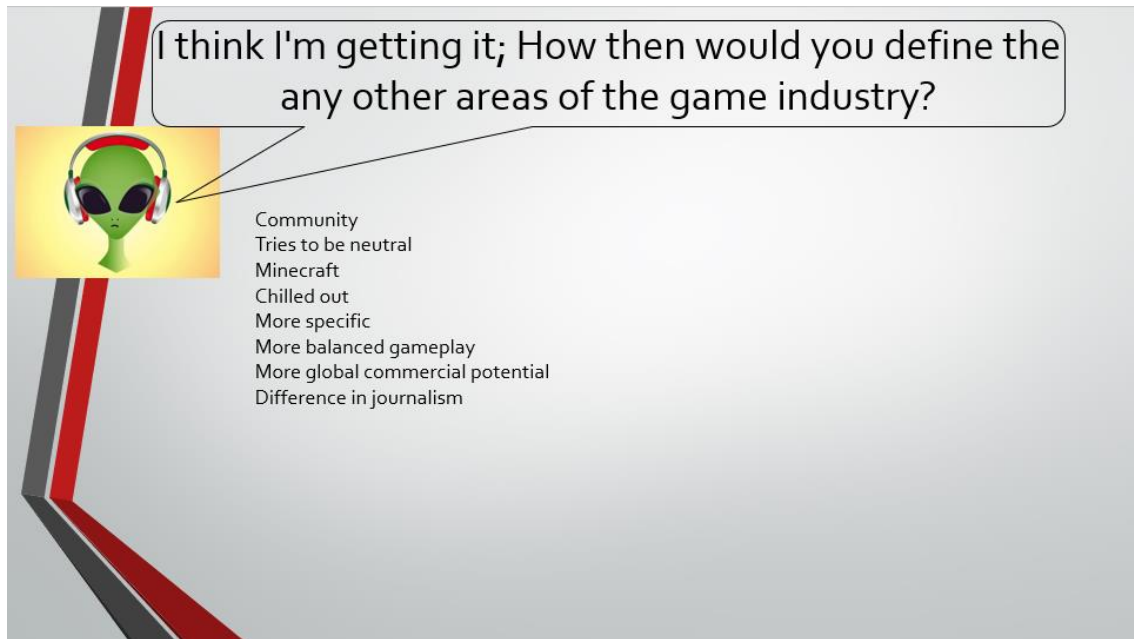
The subjects were making a conscious effort not to talk about locations throughout the session instead focusing on the issues they had with the industry. Rather than being overly negative out of anger, the negative points were presented more as a problem that needs to be solved. Despite the discussion put into the answers given, few video games were mentioned outside one series. The final conclusions were mixed as a lot of the conversations were around inclusion in the industry, but they chose ‘more 18+’ as a final point.

- Assassin’s Creed series



Again, the subjects tried to stay away from mentioning any regions outright although after a while the topic of Japanese game design did come up. The subjects offered more examples of games here but were general in nature. The titles, like the discussions, focused on RPG games which tied into a big part of the overall conclusions. The aspect of famous developers influencing development and production was talked about as well and their effects on consumers when they purchase games. The conversations were more positive but less critical than the Western area.

- Final Fantasy series
- Xenoblade Chronicles
- Mario series
- Metal Gear Solid series
- Dragon Quest series
- Persona series



The concept of another area seemed to be a difficult topic at first since the subjects seemed to believe that this was a neutral area, in that this would be leftover aspects from the previous areas. This thought led to the discussion around Minecraft and games with different design goals. After more conversation around this aspect the subjects then concluded that there is an alternate area which has differences from the other industries, citing from their specialities that the journalistic style and advertisement strategies are different and when they are not, should be. No region or place was named, just that it was different from Western and Eastern.

- Minecraft

Observations:

- The smaller focus group allowed for more intense discussion which led to a definite set of conclusions.
- Moving conversations along became an issue at points as subjects wanted to fully explore each other's points.
- The rationale for not given locations was, according to the group, to allow for more detailed discussion that could not be summarised to one country as this was viewed as an "easy answer".

Conclusions:

- West is negative BUT a lot of the conclusions were criticisms that need to be solved to begin improvement. Trend jumping and appealing to a mass market were also common themes throughout.
- East was, though not mentioned, focused a bit on Japanese values and the RPG genre. Also, the perceived level of quality from this area is much higher than the West.
- Other areas were difficult to think about at first but are believed to exist; the East and West overshadow this area making it a neutral zone. However, further discussion went away from this and began to present it as its own area, separate from the others.
- Subjects used their specialisations to rationalise and understand a divide, including the acknowledgement of an alternate area.

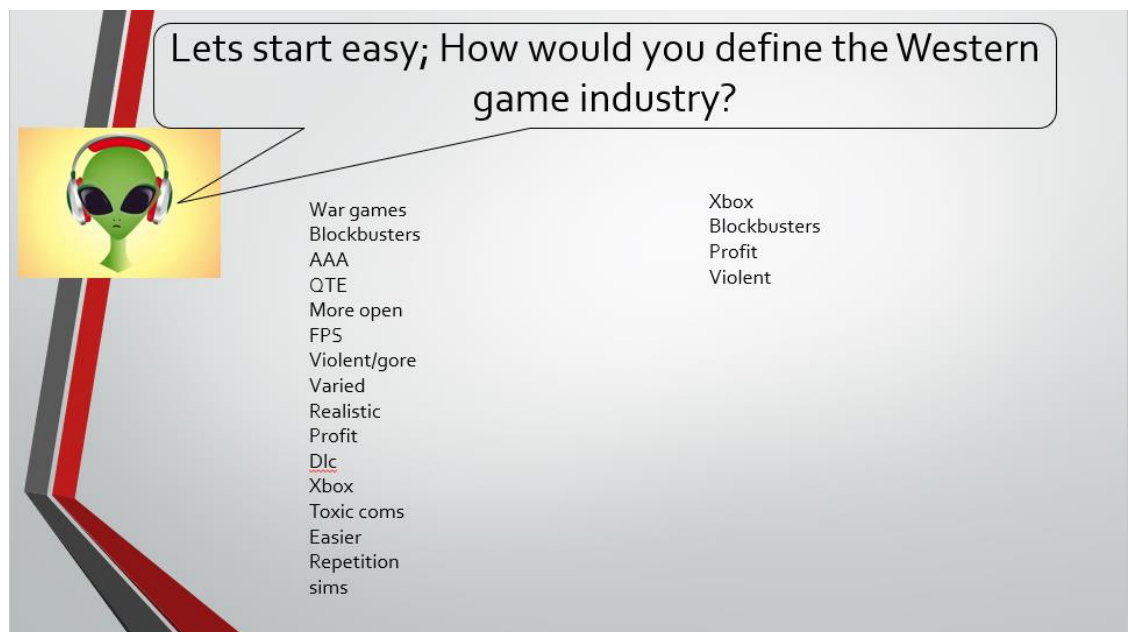
Focus Group 7

Number of participants: 6

Notable factors: Part of a Masters year Game Design lecture

Brief Overview:

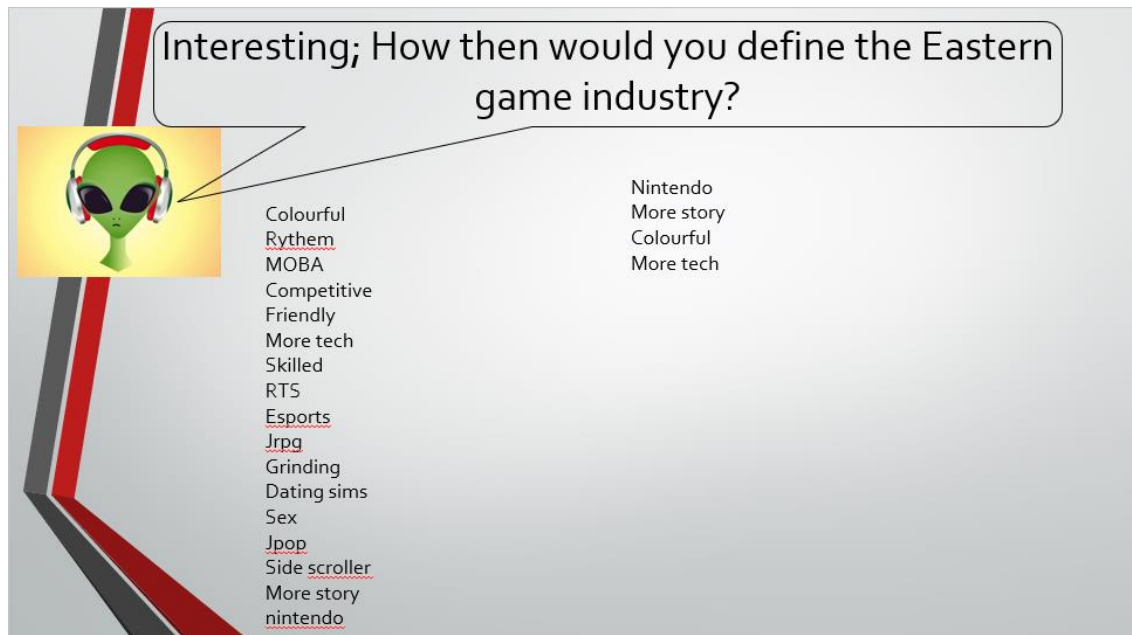
- Though in a classroom, the session took place at the end of a lecture which had an unintended side effect of making the subjects worn out. Discussion was minimal but more suggestions were offered.
- The topic was hard for the subjects to grasp initially but the map activity helped them to understand this topic better. Subjects stated that they would have been lost without this part of the study.
- Subjects ran their thoughts past the others before submitting any points or conclusions for a majority of the session.



The Call of Duty series was the focus of much of the perception of a Western industry with little other video games mentioned. This was through its genre, mechanics, marketing and industry impact. The subjects had mixed opinions about this; it was not entirely negative, just how the industry is. The focus then switched to the Xbox console as being the standard for what a Western gaming product is. The subjects concluding with it and the values in which the console is perceived to have.

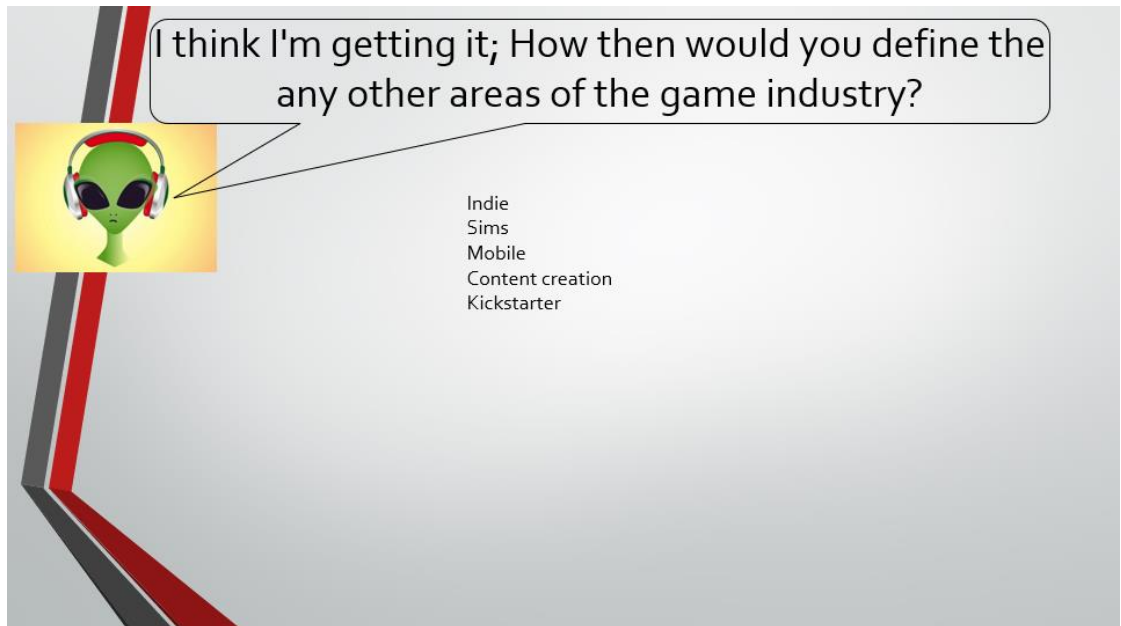
- Call of Duty series

- Gears of War series



The subjects began to discuss everything that they perceived Western to not have which eventually led to them focusing and concluding on one area again, in this case Nintendo. Niche games and genres were referenced as part of their conclusions including MOBA, but this came with no clear example. The subjects focused on the perceived Eastern player base which they presented as being better than the West. This player was also Japanese; which lead to the conclusion of Nintendo being a representation due to its Japanese roots and location.

- Theatrhythm Final Fantasy
- League of Legends
- Street Fighter series
- Starcraft 2
- Final Fantasy series



The idea of another area within the industry was odd to the subjects due to their approach towards the East discussions. In trying to repeat this, they concluded with everything they believed they missed in the previous discussions, indie games and their methods of publication and development. YouTubers and content creation were also touched upon but was not developed. Only one game was mentioned, The Sims series, because of its perceived large difference when compared to the other regions.

- The Sims series

Observations:

- The subjects were not able to come to any solid conclusions due to their approach towards the topic and a mentality of a definitive East/West split which did not allow for any other areas.
- The smaller group was able to engage a lot more with each other but were very hesitant on offering any conclusions until one or two more dominant members of the session suggested one.
- The fatigue of the subjects was noted and a session like this one will not be repeated.

Conclusions:

- West is represented by the Xbox and its Americanised games and methods of production. This is not perceived as wholly negative, just how the state of the industry is right now.

- East is what the West is not, including using genres that other industries lack. Players and consumers in this area are perceived as being better due to a higher skill level and represented by Nintendo and Japan.
- Other areas are perceived as focused on independent productions and the alternate methods that consumers engage with video games.
- This session was the furthest away from the initial hypotheses.

