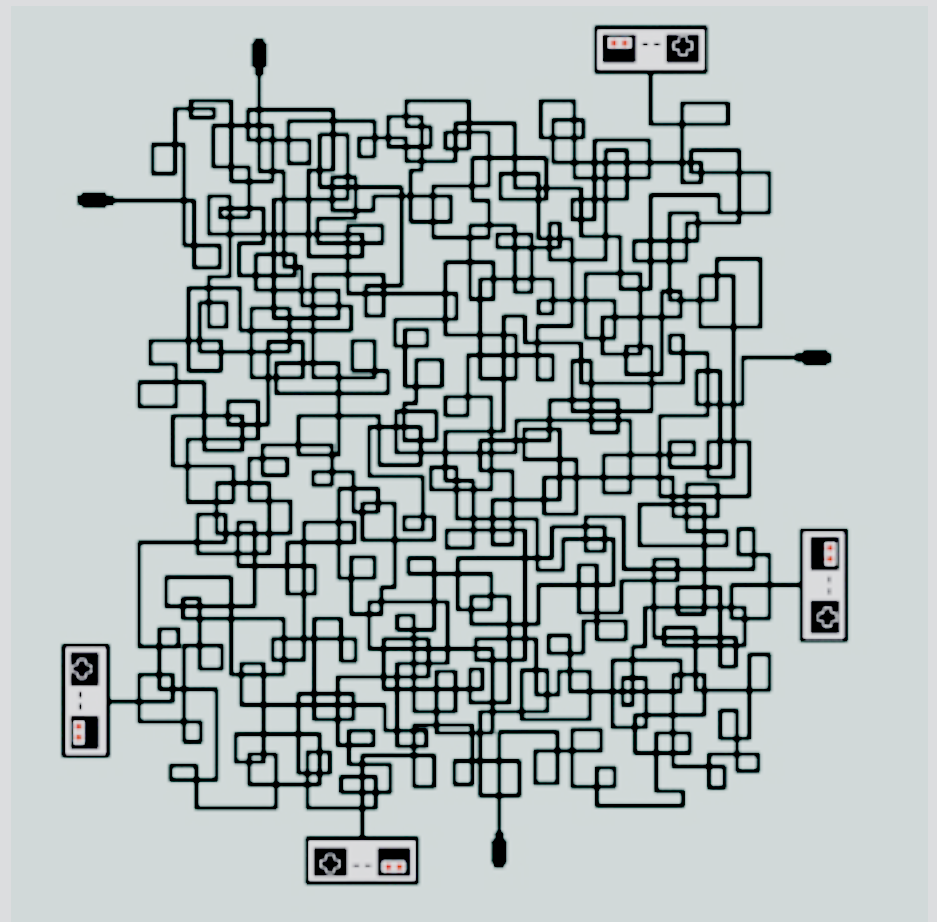


The Critical Sentiment: How Reviews and Recommendations Influence Video Game Users



Paige Ziegler
Niki Wilkes
Ethan Sweat
Azia Bussell

December 10, 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	pg	3
Introduction	pg	4
Background	pg	5
Methods	pg	6
Findings	pg	7
Artifact Analysis	pg	9
Conclusion	pg	10

Executive Summary

We will effectively research what makes an impact upon users' video game selection the most through the use of reviews and recommendations. We will also discover the most common influences of users' video game selection. We conducted a survey that included 141 participants and interviewed a subset of this population totalling 9. We also collected 200 screen shots of comments on video game reviews for artifact analysis. The theme of our research questions is centered around what affects users' video game selection based on reviews and recommendations, and our background includes market research and the demographics of gamers, allowing for a well-rounded collection of user data. Knowing what video game users use recommendations and reviews for will aid video game creators in positively balancing on the line of creativity and simplicity for users' specific preferences.

Keywords

Video game, Reviews, Recommendations, Critics, Genre, Trustworthiness



Introduction

Since the era of the baby boomers, video games have evolved into a fun, commonplace activity among all ages of people on a global scale. While a good way to understand how much one will enjoy a video game is to simply purchase the content and gain first-hand experience, a more resourceful method is to discover an objective and fair review or recommendation.

This document provides insight to how reviews and recommendations of video games affect video game users choices. Through interviews, surveys, and quantitative data, the researchers discovered how necessary video game users feel reviews and recommendations are and what makes a particular one trustworthy.

The research provided in this document will shed light on how important reviews and recommendations are to video game users and help creators of video games understand what features or aspects of gameplay users find important.