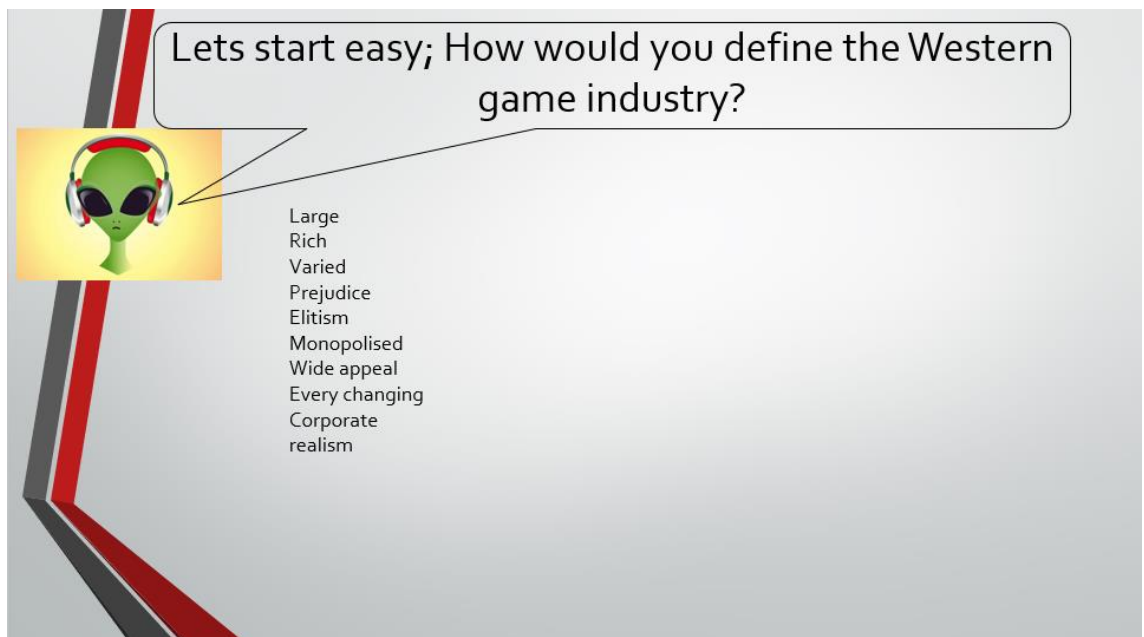
Focus Group 8

Number of participants: 4

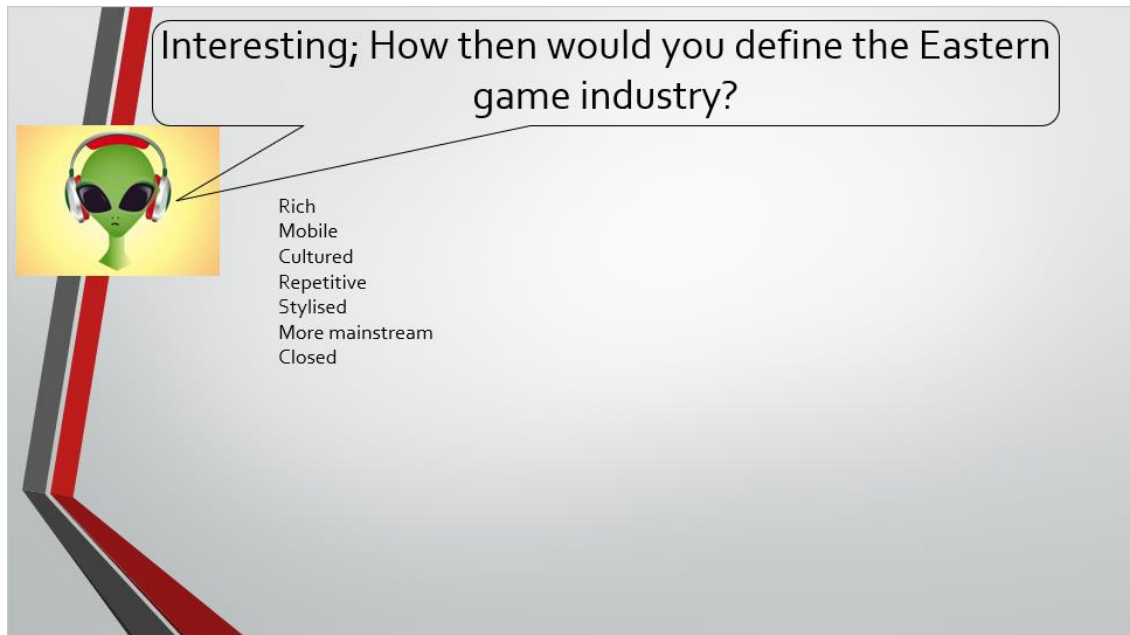
Notable factors: Part of a gaming academic and developer meetup and talk at Launch Conference

Brief Overview:

- The subjects in this session submitted every answer and conclusion in one go after deliberation among themselves. This was in a causal setting away from the talks and any distractions.
- The subjects understood the topic and quickly completed the map task with no issues.
- There was a lot of interest in the point of the study and the results that the session would produce, the subjects were taking the group very seriously.

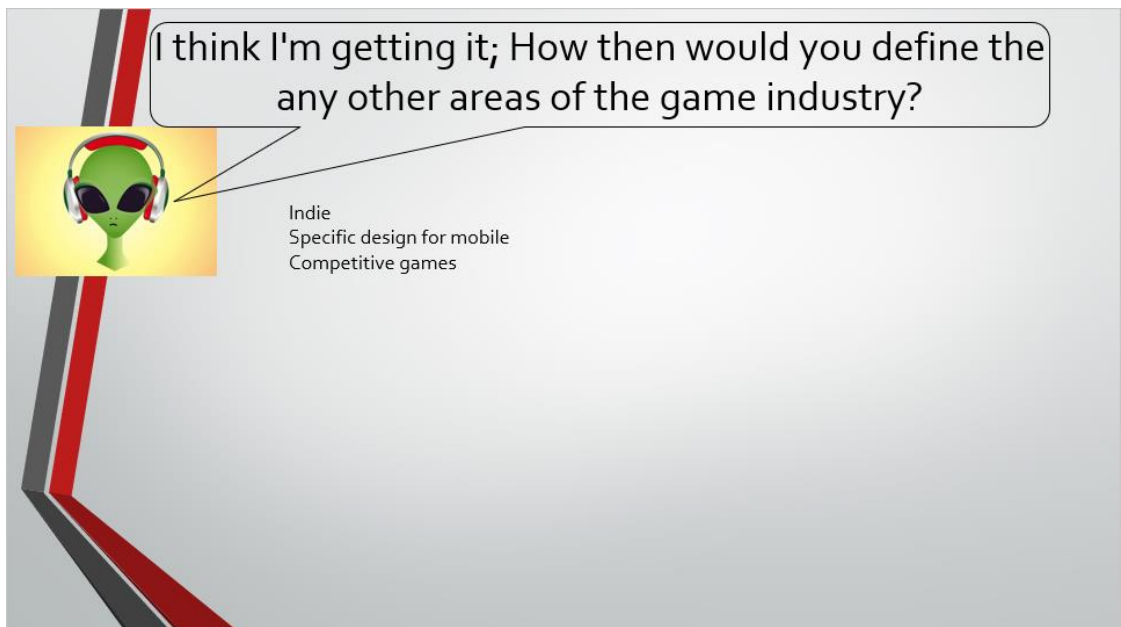


The discussions started on negative perceptions but quickly became more mixed. The subjects talked about an industry which is trying to get as much as it can out of consumers and some methods used to do this. The corporate nature of the industry was a big problem for the subjects. No video games were mentioned, and no regions or places were talked about either.



Unlike the previous discussion, the subjects made up a mindset that the East was Japanese based and used this as a base for their points, using descriptions such as ‘stylised’ and ‘cultured’. The conversation was more positive and focused on what good the industry is perceived to give but also how it is stuck in the past due to its closed off development. Only one game was mentioned due to its cultural relevance in coming to the West.

- Final Fantasy 7



The subjects were confused as to what this area would be and spent a while looping small discussions. They settled on the concept that this area would be indie focused with alternate design methods being relegated to regions outside of East and West. Outside of

this concluding point no real discussion about the topic took place other than to contemplate the concept of other areas in the industry and what it could mean for them as European developers. No video games were mentioned.

Observations:

- While the subjects had clear views of the topic, they were so fixed on an East/West split that a new area concept was extremely foreign to them and therefore hard to discuss.
- The session went well but the subjects seemed to be more concerned with being “correct” rather than coming up with their own conclusions.
- The lack of games mentioned or referenced was a surprise given the amount of industry discussion.

Conclusions:

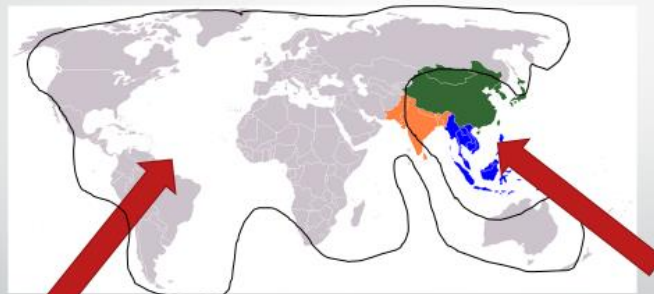
- West is corporate and focused on making products that get money in through mass appeal. This is viewed poorly and creates a sense of prejudice.
- East is better than West due to its differences which are more appealing. This is due to more use of the good points of Japanese culture despite it being perceived as a closed-off industry.
- Other areas are viewed as separate from the mainstream, in this case independent gaming and other methods of play.
- Despite limited answers, they still line up partially with hypotheses.

Appendix B: Supporting Study: Presentation to focus groups

"Game Culture" and why is it important

Understanding Game Culture is not a simple thing

Culture is too varied to be completely defined; it has implications for how video games are studied and is connected with how culture is studied more broadly.



This is "Western"?

This is "Eastern"?

Terminology?



Stjepan Meštrović (*Balkanization of the West: The Confluence of Postmodernism and Postcommunism*) defined this split.

Included Russia until....

Felicitas Macgichrist (*Metaphorical politics: Is Russia western?*) showed otherwise.

You have heard of this even if you don't think you have!

They talk about it
ALL THE TIME!



How does this apply to the players then?

Hardcore Gamer?

Casual Gamer?

Gamer Girl?

Game Addict?

Any others you can think of?

Is this right?



TL;DR?

"In the end, it's about gamers upset with the status quo and demanding something better. It's about a group of consumers and enthusiasts not simply feeling that their identity is threatened, but believing that they're being poorly represented by an industry and press that grow more and more cliquish and remote every year. And it's about the ad hoc, messy series of uncoordinated events that got us here."

Remember, regardless of culture; everyone should have the right to enjoy gaming!



Lets start easy; How would you define the Western game industry?



Interesting; How then would you define the Eastern game industry?



I think I'm getting it; How then would you define any other areas of the game industry?



What to take away

"Unpacking the discourses surrounding "video game culture" allows us to see the power dynamics involved in attributing certain characteristics to it, as well as naming it "video game culture" as such."

A. Shaw (2010)

- You WILL encounter it
 - You WILL have to make changes for it
 - You CANNOT ignore it
- You can stay on top of this stuff!
- Keep up to date on gaming news (not just about games)
 - Talk to peers about it (like today)
 - Get involved
 - PLAY LOTS OF GAMES!



Appendix C: Main Study: Video Game Data, Regional Designation, Code Words and Netnographic Notes

	Video Game Title	Year	Developer	Developer Location	Genre(s)	Average Review Score	Engagement (Hours)	Cultural Code Words	PM	MP	MC	CM	CP	PC	Geo-Designation	Netnographic Notes
1	Agar.io	2015	Miniclip	Switzerland	MMO	60	10	addicting, frustrating, stupid fun, repetitive, dull							European	Made popular by youtubers etc Signalled the beginning of the "Battle Royal" craze Very simple but very addictive to play "memeable"
2	Alien Isolation	2014	Creative Assembly	United Kingdom	Survival Horror	81	15	Haunting, upsetting, full of fear, cinematic, captivating, faithful, edge of my seat							European	Actually scary horror game Faithful to the Alien series Raised the bar of horror games to follow Won lots of awards but did not sell well
3	Animal Crossing: New leaf	2013	Nintendo	Japan	Simulation	88	25	Charming, noob friendly, feel-good, magical, addictive, repetitive							Eastern	Relaxing game to play but a large time sink Sold well around the world Updated the Animal Crossing formula and gave way to Nintendo phone games
4	Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag	2013	Ubisoft Montreal	Canada	Action-Adventure	88	30	Pirates, Gorgeous, Reinvigorating, Improved, solid, expansive							Western	Considered the best Assassin's Creed game when it came out Was a return to form for the series which it sorely needed Fully embraced the good points of AC3, including ship battles Open world direction combined with Pirates was fun PETA were mad about whaling in the game
5	Assassin's Creed Rogue	2014	Ubisoft Sofia	Bulgaria	Action-Adventure	72	15	Lacking, fan pleasing, recycled, swansong, enjoyable, challenging							European	OK enough assassin's creed game which flipped the formula Felt like Assassin's Creed 4 DLC Multiplayer cut which made the game feel lacking Filler for Assassin's Creed Unity not being on PS3/Xbox 360

6	Assassin's Creed Syndicate	2015	Ubisoft Quebec	Canada	Action-Adventure	75	25	Fantastic, gorgeous, a lot of fun, tired formula, solid fundamentals, attention grabbing, british								Western	New systems such as the grappling hook helped the game lots Formula really starting to show its age here Story/characters better, gameplay takes a hit Improvement but something needs to change
7	Assassin's Creed Unity	2014	Ubisoft Montreal	Canada	Action-Adventure	70	25	nice setting, enjoyable enough, picture perfect, tarnished, problematic, improved,								Western	Ambitious game but suffered from lots of in game and IRL issues No female animations was a mess and received poorly Co-op was good in theory but falls short In-game purchases blocked in game content which ruined player experience
8	Awesomenauts	2012	Ronimo Games	Netherlands	MOBA	78	10	Potential, complex, factor of addictiveness, clever mix, visually interesting, hilarious, relaxing								European	Babies first MOBA, easier to play compared to more hardcore games Free-to-play switch gathered a lot of attention and players
9	Batman: Arkham Knight	2015	Rocksteady Studios	United Kingdom	Action-Adventure	87	25	Time well spent, beautiful, stunning, empowering, impactful, smart, grand, loses focus								European	Perfect end to the Arkham series Batmobile was an interesting inclusion but was not that well received PC version was poor and took a while to be fixed Fastest selling game of the series
10	Batman: Arkham VR	2016	Rocksteady Studios	United Kingdom	Adventure	74	5	Experience, immersive, potential, cool, short, expensive, shallow								European	VR game made to grab the casual players, did not do as well as expected One of the best VR games but not liked due to its short game time and ease. Biggest selling VR game in 2017 for Europe.

11	Battleborn	2016	Gearbox Software	United States	FPS	68	10	Inoffensive, unfulfilling, confusing, witty, samey, frantic,							Western	Not a bad game but completely overshadowed by Overwatch Not beginner friendly, this hurt first impressions Lots of gated content Confusing genre, FPS which wanted to be a MOBA
12	Battlefield 1	2016	EA DICE	Sweden	FPS	89	15	Lots of charisma, refreshing, stirring, epic scale, tweaked, surprisingly deep							European	Surprisingly good despite the return to the WW era Fixed a lot of issues from past BF games WW1 gained interest after this games release (over WW2) No Women in the game (Realism argument) caused problems around release
13	Battlefield 4	2013	EA DICE	Sweden	FPS	85	20	Solid, interesting, technically impressive, true battlefield game, satisfying, buggy,							European	Enjoyable but suffered from a lot of problems at launch Very team based within a team, squad play was more at the forefront Single player was just OK LOTS of DLC and a premium pass
14	Bayonetta 2	2014	PlatinumGames	Japan	Hack 'n' Slash	92	10	crazy, sexual, high level, stylish, must have, ridiculous							Eastern	Came out on WiiU and received critical acclaim Improved over original, puts Bayo in Nintendo's sights Online stuff was cool but didn't go anywhere Touch screen controls were meh
15	Beyond: Two Souls	2013	Quantic Dream	France	Adventure	72	10	Shallow, controversial, dividing, weak, emotional, cinematic, visually impressive							European	Amazing looking and acting but barely a game Lots of dead ends and passive gameplay Sharing choices is interesting but flawed Inconsistent all around

16	Bioshock Infinite	2013	Irrational Games	United States	FPS	94	20	Visionary, Triumph of artistry, important, evolved, polished, limited, potential, problematic							Western	Turned heads with its odd story and interesting setting, made players re-think the way they tell stories in FPS Cited as the top3 best games in 2013 FPS gameplay the lowest point, good but pales compared to what the game achieves LOTS of racist themes and cult like religious commentary caused online arguments. Violence was also discussed but not as much
17	Block N Load	2015	Jagex	United Kingdom	FPS	72	10	innovative, variety, tactical, carnage, smile generating, bad pacing, weird							European	Made to grab some of the Minecraft crowd and it shows Focus on co-op building over shooting but shooting is still vital to play Tries to be funny but comes off weird
18	Bloodborne	2015	FromSoftware	Japan	Action Role Playing	92	20	Unrelenting, brutal, dank, bloody, frustrating, creative, precision, challenging							Eastern	The best version of the souls series Still hard as hell but focus on combat and attack helps the difficulty Won lots of awards and cause a large stir online with some rating it one of the best games ever
19	Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel	2014	2K Australia	Australia	Role Playing Shooter	75	20	Fantastic, funny, wacky, expanding, fan service, more of the same, predictable, copy							Western	Fills in a lot of holes in the Borderlands series Fun game but felt like BL2 DLC, lot of people felt cheated Still funny but more in humour than anything else Playing with friends still the most fun that can be had with this series
20	Bravely Default	2012	Silicon Studio	Japan	RPG	85	40	Overwhelming, worth playing, quintessential JRPG, immersive, nostalgic, special,							Eastern	FF game but not, a lot of players agreed Dev's looked at western influences during production, kinda shows Thought to be one of the best 3Ds games in 2013/14; players agreed Showed Square Enix that they can expand beyond the FF series
21	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	2007	Infinity Ward	United States	FPS	92	40	Solid, quality, addictive, intense, relentless, whole package, cutting edge, fast							Western	Set the standard for FPS games and took the genre past the WW2 era Widely regarded as one of the most influential FPS games ever made Top selling game for 2 years, universal praise, industry standard set Started the trend of fast paced multiplayer and shocking single players gameplay choices

22	Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare	2014	Sledgehammer Games	United States	FPS	83	30	Strong, refreshing, entertaining, smooth, lives up, innovation, premiere, predictable							Western	Like CoD4 this game pushed the series forward Single player had a lot of love put into it with actors etc Players liked the new setting, well received all around Won a lot of awards, Even nominated for esports awards
23	Call of Duty: Black Ops 3	2015	Treyarch	United States	FPS	81	20	Fantastic, outstanding, thought provoking, big, variety, step forward, deep, routine, not meaningful,							Western	Longer dev time compared to other CoD games, more content Players and online liked the amount of content but did nothing for the series CoD/FPS fatigue has set in here
24	Call of Duty: Ghosts	2013	Infinity Ward	United States	FPS	71	15	Tiresome, more of the same, still fun, by the numbers, Story driven, linear, tweaked gameplay							Western	Focus was on multiplayer; single player was not great. Campaign ending was a let down New online modes were fun but didn't hold interest Did little to make the CoD series interesting again Sales were down over CoD Black Ops 2
25	Candy Crush Saga	2012	King	United Kingdom	Puzzle	79	15	Challenging, tempting, charming, simple fun, addictive, massive hit							European	Figurehead of F2p games and set standard for them King seen as exploiting gamers with in game purchases Tried to copyright "Candy", backlash stopped this Got copyright on "Saga", more backlash

26	Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker	2014	Nintendo	Japan	Puzzle	81	10	Joyous, fun, amazing design, original, beautiful, charming, little, not long								Eastern	Unexpected but sweet spin off puzzle game Fans loved it, but average players hated the shortness of the game Actually used the WiiU pad well Price was an issue, game is good but overpriced
27	Chronicle: RuneScape Legends	2016	Jagex	United Kingdom	Card Game	76	50	Refreshing, addictive, easy, random, predictable, different								European	Card game based on RuneScape, planned to be a part of the MMO Had a strong start due to interesting concept but fell off fast due to lack of market understanding Did not release on mobile despite many players wanting it, shown to be mistake to ignore this Servers shut down in 2018 due to dwindling player base
28	Civilization VI	2016	Firaxis Games	United States	Strategy	88	10	Complex, addictive, masterpiece, sophisticated, challenging, unappealing								Western	Newest in a long running and prestigious series, well received again Won every award for strategy games in 2016, improved the formula but removed aspects from the game that annoyed some Surpassed previous titles sales, release on a Nintendo platform helped
29	Clash Royale	2016	Supercell	Finland	Strategy	86	15	Satisfying, trailblazing, tweaked, very good, accessible, grinding,								European	Solid phone game let down by a lot of in game purchases Competitive but also co-op was liked by many Trying to be an eSport, liked by a lot of players Won awards for esports and best game (google Play)

30	Code Name S.T.E.A.M.	2015	Intelligent Systems	Japan	Strategy	69	15	Sophisticated, brilliant, new, challenging, lack of attention, drawn out, dull, mundane								Eastern	Interesting game but failed to grab players Genre was not improved on, just another strategy game Sold poorly around the world and forgotten fast Most players don't even know it has online play
31	Counter Strike: Global Offensive	2012	Valve Corporation	United States	FPS	83	60	Classic, true to itself, hardcore, near perfect, fair, competitive, good, legacy,								Western	The esports game for FPS for a long time Game has a lot of in game purchases which caused annoyance CSGO Gambling skins became a huge problem, caused new laws to come into effect Balance issues have plagued the game due to online moaning
32	Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy	2017	Vicarious Visions	United States	Platformer	80	25	Wonderful, a gift, cohesive, frustrating, nostalgic, hard, beautiful,								Western	Remake of old classics that was requested for a while Started a trend of more requesting remakes due to its good reception Called the Dark Souls of platformers, turned into a meme Devs looked at the community for feedback during dev'ing time
33	Cuphead	2017	StudioMDHR	United States	Shooter	88	15	Beautiful, inspiring, charming, piece of art, challenging, unique, punishing, quality								Western	Hand drawn game caused a lot of positive stir Difficulty was noted and memed online Music was outstanding and got a lot of players looking to jazz Raised the bar for indie games by miles
34	Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc	2010	Spike Chunsoft	Japan	Visual Novel	80	25	Unsettling, gripping, exceptional, unique, heavy, shocking, convoluted, patience								Eastern	Game opened up players to the genre Spawned an anime, other games etc Violence and gore made the game a hit online and memeable

35	Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair	2012	Spike Chunsoft	Japan	Visual Novel	81	30	Refined, disturbing, smart, dark, ridiculous, improved, disturbing, bizarre, slow							Eastern	Got more attention due to the previous game Higher scored but less attention due to setting and darker tone Plot confused many, took an anime to explain Quickly forgotten by online players for other Danganronpa media
36	Dark Souls 2	2014	FromSoftware	Japan	Action Role Playing	91	25	Enthralling, intense, adventure, tough, grand, challenging, unique,							Eastern	Noted for its improvement to the series and cementing the devs in the industry Difficulty became a meme, used a lot online Very popular, played for a long time and used as a standard in game reviews
37	Dark Souls 3	2016	FromSoftware	Japan	Action Role Playing	89	20	Nostalgic, epic, sadness, accessible, polished, beautiful, intense, enthralling							Eastern	Final game in the souls series due to devs wanting to move on Fastest selling game from Bandai Easier than before which annoyed some players but allowed for a bigger audience Western release was filled with issues, Eastern was fine?
38	Dead Island: Riptide	2013	Techland	Poland	Action Role Playing	61	10	Easier, dumb fun, buggy, forgettable, accurate, quite entertaining, frustrating							European	Same game again, didn't change much or add anything new Marketing was a joke and the female torso was gross Game is fun but it is dumb repetitive fun to be played with friends and that's it
39	Dead Space	2008	Visceral Games	United States	Survival Horror	86	15	Appealing, Shocking, claustrophobic, refreshing, gory, solid, distinctive,							Western	Fresh air for the horror genre, gameplay twist Popular when it came out but more popular after the sequels Brought the horror genre to the forefront of the industry, jump scares used from this
40	Dead Space 2	2011	Visceral Games	United States	Survival Horror	87	15	Shocking, great, polished, frightening, blockbuster, fresh, thrilling, tense							Western	Added more to the same formula, multiplayer etc Main Character talks now, caused some stir but it was ok Your mum hates dead space 2, caused debate but mostly just funny Violence in games issue raised from this

41	Dead Space 3	2013	Visceral Games	United States	Survival Horror	78	15	Strong atmosphere, polished, gory, average, more action, less scary							Western	Less scary for more action which was a big let down for fans Kept everything from before but added co-op, was ok More action was due to the trends of the time Did not sell as well as expected but its release made players look back at the previous games
42	Deadpool	2013	High Moon Studios	United States	Hack 'n' Slash	63	10	Decent, rough, fan service, expensive, repetitive, lacks quality, average							Western	Pure fan service Memed a lot but not liked due to the price tag Fun but dumb Deadpool came back into focus a bit due to this game
43	Destiny	2014	Bungie	United States	Role Playing Shooter	76	100+	Rich, addictive, hooked, art, satisfying, epic, safe, messy, shallow							Western	Massive game which was hyped but suffered a little Made players look at pre release info more clearly after this DLC fixed a lot of the games problems and increased score/playerbase Revealed score = better pay clause in the industry, lots of backlash for it
44	Destiny 2	2017	Bungie	United States	Role Playing Shooter	85	100+	Epic, accomplished, richness, huge, addictive, evolved, polished, grinding, fixed, well crafted							Western	Improved over previous game, hype the same Join with Blizzard which was a strong move but delayed launch Characters did not transfer over which was a huge issue Sold well and set a standard for online fps play again w/ blizzard
45	Dirt 4	2017	Codemasters	United Kingdom	Racing	85	10	Tough, feel, challenging, accessible, precise, sophisticated, improved, speed,							European	Great racing game, did well with fanbase Including online leagues and teams with friends was a great touch Kind of broke the trend with inaccessible racing game sims

46	Disney Infinity	2013	Avalanche Software	United States	Action-Adventure	75	10	Safe, young, kiddy, family, expensive, predatory								Western	Disney's version of the toys to life genre, very expensive to play fully OK game, good figures but didn't add much to the genre, fun to play Game was cancelled in 2016 for unknown reasons
47	Dissidia Final Fantasy NT	2018	Team Ninja	Japan	Fighting	67	10	Bustling, fun, slick, fan service, chaotic, flawed, different, Steep learning curve								Eastern	Game tried to force an esports angle, didn't quite work Fan service overdrive 3v3 but no local inclusion is odd Overhyped by many, much let-down on release
48	DmC: Devil May Cry	2013	Ninja Theory	United Kingdom	Hack 'n' Slash	85	10	Solid, staggering, wild, darker, compelling, attitude, flawed								European	Dev'd in the UK but heavy influence from capcom Japan Death threats over the remake of the game and characters Liked by reviewers, hated by fans for redesign mostly Mixed development gave the game a mixed tone which some say is good/bad
49	Doki Doki Literature Club!	2017	Team Salvato	United States	Visual Novel	78	5	Scary, sad, intentionally insufferable, shocking, surprising,								Western	Surprise hit of 2017, gained a cult following Scary and 4th wall breaking taken to extremes which started discussions Raised the bar for indie game storytelling and visual novel impact
50	Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze	2014	Retro Studios	United States	Platformer	83	10	Care, quality, solid, simplicity, classic, safe, challenging, bubbly,								Eastern	Strong game which gave the WiiU more life Not wanted but liked by fans, deemed a successful remake however Reviewed well but cited hard gameplay, Players brushed this off as Old-School hard "Funky mode" was a way to make the game accessible
51	Dragonball FighterZ	2018	Arc System Works	Japan	Fighting	87	50	near-perfect, amusing, intense, accessible, complex, frantic, essential, pretty, cool								Eastern	Massively successful, faithful and loved by fans. Best DBZ game ever Top amount of Steam users playing a fighting game Made it into EVO etc with ease, killed other fighting games