Background

Prior Research

The research we've gathered leads us to believe that demographics plays a substantial role in our research. In a study conducted at Southern Methodist University by [Electronic Entertainment Design and Research](#) of the 188 students, students who were given positive reviews of a game before playing it scored the game high, while those students who read negative reviews on a game scored that game low after playing. With prior research, such as the EEDR study, we can understand the use of reviews and recommendations and if they are truly looked at and used.

Demographics

According to the [Entertainment Software Association](#), the average age of video game users is 30 years old. ESA also found that 55 percent of video game users are male. But more women users are growing each year. From research done by ESA, within the genres of video games, the best-selling is action at 22.3 percent while the best-selling computer game is casual with 26.7 percent. Our research focused on user reviews and recommendations of video games of all sorts to determine how they affect the users choice of video games.

Justification

Today, there is an array of genres to choose from when looking into playing a video game. Some gamers even have their likes and dislikes of certain genres. But for those looking for a different task to take on or a new adventure to pick up, reviews and recommendations can guide them to the game they are looking for. However, game reviews and recommendations can also degrade a certain game or genre and resist users to play that game or genre. We believe our research will help users quickly and easily make a decision on whether or not they want to play a certain video game. Our research will also help critics see what users look for and care about in video game reviews and recommendations.



Methods

One of main means of data collection was a 25 question survey sent through Ball State's CommCenter email database. This survey was helpful in collecting general demographics, as well as video game user's habits and preferences. The main purpose was to find the answer to questions on how people interact with reviews and recommendations for the sake of selecting a video game to play.

Our survey drew in 141 participants, which was around our targeted 150. From this survey, we were able to collect 35 participants interested in a short, 15 minute interview. Of these 35, we selected 10 people to contact for an interview and 9 of which we were able to complete. The goal of this research method was to get a more in-depth answer to questions that would be too complicated for survey questions. We asked questions about how and why users received or gave recommendations and reviews. We also explored the main issue of concern with our research; what exactly the users believed made a review or recommendation trustworthy?

Once all the data was collected, we analysed the two both separately and in conjunction to each other to find patterns. For the surveys, we compared different sub group, such as gender, age, and usage level, to find what they valued in comparison to the other. We also looked at the general population as well to see what patterns showed up. When looking at the interviews, we transcribed and coded them in order to see if the answer matched up or contrasted with the survey results, as well as looked at them individually to see what the 9 interviews had in common.



Findings



Linkalicious72

I use reviews to ensure that I'm not going to waste my time and money. I rarely buy games, but when I do, they better be damn good because I'll play them forever.

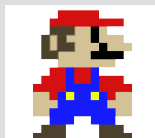
(survey quote on why they use reviews)

Why Use Reviews and Recommendations?

One important question that needs to be answered when looking at our research is why exactly people look for reviews and recommendations when they are looking for a new game to play. From our survey and research, we found that many of them do not want to waste time or money on a game that they do not enjoy. To avoid this, they look for their reviews and recommendations to be in-depth and show the user exactly what the game will be in a way that advertiser would not.

Gameplay

In our research we found that a common theme in our surveys and interviews is the importance of gameplay. People like to know what they're getting into before they dive into a video game. When they watch a review, whether it's online or in person, they are given the chance to understand what's going to happen before they ever need to experience it themselves. This preference for gameplay shows a general consensus that video game users do not trust simple word of mouth, especially from the producers of the games. They want concrete examples of what they are getting into so that they can make an informed decision.



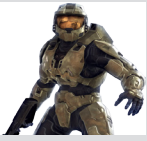
WahahahahMario1

I don't want to buy a game and not be able to finish it.

(interview quote on gameplay)



Findings (cont.)

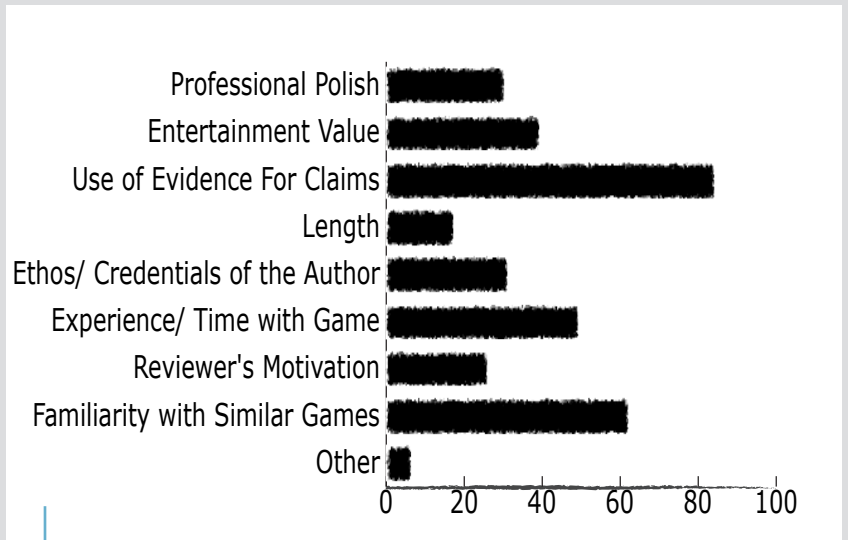


MasterChief123

Um, really it's their personality. If I don't find them to be a d**k, I will probably follow them more heavily. If I liked what they've written in a previous review, then I'll tend to keep following them more and more and hopefully like more of what they write.

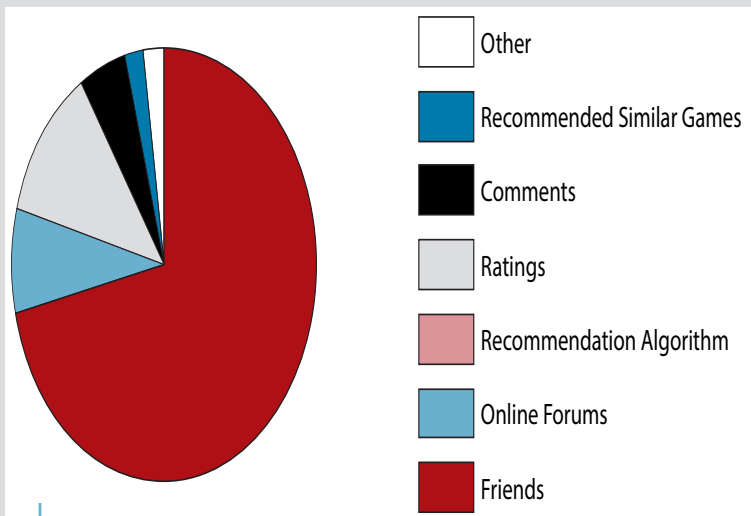
(interview quote on trustworthiness)

Another important theme in our research is that of trustworthiness and what exactly makes a review or recommendation trustworthy. From our research, we found that video game users have a slight mistrust of advertisements, opting to value recommendations from people who have no investment in the product. This is often found through friends, with 72% of our survey participants stating that their friends were the most trustworthy source. These recommendations have the added bonus of coming from people who know the user's tastes and personality.



This graph represents the top 3 aspects that users look for, or value, the most when playing a video game. The top 3 aspects chosen were Story, Gameplay and Genre, showing us what users want in video games.

If the users did look elsewhere for reviews, another trend appeared. Since they did not know the reviewer personally, they wanted the review to be in-depth and content focused. This we found especially in our interviews, when many of the participants expressed a desire that the reviewers had to know what they were talking about and provide examples/ details for the viewer/ reader to be considered trustworthy. They looked for consistency in opinion and similar tastes as well. In essence, they want the reviewer to prove to them that they are worth listening to, as if it were the opinion of a close friend.

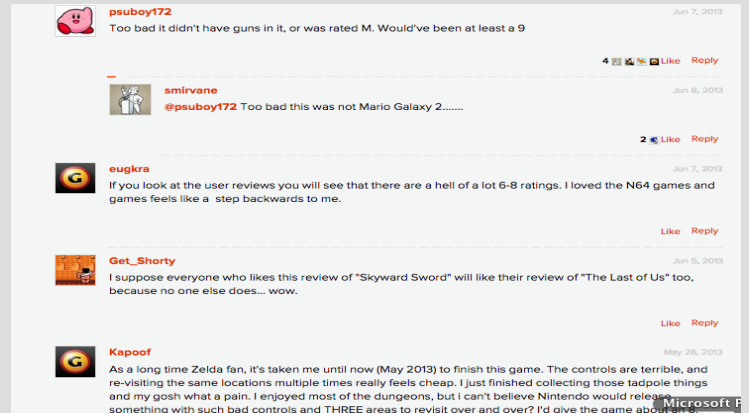


This graph illustrates the top 3 most trustworthy forms of recommendations. As shown above, the 3 most frequently chosen responses were Friends, Ratings and Comments, showing us what/who users look to for reviews and recommendations.