56	Evolve	2015	Turtle Rock Studios	United States	FPS	77	5	Gimmicky, interesting, beautiful, solid, frantic, grind, niche, thrilling							Western	Positive reception due to concept but failed on release Devs abused DLC and started a discussion about this type of DLC, this killed the game Tried to brute force esports but this also failed Went f2p but could not save itself
57	Far Cry 4	2014	Ubisoft Montreal	Canada	FPS	80	15	Entertaining, huge, open, potential, stale, shallow, beautiful, polished							Western	Had a lot to live up to due to Far Cry 3, kind of did it Multiplayer was skippable, players didn't see the point Started to wear on players, Ubisoft mechanics meme was born (Watch towers in every game etc) Less ambition in the game, feels like a yearly release title
58	Fifa 17	2016	EA	Canada	Sports	85	5	Experience, evolution, change, rewarding, unique, safe, outclassed							Western	Newest version of the FIFA series, included a single player for the first time, used frostbite engine for the first time (DICE) Noted for keeping things the same but with a bigger focus on the single player mode as another way to play Included in the microtransactions debate, not as much as other titles
59	FIFA 18	2017	EA	Canada	Sports	84	5	Relatable, realistic, solid, balanced, emotionless, progress							Western	Newest version of the FIFA Series, continued the single player Nothing much new apart from the story mode Contained a lot of bugs and problems with microtransactions after release, made it a bigger target in the investigation into look boxes
60	Final Fantasy Explorers	2016	Square Enix	Japan	RPG	69	15	Exciting, flawed, adventure, repetition, freedom, fun, shallow,							Eastern	FF's attempt to be a new Monster Hunter, received ok Came out, reviewed ok, fell off the radar Multiplayer feels like a formality rather than a solid add on

61	Final Fantasy IX	2000	Square Enix	Japan	RPG	92	40	Triumph, improved, pleasant, cliché, solid, memorable, masterpiece,							Eastern	Played the iOS release, better port then expected, fans pleased Full of tropes/clichés but it worked to get nostalgic audience Showed that the traditional RPG formula/setting can still be strong and used Tetra Master (In game game) seen as way too complex, failed spin off attempt
62	Final Fantasy Type-0 HD	2015	Square Enix	Japan	RPG	72	15	Authentic, challenging, engaging, balanced, interesting, gritty, dynamic, departure, clunky							Eastern	A HD remake of a PSP title, well received but the mechanics were behind the time A lot of players bought the game for the Demo of FF15 Despite selling well, fell off the radar quickly
63	Final Fantasy V	1992	Square Enix	Japan	RPG	77	20	Dated, strong, appealing, long, weak, tropes,							Eastern	Played on PC re-release, downgrade in graphics and sound fx Caused the FF series to begin to change due to mixed reviews One of the most forgotten FF games
64	Final Fantasy VI	1994	Square Enix	Japan	RPG	91	25	Bold, sublime, must have, humongous, fascinating, classic, worth							Eastern	Played the iOS release, down grade in graphics and some audio issues Still one of the best RPG's of all time, remake liked by fans Solidified the trend of bringing more RPG's to handheld phones
65	Final Fantasy VII	1997	Square Enix	Japan	RPG	92	100+	Flawless, must buy, depth, engrossing, apex in RPG's, amazing, dark, incoherent							Eastern	Played the mobile release, contained micro transactions which annoyed fans, negative reactions like PC release Dragged RPG's into 3D in a big way, has one of the biggest fanbases ever Multiple games/films to expand lore, showed other games what do/not do Music critically acclaimed (Classic FM etc), Remake (2015) caused massive uproar

66	Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn	2013	Square Enix	Japan	MMORPG	83	100+	Addictive, satisfying, triumph, polished, fan service, gorgeous, miracle, vivid, strong								Eastern	Redo of a older MMO which failed in a massive way, Much better MMO to stand up to WoW etc, achievement showed that top MMOs could be contested High user satisfaction, faithful to FF series but still solid MMO
67	Final Fantasy XV	2016	Square Enix	Japan	RPG	85	90	Thematic depth, meaningful, flair, charming, touching, beautiful, cinematic, divisive, unfocussed								Eastern	Lots of hype, kind of met it Players concerned about male dominance (Cindy etc), died down after release Realistic style credited to western influence along with DLC topping off the storylines Added multiplayer to a single player game, went down very well
68	Firewatch	2016	Campo Santo	United States	Adventure	76	5	Slightly, serious, story driven, intriguing, simple, dividing, brief,								Western	Short but sweet adventure game, choices don't change much Caused a debate about price to gameplay time (\$20 game for 3-5 hours of gameplay) Continued a trend of indie titles starting to be turned into movies
69	Five Nights at Freddy's	2014	Scott Cawthon	United States	Survival Horror	78	5	Entertaining, done right, horror, clever, scary, terror, simple, repetitive								Western	New type of horror, simple yet scary Started a new wave of indie games coming to the public eye Massively popular, youtuber fame boost, movie deal, Books etc
70	Five Nights at Freddy's 2	2014	Scott Cawthon	United States	Survival Horror	62	5	Personality, punishing, harmful, for youtubers, over-saturation, cheap								Western	Added more lore and mechanics but it made the game bloated Much harder, difficult to just play which turned a lot of new fans away Cited as a youtuber game, began a discussion about games being made for youtubers to advertise
71	Five Nights at Freddy's 3	2015	Scott Cawthon	United States	Survival Horror	68	5	Eerie, terrifying, tense, stressful, history, curious,								Western	Changed the formula to be more scary, worked but made the game more complicated Opposite of a youtuber game, not fun to watch Increased the lore of the series and began to add secrets in the game to collect Jump scare formula starting to become stale here

72	Five Nights at Freddy's 4	2015	Scott Cawthon	United States	Survival Horror	51	5	Different, loud, uneasy, variety, fear, poor, mediocrity, YouTube game							Western	Scariest game in the series so far, changing locations and visuals and more lore Became a youtuber game again, lacking substance, caused a debate over how to produce indie games VERY complicated to play, luck based in places Started the box meme off, never revealed (as of 2018)
73	Five Nights at Freddy's: Sister Location	2016	Scott Cawthon	United States	Survival Horror	62	5	Fantastic, frustrating, polish, lacks tension, reaching, no risks							Western	More based on narrative than gameplay, more lore into the world Best game technically to date but no real gameplay Started a few memes (Exotic Butters etc) but fell of the radar very quickly
74	Flappy Bird	2013	dotGEARS	Vietnam	Arcade	52	5	Obsessive, simple, small, time waster, shallow,							Eastern	Very simple game made cheaply using reused assets Caused massive debate over the state of current video games Most downloaded app, had to be removed due to addictive players Started lots of talks about game design, indie games and app store regulations
75	FNaF World	2016	Scott Cawthon	United States	RPG	50	5	Retro, parody, incomplete, rubbish, not interesting,							Western	Attempt to catch players/fans off guard but failed Popular FNaF players did not play the game due to it being bad/long/poorly made Could of possibly killed the series, game being free and patchable saved it a little
76	For Honor	2017	Ubisoft Montreal	Canada	Fighting	78	10	Hybrid, entertaining, sturdy, flawed, smart, demanding, beautiful, rough							Western	Interesting fighting game but suffered from a lot of issues on launch Single player was meh, esports/multiplayer focused Game was a mess, esports play was filled with exploits (World champ asked to keep bugs in so he could win again!)

77	Fortnite: Battle Royale	2017	Epic Games	United States	Battle Royale	79	100+	Simple, perfected, creative, engaging, promise, impersonal, commitment							Western	Knocked PUBG off the top spot on twitch etc Simple game, free, microtransactions change everyday Easy to watch and understand at a base level, easier to engage with Showing no signs of losing any popularity, new face of games (as of 2018)
78	Foul Play	2013	Mediatonic	United Kingdom	Beat 'em up	69	5	Sense of humor, cool, energetic, diverse, likeable, linear, simple							European	Simple beat em up punching above its weight due to style and gameplay Put devs in the spotlight and used to fund more games
79	Freddy Fazbear's Pizzeria Simulator	2016	Scott Cawthon	United States	Survival Horror	74	5	Stitched together, different, blended, spooky, evolution, value							Western	Became a horror/tycoon game, big bait for new fans/audience More story for the series and new mechanics, well received by fans Followed trend of circumventing genres in games Return to form after previous title (World)
80	FTL: Faster Than Light	2012	Subset Games	United States	Strategy	84	20	Amazing, addictive, original, rewarding, old school difficulty, inventive, simple							Western	Rouge like game caught a lot of people off guard by how good it was Played on the mobile version, upgraded port sold well, used to fund other games Kickstarter success story, set a standard for KS games
81	Goat Simulator	2014	Coffee Stain Studios	Sweden	Simulation	62	5	Stupid, manic fun, simple, ridiculous, hilarious, novelty, dumb, crappy.							European	Made as a joke game, made popular via youtubers (PewDiePie etc), first youtuber/YouTube bait games Game is bad and buggy, but it is funny and has co-op so a lot of people gave it a pass Started a debate about youtuber games and quality control in games
82	Grand Theft Auto V	2013	Rockstar North	United Kingdom	Action-Adventure	95	30	New perspective, impactful, important, essential, amazing, raised the bar, replayable, alarming							European	Loved by many despite the controversial nature of the series Online was bad to start but improved Started the trend of in-game purchases Highest rated game in 2013 Won a stupid amount of awards from GotY to VA to Artistic design

83	Guild Wars 2	2012	ArenaNet	United States	MMORPG	90	70	Gigantic, wonderful, ambitious, fresh, innovative, beautiful, slick, refined,							Western	Played the release of Heart of Thorns, brought a lot interest back to the game 1 off payment for full game, no fees, gameplay more like a single player game than an MMO Raised the bar for MMO's and opened the door for more MMO's to come into the market
84	Halo Wars 2	2017	Creative Assembly	United Kingdom	RTS	70	10	Solid, fast, fan service, easy, competent, too classic, lack of depth, console focused, average							European	Additional Halo universe content, same game again with new card game/co-op gameplay Reviewed well but fell off the radar, microtransactions could have had something to do with it Cross play was included post release even though both versions released at the same time
85	Hand of Fate	2015	Defiant Development	Australia	RPG	78	5	Gratifying, innovative, polished, hidden treasure, challenging, clever, repetitive, easy							Western	Kickstarter funded game, success story game Funded a physical version, devs using funds to make more games Reviewed well online, followed the card game boom from 2014
86	Hatoful Boyfriend	2014	Mediatonic	United Kingdom	Dating Sim	68	5	Memorable, interesting, stupid, charming, absurd, unexpected, surreal, joke							Eastern	Played the HD remake with some changes The concept was so bizarre it gained attention from that Started debate on how far games could push a stupid concept
87	Hearthstone	2014	Blizzard	United States	Card Game	88	100+	Friendly, vibrant, easy, balanced, deep, addictive, irresistible, accessible							Western	Started the card game boon, lots of games tried to include small games like this Created its own esports section, balanced being fun to watch and interesting to play Memes, designs and dev were all created from this game Set a high standard for f2p titles

88	Heroes of the Storm	2015	Blizzard	United States	MOBA	86	100+	Depth, accessible, fun, exceptional, grinding, easy, casual-competitive, solid,								Western	A MOBA that was able to force a niche between DOTA and LoL, opens other games to do the same Showed that accessibility was a key aspect to draw in players Lots of eSport support, some balance disputes due to this from release
89	Hitman GO	2014	Square Enix Montreal	Canada	Puzzle	81	5	Fun, unique, smart, clean aesthetic, elegant, challenging,								Western	Different take on a Hitman game, puzzle phone title was a surprise Started a trend of titles coming to mobile Showed that devs could mess with the genre of an established game series as long as the result was of good quality
90	HuniePop	2015	HuniePot	United States	Dating Sim	79	10	Shocking, good, pornographic, addictive, pervy, deep,								Western	Kickstarter funded game, punched above its weight due to concept One of the first games banned on Twitch, youtuber effect backfired Started a debate on what could be suitable in a puzzle game and censorship in streaming
91	Hyrule Warriors	2014	Team Ninja	Japan	Hack 'n' Slash	76	10	Action packed, fun, addictive, promising, surprising, fan service, nostalgic, repetitive								Eastern	Surprising mix of franchise and genre which worked well Multiplayer was a joke, lots of bad press because of it Very like/hate game based on gameplay style (DW based) Linkle character raised debate, female Link discussions, stopped after release
92	I am Bread	2015	Bossa Studios	United Kingdom	Action-Adventure	60	5	Comedy, attitude, funny, crazy, clumsy, shallow, unique, silly, nonsense								European	Made for YouTube, gameplay is bizarre, funny to watch others play Made a continuing case for games to be carried on a stupid concept Co-op mode felt added on, made again for rage/reaction material

93	Infamous Second Son	2014	Sucker Punch Productions	United States	Action-Adventure	80	20	Memorable, fun, satisfying, superior, stylish, beautiful, impressive, safe, light							Western	Devs worked close next to dev of the PS4, designed to take advantage of hardware Tried to be a system seller, kind of was due to graphics and story elements Showed the ageing open world/sandbox formula, raised discussions on how to improve this
94	Injustice 2	2017	NetherRealm Studios	United States	Fighting	87	10	Addictive, stellar, kinetic, absorbing, beautiful, approachable, solid, strong							Western	Sequel better than the first game, everything improved and universe explored better Won a lot of awards, got a lot of consumers looking to fighting games again Microtransactions caused an issue before launch, confusing and needlessly exploitive
95	Inside	2016	Playdead	Denmark	Puzzle	91	5	Unrelenting, weird, unusual, special, beautiful, bleak, dark, clever, haunting							European	Next game from devs after Limbo another game with a weird premise Made to make players think about and discuss, youtuber content due to this Part of the argument for games to be considered art
96	J-Stars Victory VS	2014	Spike Chunsoft	Japan	Fighting	61	10	Joy, fun, not original, limited, tribute, otaku, mess, heart, fan service							Eastern	Average fighting game based on shonen anime/manga, large fan service A lot of hype from fans but died off fast Largest AAA roster for an anime fighting game so far
97	Killer Instinct	2013	Double Helix Games	United States	Fighting	73	10	Addictive, brutal, interesting, incomplete, limited,							Western	F2p launch title for Xbox One, released with only 1 character available, had to pay to unlock more, included season bundle Players did not like the releases system, started a debate on if this type of dev was ok Picked up as an eSport quickly, did not get the numbers expected but did well enough

98	Killing Floor 2	2016	Tripwire Interactive	United States	FPS	75	15	Crazy, refined, challenging, bloody, solid, fun, violent, havoc, hollow,								Western	Game built off of the first one's profits, allowed for more dev time/quality Ages in early access with microtransactions, continuing trend Design formula pushed the limit, outdated at this point
99	Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 Remix	2013	Square Enix	Japan	Action Role Playing	77	100+	Magical, masterful, beautiful, solid, memorable, value, nostalgia,								Eastern	Compilation of 3 games in HD with achievement support Made to tide fans over for the 3rd title, obviously so Continuing trend of HD remakes becoming the main versions to play
100	Kingdom Hearts HD 2.5 Remix	2014	Square Enix	Japan	Action Role Playing	81	100+	Beloved, complete, stellar, fun, quality, nostalgia, value, faithful, complicated								Eastern	2nd HD collection due to positive fan response to first game Included the final versions of all the KH games, much love in the west Contained hints as a bonus for another game, incentive to buy
101	Kingdom Hearts HD 2.8 Final Chapter Prologue	2017	Square Enix	Japan	Action Role Playing	76	40	Bridging, polished, stunning, beautiful, high quality, low quantity, faithful, hardcore								Eastern	Final HD collection in the series, mainly purchased or the 2.8 game Criticized for being a short game with other title tacked on Fans loved the game as a proof of concept for KH3
102	Kingdom Hearts: Unchained X	2015	Square Enix	Japan	RPG	70	100+	Satisfying, casual, cool, patience, fun, entertaining,								Eastern	Browser game turned into a phone title due to fan demand Full of the series' lore but gameplay kept other players involved Lots of discussion about locking content behind a mobile game with microtransactions
103	Knack	2013	SIE Japan Studio	Japan	Platformer	54	5	Fun, charm, mediocre, basic, family friendly, interesting, unimaginative								Eastern	Launch title for PS4 that failed, tried to be the new Crash Bandicoot Tech wise the game is amazing, but gameplay suffers Started discussion on tech demo like games and/as launch titles
104	Lara Croft GO	2015	Square Enix Montreal	Canada	Puzzle	83	5	Outstanding, stylish, sharp, tricky, addictive, clever, simple, relaxing								Western	Continuing trend of making games iOS titles in a new genre (After Hitman GO) Won lots of mobile GotY, less discussion than Hitman GO due to the concept being done before Microtransactions caused a bit of complaining but it passed quickly

105	Lego Marvel Super Heroes	2013	Traveller's Tales	United Kingdom	Action-Adventure	83	15	Engaging, casual, replayable, funny, simple, not difficult							European	Good game for Marvel/Lego, brought attention back to those game series All ages gameplay, something for everyone in the game Really funny in places Co-op is actually fun but still focused on a younger audience
106	Lego Marvel Super Heroes 2	2017	Traveller's Tales	United Kingdom	Action-Adventure	73	10	Funny, childlike, enjoyable, safe, classic, diverse, happy, charming, repetitive,							European	Safe sequel, building on the LEGO game formula of funny fanservice etc Affected by the 2016-7 voice actor strike, audio quality noticeably dipped, used as a reasoning for the union Added multiplayer elements, went unnoticed, core game just fun
107	Life Is Strange	2015	Dontnod Entertainment	France	Adventure	83	15	Unique, experience, brilliant, refreshing, heartbreaking, dark, controversial							European	Female lead caused issues with publishers, caused a lot of discussion when the news game out Game touched on taboo subjects (Suicide, social division, abuse etc) with grace and respect not often seen Sold as episodes, no much anger over this Ending was controversial, hated to ok response
108	Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII	2014	Square Enix	Japan	RPG	66	15	Mediocrity, attractive, flawed, emotional, novel, fan service, dynamic							Eastern	Last of a trilogy, messy series and this games systems caused problems Time Travel mechanics are always tricky, caused a lot of discussion Example of unlikely game still selling well, devs happy with game and sales
109	Little Big Planet 3	2014	Sumo Digital	United Kingdom	Platformer	79	10	Wonderful, charming, joy, accessible, bold, creative, imaginative, shallow							European	3rd game in a series, not primarily dev'd by original devs, issues due to this Larger focus on player-built levels and sharing them with friends/online than ever before Short single player and lots of bugs caused a lot of player disappointment

110	Loadout	2014	Edge of Reality	United States	Third Person Shooter	72	5	funny, throwaway, frantic, crude, broken, gratifying							Western	Game tried to be edgy and crude, kinda worked F2p game in the 3rd person, on the end of a dying formula Game shut down due to General Data Protection Regulation
111	Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon	2013	Next Level Games	Canada	Action-Adventure	86	15	Incomparable, accessible, fun, charming, robust, funny, rich,							Eastern	Sequel to a Gamecube classic, loved by a lot of fans Showed devs that old IP's still have a place in modern gaming if done correctly Multiplayer was added, not sure in needed but welcomed by fans
112	Mario & Luigi: Dream Team	2013	AlphaDream	Japan	RPG	81	40	Wonderful, funny, creative, easy, memorable, magic, creative, intrusive,							Eastern	Part of the Mario RPG series which is widely liked Part of the Year of Luigi promotion, focus on Luigi Did its job, liked game, attention dropped off after release
113	Mario & Luigi: Paper Jam	2016	AlphaDream	Japan	RPG	76	30	Important, linear, simple, goofy, quirky, accessible, fun, irritating, novel							Eastern	Cross over in a series, better game than the last games in respective series Did not sell super well, fans burnt out from the series' handholding Series started to show its rough edges here, players noticed
114	Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	2017	AlphaDream	Japan	RPG	81	30	Addictive, humorous, polished, fun, approachable, nostalgic, better, simplistic							Eastern	Remake of the first game in the series with add on game Well received, noticed a lot during e3, add on game was met with confusion and not liked overall Sold well, became the best version of the game, original set the standard for handheld RPGS
115	Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle	2017	Ubisoft Paris	France	Strategy	85	25	Funny, surprise, special, quality, competent, innovative, challenging, amusing, tedious							European	Large surprise and shock when announced, many people confused and doubtful Game did well, changed people's perceptions of genre mashing Lots of support for devs when announced, crying dev started a positive meme Nintendo x Ubisoft became a thing after release

116	Mario Kart 8	2014	Nintendo	Japan	Racing	88	20	Chaotic, smooth, accessible, fun, appealing, beautiful, joy, intense								Eastern	Newest game in a long series, always considered a lot of fun/anger inducing Lots of new crossover characters and mechanics with a revamped online kept players playing Wii U seller, bundled with the console and sold a lot Started Luigi Death Star Meme, used by Nintendo to great effect
117	Marvel vs. Capcom: Infinite	2017	Capcom	Japan	Fighting	72	5	Great, geeky, free, messy, flawed, accessible, ugly, solid,								Eastern	Latest in the MvC series, not liked from the outset due to poor graphics and initial gameplay Demo hurt the game before release, citing bad art direction and VA work Played well on release but DLC, lacking characters (X-Men etc) and bugs have hurt the series Dropped at Evo for Dragonball FighterZ
118	Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance	2013	PlatinumGames	Japan	Action-Adventure	80	5	Innovative, ridiculous, short, beautiful, fresh, disappointing, uninteresting								Eastern	Departure from the normal MGS game, confused fans when revealed Very short but did what it set out to do, gameplay and length split fans The long and over the top name was mocked and turned into a meme Format not due to be repeated again
119	Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes	2014	Kojima Productions	Japan	Action-Adventure	75	5	Good, evolution, short, demo, concerning, fleeting, unjustifiable, solid,								Eastern	Game has high quality but is only a hour long, started a discussion about value for games Sexual violence used as plot device/point and done poorly, extra problem on top of everything else Split community; does length matter if the content is good? Put everything on MGS 5 to be great to make up for this

120	Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain	2015	Kojima Productions	Japan	Action-Adventure	93	30	Gorgeous, perfect, ingenious, creative, impressive, complex, consistent, confusing, solid,								Eastern	Rated as one of the best video games ever, given perfect scores Lead dev (Kojima) left during production, lead to unfinished content, story finished abruptly Characters criticized for being bad or oversexualised (quiet) Caused a discussion around giving games perfect scores
121	Metroid Prime: Federation Force	2016	Next Level Games	Canada	FPS	64	10	Fresh, solid, fun, care, divisive, competent, bland, limiting								Western	Very controversial game when announced due to it having the Metroid name, was not shown again by Nintendo, petitions to get it cancelled Ok game but having the Metroid name gave fans a specific expectation Co-op stuff is fun, single player is strange in tone due to art style and Prime series
122	Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor	2014	Monolith Productions	United States	Action Role Playing	84	10	Solid, surprising, dark, original, ambitious, repetitive,								Western	New concept, caused problems with Ubisoft for reusing assets Only would provide review copies if game was reviewed well, joined the reviewing debates due to this, found to have broken the law Good game but its controversy brought it down, did well commercially,
123	Mighty No. 9	2016	Comcept	Japan	Platformer	52	5	Difficult, identity crisis, overrated, niche, tedious, dull, joyless, insult								Eastern	One of the largest kickstarters ever (\$4 million), did not deliver Game was disappointing and was not liked, caused a discussion around kickstarters not living up to expectations, used as an example of how not to do a KS Publishers made more mistakes in advertising, insulting fans etc
124	Monster Hunter 4 Ultimate	2014	Capcom	Japan	Action Role Playing	86	100+	Compelling, accessible, addictive, fun, satisfying, essential, taxing, adventure								Eastern	Newest in a long running series, called the best in the series so far Dev'd for a Japanese audience but this version was dev'd and localised for westerners Sold well, new mechanics set a standard for the series and game type

125	Monster Hunter Generations	2015	Capcom	Japan	Action Role Playing	85	40	Solid, accessible, incredible, complete, appealing, versatile, fun, niche,								Eastern	Newest in the series, called the best in the series so far New mechanics added to make the game more New special moves divided fans, some liked the change while others felt it went away from the series gameplay draw
126	Monster Hunter Stories	2016	Marvelous	Japan	RPG	79	10	Colourful, easy, innovative, fresh, simple, heart, solid, repetitive								Eastern	Spin on the Monster Hunter Series, gameplay and tone change annoyed a lot of fans Style done to draw in kids, kinda worked Popular enough to get an anime but not enough to get a sequel
127	Monster Hunter: World	2018	Capcom	Japan	Action Role Playing	90	100+	Beautiful, accessible, dynamic, satisfying, thrilling, immersive, rewarding								Eastern	Newest MH game, critical acclaim across the board Capcoms highest selling game ever, much more accessible than before Lots of QoL changes which made the game more appealing Worldwide, worked well
128	Monument Valley	2014	Ustwo Games	United Kingdom	Puzzle	89	5	Beautiful, fascinating, amazing, memorable, artistic, unique,								European	Well-made game which won a lot of awards, new ideas for phone games Used in "House of Cards" to great effect, sales increased and games brought into public eye Set a standard for mobile games in this genre
129	Mortal Kombat X	2015	NetherRealm Studios	United States	Fighting	83	10	Gruesome, fresh, gory, bold, quality, fast, solid, modern, strange								Western	Latest game in a series, fastest selling in the series Cause a stir over the massive and vivid violence in the game, used a lot in "games are bad" arguments Single player was ok, fan service filled Lots of DLC and microtransactions, split fans as dlc was fun
130	Murdered: Soul Suspect	2014	Airtight Games	United States	Action-Adventure	59	10	Solid premise, atmosphere, simple, potential, likeable, limited, monotonous,								Eastern	Game dev'd in Japan and aimed to appeal to the West mainly Good idea for a game but failed to grab players Fell out of the public eye very quickly, seen as a failure