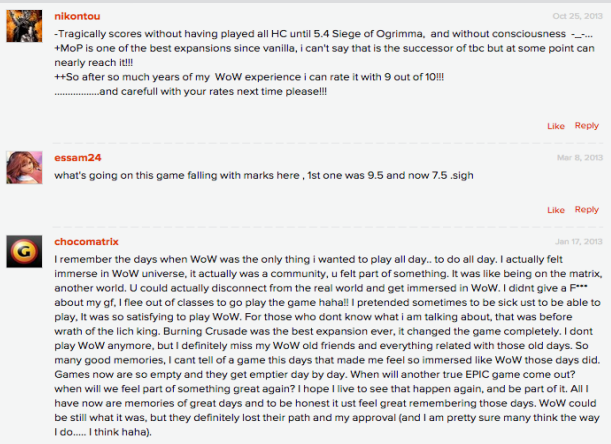
Artifact Analysis

Our third research method consisted of a different population, and is therefore separate from the methods and findings above. We did an artifact analysis of 200 screen shots for viewer/readers comments on various reviews. To determine which reviews to take screen shots, we used the results of our survey to find the top four video game review sites that the participant used (Gamespot, MetaCritic, Kotaku, and Game Radar), and then picked the top five genres of video games that they liked to play (role-playing games, action adventure, first person shooter, fantasy, and strategy and tactic). From each site we picked one review for each genre and took ten screen shots of the most recent comments. Our goal was to answer the questions about what audience members looked for in a review, how they interact with the review and each other, and what is important to the video game community.



This is a screen shot video game review comments. This shows us that multiple people comment on other users' comments.

Through our observations, we found many points that matched up with what the survey and interviews and others that were mentioned but not emphasized as much. From our survey population we found that a little over half of the participants never interacted with reviews and recommendations. So our artifact analysis explored what induces a viewer/reader to comment and what exactly they find important. From this, we found that, like the interviews, there is a certain mistrust of one person reviews. Many of the commenters brought in statistics of reviews from other sources and compared and contrasted with the review they were commenting on.



This screenshot shows commenters commenting with their own review of the already reviewed videogame.

In general, commenters valued an almost research paper approach to their comments. That was for the reviewer themselves as well as the other commenters. If the reviewer had not done their research, be it the game itself, the franchise, or the genre, it was called out, even ridiculed. There was also a desire for example and allusions to other games, which the commenters especially participated in. Through these conversations, we learned that the reviewer's audience member respected reviews that were holistic, in-depth, well researched, and full of examples. Most importantly, the reviewer has to prove to them that they are part of the gaming community and their opinion matters.



Conclusion

The three most popular video game genres chosen by users were role playing games, action adventure games, and first person shooters. Users also said that they valued the story and gameplay aspects the most when playing a video game. They also revealed that the majority of users surveyed played three to four different video game genres a month, while playing five to nine hours a week.

From our research, we concluded that most video game users regard recommendations from friends as the most trustworthy form of review or recommendation. In regards to reviews, either video or text, users valued the use of evidence, familiarity with similar games, and experience/time spent with the game over all other aspects of reviews. Our research revealed that most users are skeptical of reviews and recommendations, and value the opinions of friends and like-minded users who provide in-depth, knowledgeable, and entertaining reviews. This information can be helpful for video game developers who wish to better understand what users want out of their video game experience, and how to market their video games to a broader market.

About Us

Niki Wilkes is a junior majoring in English and Creative Writing. Though not an avid video game player, she does enjoy the occasional Mario Kart and Spyro. In this project, she was a data analyst, most notably for the artifact analysis, and a contributing writer with the methods and artifact analysis sections.

Ethan Sweat is a Senior majoring in Telecommunications with a Marketing minor. He is an avid video game player who plays a wide variety of games on a number of consoles. Ethan was the Principal Investigator for this project, worked on the background section, as well as contributed to the survey and interview process.

Azia Bussell is a senior majoring in Telecommunications with a minor in Chinese. She plays a variety of video games with a focus on anything Sims related but she's mostly attached to the Xbox Kinect game Dance Central. For this research project, she was mostly an idea producer and an editor.

Paige Ziegler is a junior majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She is also minoring in Film and Screenwriting. While being loyal to her first love, the Nintendo 64, she enjoys playing the Wii, especially games involving the Wii Fit Board, including Rayman Raving Rabbids and yoga. For this research project, she contributed her writing for the captions, the findings section, and created the InDesign document, infographics, and quotes.