131	Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Revolution	2014	CyberConnect2	Japan	Fighting	73	5	Diverse, frenetic, fan service, dynamic, flawed, short, filler								Eastern	Fan service game for the Naruto series, part of yearly release Very short, replayability in unlocked characters and in game items Felt like a filler game as the storyline was not complete
132	Neko Astume	2014	Hit-Point	Japan	Gacha Game	n/a	20	Quirky, compelling, cute,								Eastern	Surprising success, simple but cute premise which feels sweet to play Another popular indie game getting a movie adaptation Dev doesn't know why it is popular, wanted to make a game for everyone
133	New Super Luigi U	2013	Nintendo	Japan	Platformer	77	5	Satisfying, playful, difficult, quality, rushed, smart, short, floaty								Eastern	Part of the Year of Luigi promotion, mainly DLC for New Super Mario Bros U Made to be a harder game, reviewed well but player preferred original game Nabbits inclusion caused some dismay as he was the easy mode
134	Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	2011	Level-5	Japan	RPG	85	40	Triumph, engaging, charming, emotional, soothing, heartfelt, frustrating,								Eastern	Highly anticipated due to being made with Studio Ghibli Mix of retro and new styles of RPG made the game interesting to play Motion control and battle systems changed to appeal worldwide Won best RPG awards despite niche nature and style
135	No Man's Sky	2016	Hello Games	United Kingdom	Action-Adventure	71	10	Unique, love letter, magnificent feat, journey, ambitious, simple, shallow, ordinary								European	First indie game to be shown at E3 on stage (Sony) Game promised a lot but did not deliver as expected, caused devs to rethink how they present their games before release Problems with "Sky" name, no review copies, massive issues on release, became a standard of what not to do Promise of extra content, fans angry due to having an "unfinished" game
136	Octodad: Dadliest Catch	2014	Young Horses	United States	Adventure	69	5	Empathetic, heartwarming, silly, unique, bizarre, funny, frustrating, inconsistent								Western	Made by game dev students, kickstarted in 2011, released in 2014 as a full game Youtuber game due to silly premise and humour Original concept used in future games aka hard to control games

137	Ori and the Blind Forest	2015	Moon Studios	Austria	Platformer	88	10	Beautiful, creative, challenging, atmosphere, detailed,							European	Made as a love letter to rayman/metroid style games, big success Game highlighted as being Art, used to show how games should be presented Set a standard for platformer games, art styles and music in mid-indie games
138	Outlast	2013	Red Barrels	Canada	Survival Horror	80	5	Primal, terrifying, stressful, tension, intense, repetitive,							Western	One of the new wave of horror games, did well, was actually scary Liked the approach of horror, being powerless, set a standard for horror games Lots of media attention, youtuber game due to jump scares
139	Overwatch	2016	Blizzard	United States	FPS	91	100+	Distinctive, polished, fun, dynamic, fresh, balanced, diverse							Western	New IP in 17 years for Blizz, set standards for FPS, microtransactions in games and esports Started the OW League massive esports events that go mainstream Diverse characters, gay characters (front of the box) Changed how FPS games work in esports and tell stories
140	P.T.	2014	7780s Studio	Japan	Survival Horror	n/a	5	Immersive, uncomfortable, scary, claustrophobic, repetitive, terrifying							Eastern	A demo for Silent hills, taken down after devs left Konami Set a new standard for horror games, innovative horror mechanics, Consoles with the game sold for 1000's, one of the best games in 2014 according to media and fans
141	Paper Mario: Color Splash	2016	Intelligent Systems	Japan	Action-Adventure	76	15	Beautiful, polish, funny, charming, repetitive, inconsistent, frustrating							Eastern	Latest in the paper series, not liked by fans on release due to its simple look and similarities to older titles Mechanics simplified, split player base some liked accessible other thought too easy Reviewed well but it suffers from genre issues, is it an RPG still or an action game?

142	Papers, Please	2013	3909 LLC	United States	Puzzle	85	5	Complex, Subtle, uncomfortable, unique, emotional, stressful								Western	Part of the games as art movement due to themes and them empathy it draws out Won lots of awards, short film made (did well), changed the standard for indie games Game covered underused subjects which some consider taboo
143	Payday 2	2013	Overkill Software	Sweden	FPS	79	20	Polished, fresh, addictive, satisfying, fun, repetitive,								European	Smartly made fps which brought life back into co-op fps games Microtransaction scheme in the game caused huge problems, caused a large discussion about how not to do this in games More problems with DLC and unfair player treatment, fans stopped playing and modding the game in protest
144	Persona 4 Arena	2012	Atlus	Japan	Fighting	86	20	Fan service, impressive, solid, eccentric, stunning, long-winded,								Eastern	Blend of one of the most popular RPG's and a Fighting game, unexpected success Story mode was messy due to combining worlds but was a top tier fighting game, esports ready Filled with fan service which made the game difficult to access for average players
145	Persona 4 Arena Ultimax	2014	Atlus	Japan	Fighting	84	20	Intricate, rewarding, satisfying, improved, refined, fan service, tedious								Eastern	Sequel, not expected but welcomed by fans Improved on the original and took its place in the esports scene Started a new standard for anime fighters and level of content required
146	Persona 5	2017	Atlus	Japan	RPG	93	40	Brilliant, accessible, unique, thought provoking, innovative, deep, stylish								Eastern	Newest in the series, cited as one of the best games in recent years Few downsides such as English dub, bad LGBT representation Helped towards to companies annual revenue, won lots of GotY's Set a new standard for RPG's in the future

147	Persona Q: Shadow of the Labyrinth	2014	Atlus	Japan	RPG	83	50	Challenging, expansive, solid, grindy, frustrating, comedic, charming								Eastern	Mix of persona rpg and etrian odyssey gameplay, worked well, nostalgic Lighthearted version of characters and more jokes confused fans but still liked overall First entry on a Nintendo platform, annoyed some fans but died out after release worldwide
148	Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney – Dual Destinies	2013	Capcom	Japan	Visual Novel	81	25	Sublime, witty, simple, entertaining, niche, polished, weak								Eastern	Newest in the series, first to be fully 3D and the change was liked More mature themes throughout and with the twist ending Won gaming awards, sold well considering niche nature
149	Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney – Spirit of Justice	2016	Capcom	Japan	Visual Novel	81	35	Intuitive, fresh, memorable, engaging, strong, silly,								Eastern	Newest in the series, continuing 3D with small new mechanics, very safe Sold well but didn't rock the boat, disappeared as soon as it came out from public eye
150	Pikmin 3	2013	Nintendo	Japan	RTS	87	15	Gorgeous, improved, fun, imaginative, distinctive, cute, discovery								Eastern	Highly anticipated sequel, lived up to fans hype Didn't bring many new mechanics or story but was still fun, fans agreed Cited as a game which could sell the WiiU, kinda did
151	Plants vs. Zombies 2: It's About Time	2013	PopCap Games	United States	Third Person Shooter	86	15	Humorous, casual, improved, tense, inconsistent, tarnished, compelling,								Western	Sequel to the massively popular franchise, casual before casual was a thing Liked but the microtransactions left a lot of players annoyed One of EA's most successful games and sold well but fell out of the public eye due to other games in the series
152	Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare	2014	PopCap Games	United States	Third Person Shooter	75	10	Unique, funny, accessible, entertaining, colourful, different, diversion								Western	Shocking change in genre which few saw coming, spoof of the amount of fps games Despite the shock and good reviews the game had little impact but maintained a small dedicated following

153	Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare 2	2016	PopCap Games	United States	Third Person Shooter	81	15	Accommodating, ridiculous, colourful, unexpected, repetitive, alternative								Western	An unexpected sequel, improved on the original and included more single player content Became more like the FPS game it started spoofing, still has a dedicated following
154	PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds	2017	PUBG Corporation	United States	Battle Royale	86	10	Surprise, tension, action, flawed, addictive, exciting, improve								Western	The cumulation of the Battle Royale trend, set records on twitch without leaving early access, streams cited as reason game took off Won lots of awards, set more records with player numbers and sales, took steps into esports Compared to CoD4 as being the cause of a shift in market desires Dev's tried to sue Fortnite devs for copyright infringement which failed, game was then overtaken in popularity by FN: BR
155	Pokémon Art Academy	2014	Headstrong Games	United Kingdom	Drawing Game	76	10	Charming, authentic, entertaining, creative, short, polished								European	Art game few expected, received well, good for children Online connecting with others via sharing pictures and competitions
156	Pokémon Duel	2016	The Pokémon Company	Japan	Gacha Game	63	10	Imperfect, frustrating, intriguing, smart, solid,								Eastern	Very P2W Pokémon game, relies too much on chance to be super competitive Based on the IRL Pokémon Trading figure game, not a notable success Single player was ok but repetitive and unfinished
157	Pokémon GO	2016	Niantic	United States	Augmented Reality Game	69	100+	Phenomenon, simple, addictive, nostalgia, innovative, experience, surreal, strained								Western	One of the largest social phenomenon's in recent years, amazing response and player base Popularized AR games, started a wave of this genre, nothing reached the scale of this game Changed the way the public interact with game players, new laws and country wide rules and regs introduced Pokémon pushed back into the public eye, increased Nintendo's stock and Pokémon sales

158	Pokémon Omega Ruby and Alpha Sapphire	2014	The Pokémon Company	Japan	RPG	83	100+	Complete, challenging, polished, generous, spirit, simple, unsurprising								Eastern	Remake of older Pokémon games, requested by the fanbase Seen as a slight step down from previous versions but added more competitive aspects, sold very well Started the "too much water" meme based on a review
159	Pokémon Rumble U	2013	Ambrella	Japan	Action Role Playing	49	10	Fun, harmless, simple, mediocre, pointless, greedy								Eastern	Sequel to an interesting Pokémon rumble series but required IRL toys to play to the fullest extent Was not received well, toys to life done poorly/rushed
160	Pokémon Rumble World	2015	Ambrella	Japan	Action Role Playing	58	15	Simplistic, fun, repetitive, shallow, mindless, half hearted								Eastern	Sequel to the rumble series, had a better free to play system but still too simple Used a lot of the 3DS's features well but fell out of the public eye fast
161	Pokémon Shuffle	2015	Genius Sonority	Japan	Puzzle	56	15	Addictive, challenging, simple, unfair, average, blood boiling,								Eastern	Pokémon puzzle game released on iOS and 3DS Abuses microtransactions, ruined the games reputation but still downloaded 6.5mil times, No more updates after 2018
162	Pokémon Sun and Moon	2016	Game Freak	Japan	RPG	87	100+	Colourful, quality, refreshed, engrossing, easy, linear								Eastern	Newest version of the Pokémon RPG series, change in structure and location design Made easier for accessibility, worked ok and understood by consumers Called one of the best games in the series due to changes More story, applied in a different way, split fanbase
163	Pokémon Ultra Sun and Ultra Moon	2017	Game Freak	Japan	RPG	84	100+	Bigger, fun, tried and tested, enhanced, vibrant, definitive, too soon								Eastern	Upgrade of the previous game, made to tide fans over until the Switch version Changed a little bit, not enough for a lot of fans at first, changed after release 9th bestselling 3ds game of all time, cross promo with other Pokémon games (like GO)

164	Pokemon X and Y	2013	Game Freak	Japan	RPG	87	100+	New life, emotional, simple but fun, full of life, impressive, strong, pretty								Eastern	First fully 3D Handheld Pokémon game. Changed the way the Pokémon series was played and bought in lots of new players. Accessible for newbs due to systems brought in. Fastest selling game on 3DS for years. Set a standard for Pokémon games to follow.
165	Pokémon: Magikarp Jump	2017	The Pokémon Company	Japan	Gacha Game	64	50	Rewarding, fun, repetitive, interesting, shallow,								Eastern	Odd game based on a weird Pokémon, funny at first Lots wrong with the game but it is a free title, loss of interest after release Microtransactions were confusing and hard to justify
166	Pokkén Tournament	2015	Bandai Namco Studios	Japan	Fighting	76	75	Unique, fresh, innovative, accessible, charming, unforgiving, experiment, limited								Eastern	Pokémon crossed with Tekken, surprising game that few expected Seen as a strong title, tried to push for esports audience but could not outdo Smash bros. Outsold Street fighter V, has a strong playerbase, used a lot of Nintendo's products to improve the game Showed that Nintendo games can survive cross overs
167	Puzzle & Dragons Z + Super Mario Bros. Edition	2015	GungHo Online Entertainment	Japan	Puzzle	73	20	Strong, addictive, simple, worth, interesting, frustrating								Eastern	Console version of a f2p game series, Nintendo crossover was unexpected Added RPG like mechanics to make up for lack of originals microtransaction based systems, was ok Received well enough but was confusing to consumers
168	Rayman Legends	2013	Ubisoft Montpellier	France	Platformer	92	10	Joy, precise, beautiful, must have, humor, memorable, revolution								European	Became a massive selling point for the WiiU, showed that Nintendo were not the only platformer masters Despite amazing scores game did not sell as well as expected, WiiU platform blamed Praised for co-op gameplay, shame it was not online

169	Resident Evil 7: Biohazard	2017	Capcom	Japan	Survival Horror	86	10	Fresh, terrifying, important, masterpiece, roots, atmosphere, predictable							Eastern	Return to form for the ResiEvil series, well received by most One of the few games that is better in VR, selling point for PSVR Seen as the best horror since Alien Iso, demos well received, sold very well Set a standard for horror, VR and future Resi games, sold well
170	Rise of the Tomb Raider	2015	Crystal Dynamics	United States	Action-Adventure	88	15	Epic, intense, beautiful, solid, fan service, interesting, brutal							Western	Sequel to reboot, did well despite being released the same day as Fallout 4 Being exclusive to Xbox caused annoyance to PS players, received a special version in 2016 Started a discussion on violent protagonists in games due to Lara's kill count
171	Rocket League	2015	Psyonix	United States	Sports	86	15	Simple, enjoyable, fast, addictive, original, absurd,							Western	Unexpected hit, positive views across all consumers Massive game online, twitch, YouTube etc, spurred on esports boon with new concept Massively popular due to ease to watch and simple to play Won many awards, sold well on every platform released on Microtransactions but few seemed to mind, continued trend of purchases not effecting gameplay
172	Runescape 3	2013	Jagex	United Kingdom	MMORPG	n/a	100+	Classic, simple, addictive, funny, unique, grind, casual, accessible,							European	Upgraded version of a classic MMO, one of the longest running, made in java Has a strong dedicated fanbase with the devs updating the game based on community feedback Appeals as a budget version of an MMO, large following on Streaming platforms Set a standard for online/player relations, first game to deal with gold farmers/cheaters in a big way

173	Shadow of the Colossus	2005	Team Ico	Japan	Action-Adventure	91	15	Inspired, masterpiece, memorable, tense, gripping, emotional, flawed,							Eastern	Played the 2018 remake, very faithful and liked Original is seen as a classic and set a standard for boss battles in future games Remake maintained quality and was still acclaimed, continued the trend of good remake games
174	Shadowverse	2016	Cygames	Japan	Card Game	80	50	Interesting, pretty, textbook, luck, generous, anime							Eastern	Became the most popular card game in japan on release Released WW in 2017 with a lot of hype, still maintains a sizeable player base, started to drop in mid 2018 due to poor design choices Compared a lot to HS but less random in gameplay and anime based Gained a reputation of being very generous to new players, not normal for card games
175	Shovel Knight	2014	Yacht Club Games	United States	Platformer	85	10	Love letter, homage, passion, old school, enjoyable, nostalgia							Western	One of the first successful kickstarter games and perhaps the most well known Game received critical acclaim, gained more campaigns due to popularity Shovel Knight became an icon for indie games, got an amiibo and in many other title including AAA games Set the standard for kickstarter and indie games, unmatched since
176	Skate 3	2010	EA Black Box	Canada	Sports	80	10	Challenging, accessible, funny, playable, formulaic, forgettable							Western	One of the better skateboarding games, gained a big following in the latter half of 2014 due to YouTube lets plays, got back into shops and sales leaderboards Returning popularity showed off the power of YouTube/online influencers

177	Slay the Spire	2018	MegaCrit LLC	United States	Card Game	n/a	30	Simple, fun, intuitive, interesting, addictive, creative							Western	Indie game that gained a lot of notice due to solid design Integrated a lot of player feedback before its release, based on irl card games and their fans Showed off the influence of roguelike games in other genres, has done very well
178	Smite	2014	Hi-Rez Studios	United States	MOBA	80	25	Changed, lighthearted, fresh, innovative, fast,							Western	Different take on the MOBA trend, more fast paced and in a 3rd person perspective, stands out next to LoL which is hard to do Gained a large console following, sizeable esports following with large prize pools Using real gods has caused issues in religious circles, nothing in the game has largely changed because of it (some art changes/updates)
179	SOMA	2015	Frictional Games	Sweden	Survival Horror	84	10	Detailed, impactful, morals, fascinating, subtle, dark, predictable, bold							European	Continuing off the success of the Amnesia series and did well, changed how a lot of people looked at horror games (sound and moral choices) Lots of youtubers played the game based on previous videos of Amnesia, gained a lot of extra attention Stood out against a rise of horror games
180	Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed	2012	Sumo Digital	United Kingdom	Racing	79	15	Nostalgia, beautiful, imaginative, clone, fresh, responsive, young							European	Sequel to a game that was already unexpected, Kart racer dominated by Mario Compared to Diddy Kong racing, has a strong following Focus on local co-op play over online Lots of DLC and collabs with other companies (TF2 on steam for example)
181	Sonic Boom: Fire & Ice	2016	Sanzaru Games	United States	Platformer	62	10	Solid, entertaining, ugly, quirky, crowded, uninspired, misstep, dull							Western	After the failure of the Sonic Boom series games this game was better received Showed that the series had some promise but not enough to save it

182	Sonic Boom: Rise of Lyric	2014	Big Red Button	United States	Action-Adventure	32	10	Painful, bland, poor, misstep, sloppy, toxic, embarrassing,							Western	Made with a partnership with Nintendo, massive failure Focus on western markets and audience, did not reach any goals, great Youtuber bait for bad gameplay and bugs Big insult to the fans of the series, worst game in the series and least amount sold, nearly killed the Sonic brand Reviewers not sent game before release, started a debate on the ethics of this
183	Sonic Boom: Shattered Crystal	2014	Sanzaru Games	United States	Platformer	47	10	Competent, reasonable, poor, repetitive, boring,							Western	Tie in to WiiU Sonic Boom game, better received but still very poor Reviewers not sent game before release, started a debate on the ethics of this Worst selling handheld game in the series
184	Sonic CD	1993	Sonic Team	Japan	Platformer	93	100+	Must own, under-appreciated, impeccable, stylish, flawed							Eastern	Played the iOS remake, sparked a series of games being remade for phones Hardcore fans made this port and pitched it, first of its kind in a while SEGA brought in fans and modders to help make more games after this, started a trend
185	Sonic Dash	2013	SEGA Hardlight	United Kingdom	Endless Runner	69	30	Quality, nostalgia, challenge, enticing, decent, safe, rushed							European	Phone game which cost money to purchase but contained microtransactions, was not liked due to this Part of the discussion of greedy in app purchases Continued SEGA's phone title development scheme
186	Sonic Forces	2017	Sonic Team	Japan	Platformer	57	30	Flawed, decent, average, short, limited, disappointing							Eastern	Tried to give the Sonic brand a darker tone, did not land well Character creator was liked, generated a lot of memes Super Sonic was paid DLC, caused massive outrage and was changed Caused discussion about refunding Steam games due to short play time

187	Sonic Forces Speed Battle	2017	SEGA Hardlight	United Kingdom	Racing	73	35	Fun, grindy, surprising, twist, unique, simple								European	Made alongside the AAA version, was positively received compared The racing endless runner theme was fresh enough to carry an audience, 2 mil downloads in a few weeks Used in examples for how bad Sonic Forces was
188	Sonic Jump Fever	2014	SEGA Hardlight	United Kingdom	Platformer	54	15	Fine, repetitive, hollow, wasted, messy, inferior,								European	Sequel to a ok received phone game, added more features which took away from the previous Fell off of the radar very quickly despite a lot of marketing Example of adding too many features can ruin a sequel
189	Sonic Lost World	2013	Sonic Team	Japan	Platformer	63	15	Fun, fresh, good, cheap, weird, inconsistent, unfocused								Eastern	New take on a Sonic game, made like Mario Galaxy, lot of comments on this Parkour system added due to it being a popular feature at the time Split fanbase, some loved new features others said it took too much away Started a conversation on the future of mascot character games
190	Sonic Mania	2017	PagodaWest Games	United States	Platformer	86	30	Essential, masterpiece, imaginative, focused, exciting, love letter								Western	A Sonic game made by fans for fans, sold very well Highest rated Sonic game ever made, started a real discussion on fans taking over development of video games
191	Sonic Runners	2017	Gameloft	France	Platformer	78	20	Nostalgic, difficult, potential, satisfying, fun,								European	New approach to sonic games, 1 off purchase with no in game purchases Game was a remake of a failed game, did well and was known to be worth the price Used as an example of this formula working in online discussions
192	Sonic the Hedgehog	1991	Sonic Team	Japan	Platformer	86	100+	Classic, outdated, care, lively								Eastern	Played the iOS remaster, part of a set of remade SEGA games on mobile The Success of Sonic CD's remake lead to this, well received due to being made by a fan Continued the trend of bringing in fans to dev games

193	Sonic the Hedgehog 2	1992	Sonic Team	Japan	Platformer	88	100+	Definitive, enhanced, classic, thrilling							Eastern	Played the iOS remaster, part of a set of remade SEGA games on mobile Continued the trend of bringing in fans to dev games
194	Sonic Unleashed	2008	Sonic Team	Japan	Platformer	60	50	Solid, pointless, clever, decent, flawed, fun, potential							Eastern	Played as part of a study, used as part of thesis Source of the sonic series' schizophrenia with design, game is considered flawed but focusing on gimmicks, split the fanbase and still does Set the theme and trends for Sonic games to follow
195	South Park: The Fractured but Whole	2017	Ubisoft San Francisco	United States	RPG	81	15	Silly, authentic, crude, sick, hit and miss, experience,							Western	Sequel title, considered just as good but updated theme, Changed a lot of mechanics to improve gameplay, story toned down with less need for censorship Humor was a focus for ubisoft, SP creators wanted to focus on improving mechanics
196	South Park: The Stick of Truth	2014	Obsidian Entertainment	United States	RPG	85	10	Silly, funny, great, shocking, faithful, crude, short,							Western	Well received and wanted game, did very well considering subject matter, tied in with the tv show for more interest Heavily censored in EU, AUS, Africa and Russia, made fun of in game, a lot of talk about game censorship due to this Won a lot of awards and was liked despite a lot of edgy material and themes
197	Splatoon	2015	Nintendo	Japan	Third Person Shooter	81	100+	Cathartic, addictive, colourful, different, hectic, fun, simple							Eastern	Nintendo's first real attempt into producing a shooting game Worked on a new concept for shooting games, contained a single player, used the WiiU gamepad well Continued Nintendo's dip into esports, well received, became a big brand for Nintendo

198	Splatoon 2	2017	Nintendo	Japan	Third Person Shooter	83	30	Fresh, simple, fun, addictive, improved, intuitive, happy, safe								Eastern	Sequel to Nintendo's shooter, improved on a lot including eSport side, One of the top selling switch games, Nintendo found a formula to stay with, more esports additions open to Nintendo Called Splatoon 1.5 but enough new content via DLC and online changes to be better
199	Star Fox Zero	2016	Nintendo	Japan	Shooter	69	10	Unconventional, challenging, short, remake, flawed, limited								Eastern	An attempt from Nintendo to bring back the Star Fox series, was not well received More of a remake game than expected, used a new control scheme, was not liked Worst selling game in the franchise in japan
200	Star Wars Battlefront	2015	EA DICE	Sweden	FPS	72	15	OK, authentic, fan service, atmospheric, spectacle, incomplete,								European	Star Wars IP brought back to a modern age, very hyped up No single player and a simple online mode, players burnt out fast tried to be an eSport, too much random chance, Faithfull to the SW universe, little else exceptional
201	Star Wars Battlefront 2	2017	EA DICE	Sweden	FPS	65	10	Variety, exciting, messy, flawed, beautiful, corporate, cynical								European	Sequel to rebrand of a popular Star Wars IP, caused HUGE problems Game was not well received, online burnt out fast, single player was short EA pulled the loot boxes before release, too exploitative, so much so that the government/gambling commission got involved, changed EU laws
202	Stardew Valley	2016	ConcernedApe	United States	Simulation	89	25	Heart, magical, experience, engrossing, charming, complex, escape								Western	Based off games like Harvest moon getting "Worse" according to the devs High quality indie game, liked to its simple and wholesome themes, Changed the way the simulation genre is designed

203	Street Fighter V	2016	Capcom	Japan	Fighting	74	20	Improved, flawless, classic, serviceable, competitive, incomplete								Eastern	Classic series most current version, very popular esports giant but is falling behind in recent years New versions always planned, lack of content annoyed many A lot of censorship of sexual content, poor performance at launch which hurt sales badly Caused a re-examination of fighting games
204	Super Mario 3D World	2013	Nintendo	Japan	Platformer	93	15	Joyful, friendly, colourful, fresh feel, typically Nintendo, safe, sticks to the formula								Eastern	Fun Mario game meant to sell the WiiU Nothing super special but still a standout game in the series Reviewed well despite a lot of criticism about the samey nature of the game compared to other Mario titles Cat mechanic was OK
205	Super Mario Maker	2015	Nintendo	Japan	Platformer	88	25	Potential, childhood, inspiring, creative, polish, fun, deep, constrained								Eastern	A new type of game from Nintendo, seen as a love letter to Mario Youtuber game due to community levels etc, added a lot to the speed running community Added a lot to the game design community
206	Super Mario Odyssey	2017	Nintendo	Japan	Platformer	97	75	Charm, fresh, fun, elegant, refreshing, pure gameplay, creative, chore, childlike								Eastern	Noted to be a reason to buy a Nintendo Switch, nominated for many awards Fastest selling Mario game ever in the US and Europe Caused a re-examination of action platformers in the industry Started a new generation of speed runners
207	Super Smash Bros for 3DS	2014	Bandai Namco Studios	Japan	Fighting	85	100+	Accessible, deep, competitive, exciting, fresh, casual, big,								Eastern	First in the Smash series to be on a handheld, sold well considering the main game was due to be released so close Made to appeal to casual audiences, focus was still on the console version Graphics and system did not allow the game to be an eSport

208	Super Smash Bros for WiiU	2014	Bandai Namco Studios	Japan	Fighting	92	100+	Loved, ultimate, system seller, polished, fun, nostalgia, accessible,								Eastern	Fastest selling WiiU game, liked by most players Became a big eSport quickly despite Melee still being so big Set a lot of records and won a lot of awards, introduced players to Smash history Changed the way that fighting games were represented and players expectations of games in the genre
209	Tekken 7	2017	Bandai Namco Studios	Japan	Fighting	82	20	Ultimate, challenging, gratifying, potential, diverse, solid, hardcore								Eastern	Started in arcades and was liked, console versions solidified the formula Considered one of the better versions of the game, esports ready very quickly but still not as popular as other titles Much more accessible than ever before, DLC adding more content off brand (FF, Walking Dead) helped the games lifespan
210	That Dragon, Cancer	2016	Numinous Games	United States	Adventure	78	5	Heartbreaking, emotion, personal, exhausting, important, unique, exploitative								Western	Indie game based on the life and death of a child with cancer, devs were parents Won a lot of awards, game designed to help others deal with loss, touched a lot of people Youtuber bait, devs did not like this and tried to stop it, failed and started a discussion on dev-creator interactions
211	The Amazing Spider-Man 2	2014	Beenox	Canada	Action-Adventure	51	10	Rushed, rough, familiar, unoriginal, budget, disappointing,								Western	Tie in game to the movie, was not well received Step down from the previous game, not liked by fans, seen as lazy and rushed Caused a lot of faith to be lost in the Spider-Man game series and its future

212	The Evil Within	2014	Tango Gameworks	Japan	Survival Horror	75	15	Challenging, imaginative, brutal, memorable, atmosphere, repetitive							Eastern	Game made to emulate western horror films, included effects to make the experience more film like, mixed reception Youtuber reaction bait, worked due to trippy effects and lore One of the highest selling horror games despite issues with performance and repetitive themes
213	The Last Guardian	2016	SIE Japan Studio	Japan	Action-Adventure	82	10	Touching, unique, companionship, emotional, frustrating, outdated							Eastern	As part of the ICO series announced in 2005, dev hell, became a meme "never going to be released" Part of Ueda's dev vision and was released as intended, well received Focus on creature due to player feedback from SotC on how much they liked Agro the horse Won a lot of awards and was well received overall, closed the door on a part of Sony's "Lore" as a company
214	The last of Us	2013	Naughty Dog	United States	Action-Adventure	95	15	Masterpiece, emotional, atmospheric, blockbuster, brutal, flawless,							Western	Considered one of the best games of all time, brought cinematic storytelling, LGBT and women in games into a new light One of the most awarded games of all time with 240 GotY awards Started a lot of discussions about how to make games on this level, many tried to emulate since Multiplayer was overshadowed but still enjoyable
215	The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds	2013	Nintendo	Japan	Action-Adventure	91	15	Fresh, nostalgia, classic, accessible, fun, surprise							Eastern	New Zelda game set after "Link to the Past", critically acclaimed Changed the conventions of the Zelda Series, did a good job, was liked by fans and critics Became a must own 3DS title due to changes, started a discussion about switching up games formulas for the better

216	The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild	2017	Nintendo	Japan	Action-Adventure	97	100+	Improved, masterpiece, new standard, stunning, experience, unexpected,							Eastern	Considered one of the best games of all time, gave the open world game genre a new way to be designed, landmark in the series Released with the Switch on day 1, broke sales records, perfect scores everywhere, has the most perfect reviews Spawned memes based on in game interactions and physics
217	The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask 3D	2015	Nintendo	Japan	Action-Adventure	89	30	Unique, stand out, risky, depth, dark, better							Eastern	Remake of a controversial Zelda game due to darker themes and gameplay changes, part of operation Moonfall Made after the success of OoT 3D selling well, also did well with fans off the back of other Zelda games changing the formula since Memes based on the game returned in new ways, stuck around
218	The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD	2013	Nintendo	Japan	Action-Adventure	90	40	Charming, unique, definitive, memorable, masterpiece, flaws							Eastern	Remake of a popular Zelda title, initial response to first game was negative but changed over time Same again with HD remake, better received after the game came out Remake showed that this game got the respect it needed Became a big system seller for the Wii U
219	The Legend of Zelda: Tri Force Heroes	2015	Nintendo	Japan	Action-Adventure	73	10	Hectic, simple, original, stop-gap, frantic, friends, repetitive							Eastern	A new take on the Zelda series, Multiplayer was the focus Multiplay was fun, single player suffered due to this, became a chore to play alone Fun but required play with friends to be good, not liked by fans due to this
220	The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess HD	2016	Nintendo	Japan	Action-Adventure	86	50	Masterful, success, improved, definitive, classic,							Eastern	Remake of Wii Zelda game, darker themes than other games Made off the success of LoZ WW HD, added new content and Amiibo support, very well received Showed that Nintendo could consistently remake games to a high standard

221	The Order: 1886	2015	Ready at Dawn	United States	Action-Adventure	63	5	Cinematic, linear, amazing visually, short, forgettable								Western	New IP focusing on looks over gameplay, defended this stance Was not well received due to shortness and linear gameplay Continued the debate of quality over quantity with video games
222	The Sims 4	2014	The Sims Studio	United States	Simulation	70	15	Addictive, varied, foundation, solid, step back, empty								Western	Latest in a series, very empty on release, said to be lacking compared to Sims 3 Took years to implement basic features over improving and making expansion packs Did not provide review codes, lack of faith in the game before release, continued EA trend of being a bad company
223	The Stanley Parable	2013	Galactic Cafe	United States	Simulation	88	5	Special, thought provoking, art, short, parody								Western	Game started as a mod of HL2 and made HD, part of the games as art argument, Had an amazing demo, big part of the youtuber bait and audience Used in House of Cards, indie game in the focus of pop culture
224	The Trail: Frontier Challenge	2016	22Cans	United Kingdom	Simulation	70	5	Minimal, simple, peaceful, relaxing, laggy, lacking								European	Indie game, tried to be deep and thoughtful, did not work well Continued Molyneux trope of promising too much for a game Ported to Nintendo Switch, poor port but scored better due to changes in the games core design
225	The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt	2015	CD Projekt Red	Poland	Action Role Playing	92	75	Perfect, achievement, immersive, compelling, memorable, expansive, ambitious								European	Called one of the best games ever made, a lot of care put into the game Very open devs, focus on community when making the game Focus on realism combined with humour and metaphors for an authentic world Used mini games (Gwent) to keep players interested

226	The Wonderful 101	2013	PlatinumGames	Japan	Action-Adventure	78	15	Original, surprising, polished, fast, ambitious, over the top, rough, clumsy							Eastern	Strange game from devs, still difficult and full of innuendo but made for kids Used the Wii U gamepad in more ways than other games Started a discussion on bringing back Viewful Joe games Has not become a cult classic, implied to be intended to be one
227	The World Ends With You	2008	Square Enix	Japan	Action Role Playing	89	100+	Interesting, unique, addictive, complex, frantic,							Eastern	Played the remake on Smartphones, called the definitive version Modelled after a real place to great effect (Shibuya), used new systems and mechanics not seen on DS/Phone before Became a cult classic due to music and large difference from normal SE games, cited as one of the best DS games
228	Theatrhythm Final Fantasy: Curtain Call	2014	Square Enix	Japan	Rhythm	83	15	Nostalgia, solid, fixed, celebration, cute, massive, limited, simple							Eastern	Sequel to a surprising SE game, music games were trending during the first game, less so for the 2nd Has little new content compared to the first, included DLC Fell out of public eye very fast due to decline of music Rhythm games
229	Thomas Was Alone	2012	Mike Bithell	United Kingdom	Platformer	77	5	Simple, funny, fresh, personality, charming, fiddly,							European	Indie game focusing on story and writing, won awards for this Started a discussion of how to write characters in games Showed that indie dev could be a career
230	Titanfall	2014	Respawn Entertainment	United States	FPS	86	40	Fresh, twist, creative, addictive, approachable, intense, bare bones							Western	New FPS title made by old CoD devs, tried to make a fresh new shooter Did not include a real single player, focus on multi, caused some issue on release Used AI characters in games to make it feel like a war, worked well Did not focus on esports which was an odd choice at the time

231	Titanfall 2	2016	Respawn Entertainment	United States	FPS	86	30	Surprise, improved, inventive, fast, entertaining, influencing, boring								Western	Sequel despite low player engagement after first games release Single player included, created dynamic with the mech Improved in every way with free DLC for ages Released next to BF1 and CoD IW, sales took a hit due to this, became "underrated"
232	Tom Clancy's The Divison	2016	Massive Entertainment	Sweden	Action Role Playing	79	15	Potential, engaging, solid, simple, dynamic, repetitive, tedious,								European	Ambitious game, looked to create an RPS genre, kinda worked Great concept, lots of problems on release, PC version was very poor Broke Ubisoft records of sales, film project in the works
233	Undertale	2015	Toby Fox	United States	RPG	92	40	Moving, masterful, love letter, masterpiece, unique, innovative,								Western	One of the most influential indie games of recent times, cult status very quickly, another successful kickstarter Critically acclaimed for almost every aspect: music, story and combat system, changed the way we look at RPG games Started multiple discussions; non-combat in games, over the top fanbases, how to make players care about characters
234	Unravel	2016	Coldwood Interactive	Sweden	Platformer	81	5	Cute, beautiful, expressive, solid, simple, irritating								European	Game revealed during EA's e3, devs were nervous which led to lots of jokes/memes/fans Simple idea but presented in a different way, supposed to capture the landscapes of Sweden Stand out from EA due to difference, received well but wanted to expand on the concept further
235	Valiant Hearts: The Great War	2014	Ubisoft Montpellier	France	Puzzle	79	5	Impressive, experience, dignity, emotion, beautiful, fail								European	Game based on the WW1, initial thoughts were that it would be insensitive, trailers touched a lot of people Won a few awards for narrative, noted to be a good representation of the time period Not a great game but a better story, fans agreed and position was split by this

236	VRChat	2017	VRChat Inc.	United States	MMO	n/a	20	Customizable, potential, mad, future, unstable, unmoderated, toxic							Western	An online chat room in VR, made a big impact due to youtubers and twitch streamers Started a discussion on the future of VR and its effects on culture Started the Ugandan Knuckles meme, gave stability to the online community
237	Watch Dogs	2014	Ubisoft Montreal	Canada	Action-Adventure	80	25	Innovative, ambitious, decent, compelling, rough, forgettable,							Western	Lots of interest when revealed due to style and hacking gameplay Part of the graphical downgrade discussion and poor promotion choices (called in as a bomb threat) Scored well but players had a lot more problems with the game, very much like old Ubi titles, big open world but shallow Multiplayer was good and very different from the norm
238	Watch Dogs 2	2016	Ubisoft Montreal	Canada	Action-Adventure	82	15	Refreshing, improved, engaging, stylish, solid, dull,							Western	Improved over previous game, brought in fans and real hackers during dev, deved with European studio as well and got music from UK Added more online features with focus on co-op and sorting previous game complaints Low pre orders but ubisoft were not worried, game released and was passed over quickly
239	Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus	2017	MachineGames	Sweden	FPS	87	10	Over the top, brutal, memorable, humorous, entertaining, unbalanced							European	Third game in the series, improved on everything from previous game (including humour and stupidity) Used recent IRL dislike of Nazi's to fuel advertising, not intended to be a political statement but came across as one Did well enough to get DLC and a new game, seen as the new mindless shooter to just enjoy

240	Wolfenstein: The New Order	2014	MachineGames	Sweden	FPS	79	10	Revitalized, memorable, solid, brutal, mindless, silly,							European	Second game in the reboot of an old series, brainless shooter considered refreshing compared to the rest of the market Made by a new dev team, focus on being over the top and dark but funny Crass game but considered an underrated title due to its different non pc approach
241	Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap	2017	Lizardcube	France	Platformer	79	5	Charm, challenging, love letter, remake, repetitive, short							European	Remake of a master system game reverse engineered, best sold on Switch Classic game for the time and system, remake in the works for a long time Set a new standard for how to remake/master retro games
242	World of Final Fantasy	2016	Square Enix	Japan	RPG	77	20	Creative, fan service, cute, nostalgic, boring, irritating							Eastern	FF title designed to be aimed at a younger players, marketed as a celebration of the series Reveal dwarfed by FF7 remake reveal, released next to FF15, seen as too kiddy compared to the other options Whole game, including systems and design, meant to be like old FF games, worked well if you are a fan but odd/outdated for new players
243	Xenoblade Chronicles 3D	2015	Monolith Soft	Japan	RPG	86	50	Immersive, masterpiece, passion, deep, massive scope, not optimal							Eastern	Port of a massive JRPG on the Wii, part of operation Rainfall, seen as a big fan success story Port made to show off the N3DS's power and for gamers with a lot of time Was liked a lot and considered innovative despite not doing much different, port compensated for the graphical issues Main character(s) now a part of Nintendo's culture due to memes and fans

244	Xenoblade Chronicles X	2016	Monolith Soft	Japan	RPG	84	30	Massive, depth, content, unique, engaging, too ambitious, patience							Eastern	A massive game based on the Xeno universe, a large achievement for the WiiU system, considered way too big to a crazy degree Compared to an MMO, essential part of the WiiU's games, used as a benchmark for future Xeno games Mention of the games QA team in production, rare at this time, most talked about WiiU game for a long while
245	YO-Kai Watch	2013	Level-5	Japan	RPG	76	15	Ambitious, funny, charming, worthy, kid friendly, familiar, simple							Eastern	A Pokémon like game based heavily on Japanese lore, took a while to come to the west Did well in east, west preferred Pokémon still, game sold below average but gained fans due to anime/manga, Lack of online turned players away Secured its place as a Pokémon competitor which was unheard of at this time, started a discussion on toppling large game series' hold on genres
246	Yooka-Laylee	2017	Playtonic Games	United Kingdom	Platformer	68	10	Successor, nostalgia, homage, funny, dead, dated, faults							European	Created to succeed the Banjo-Kazooie series, funded by Kickstarter via a few of the original devs, goal met in 40 mins, highest UK Kickstarter Lots of problems during kickstarter; delays in versions, delayed release, No WiiU version Did ok, not as polished as it should have been, relied on nostalgia too much
247	Yoshi's New Island	2014	Arzest	Japan	Platformer	64	5	Cute, repetitive, polished, fun, copy, inferior							Eastern	Not a bad game just nothing new added to a popular series Music was poor, kazoo used? Forgotten very quickly
248	Yoshi's Woolly World	2015	Good-Feel	Japan	Platformer	78	10	Fresh, accessible, short, creative, charming, generic							Eastern	Based off the Kirby Epic Yarn series, style worked well here Hyped up but came out and left public view very quickly

249	Yu-Gi-Oh Duel Links	2016	Konami	Japan	Card Game	81	100+	Nostalgic, homage, stand out, care, simple, fan service,							Eastern	Simplified version of the Yugioh TCG, very popular Became another Konami eSport very quickly Started a discussion about microtransactions due to being like card packs, part of the EU debate on lootboxes
250	ZombiU	2012	Ubisoft Montpellier	France	Survival Horror	77	10	Tension, solid, unique, intense, intelligent, repetitive, frustrating							European	Launch title for the WiiU, different type of game for Nintendo, worked well and sold well enough Popular enough to be ported to other consoles/PC Set a new standard for gameplay in horror games via gamepad