2017 specification
first exams in 2019

Getting to Know...

The Sims FreePlay

for A Level AQA Media Two

Second Edition, January 2024

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Contents

Teacher's Introduction

This resource has been written for the AQA Media Studies A Level specification (7572), with a specific focus on Media Two: In Depth Study: Video Games: The Sims FreePlay.

As a 'Getting to Know' pack, this resource has been constructed to actively engage students with the source material through a range of stimulating, focused and entertaining magazine-style articles exploring different topics across the media frameworks and theories. Discussion tasks are included throughout to recap knowledge. At the end of the resource, we have included a range of more challenging essay-style questions for students to test their learning.

The structure of the pack is as follows:
1. What Should I Know? – a brief overview of the key facts/information about the close study product.
2. Getting to Know… – nine articles on a variety of topics. In these articles, we have tried to focus on the more niche aspects of the product that may not have been covered by textbooks, to broaden students' understanding.
3. Show What You Know – four essay-style questions on the close study products complete with an answer section.

Our aim with this resource is to provide variety for those students who may feel overloaded by textbooks and other learning materials with a solely academic writing style. The blend of informative content and entertaining presentation style will not only help to strengthen a student's knowledge of the product, but also help to foster a genuine interest in it.

January 2024

Second Edition, January 2024
Changes have been made to the resource to account for the changes made to the set products, for assessment from 2024.

What Should I Know?

The Sims FreePlay (2011)

Background information

➢ Developed by **Maxis, Firemonkey Studios, Blue T... e ...ntertainment**, and

➢ Published by Electronic Arts (EA), availabl... fo... d... load on the App Store a...

➢ The game has been continually u... te... s...ce release in order to retain play...
    including an AR (augmen... real...y) function added in late 2018.

Plot and ga... ... view

➢ **Social s... ...ion game** where you create a virtual world filled with virtual p...

➢ The game features **microtransactions** that allow the user to purchase virtual
    unlockable items – however, this industry practice has been criticised.

Release information

➢ At the time of writing, the game has a **4 star rating** on Google Play from a tot...
    on the App Store it has a **4.4 star rating** from 23,666 ratings – indicating a po...
    platforms but a much larger market share on Android devices compared to A...

➢ Released as a **free-to-play** version with less content than the full PC games.

➢ Original released on **15ᵗʰ December 2011** for **Android, iOS** (Apple operating s...
    The Windows Phone version was discontinued as the operating system was s...

Getting to Know… The Sims F[...]

1. The Sims audience breakdown and cultural lega[...]

Audiences

The Sims is one of the most recognisable ga[...]g franchises to have emerged in the last couple of decades, an[...] [...] has permeated mainstream pop culture. For anything to [...] make an impact on pop culture, instead of just a small [...] di[...]ed fan base, it has to have a really sweeping broad audience ap[...] So, who plays The Sims, and why?

Demographics

A standout figure from the overall gender split of the whole Sims series is the fact towards women, and EA itself has estimated that women make up about 65% of i[...] estimation for gaming in general, as a hobby, is that there is a pretty even split 50 so The Sims' demo is notable because of that imbalance. It's hard to find precise [...] of FreePlay because of the smaller scale, but it would be logical to assume that be[...] there's a similar division along gender grouping.

In terms of age, The Sims has a remarkably broad audience grouping. Thanks to the lack of adult content, controversy, sex or violence, the games are all accessible and suitable for children and young teens as well as still being engaging for older categories.

With FreePlay specifically, we can see th[...] [...] emographic split between iOS and skewed towards the latter, wh[...] can b[...] [...]en in how the app has over five millio[...] whereas it only has an[...] [...]ly 20,000 in the Apple App Store. This is not unus[...] iOS is only [...] A[...] phones, whereas Android operating systems are used b[...] an equal ma[...] are with rival phone manufacturers primarily because it sells le[...] more expensive, but globally Android smartphones make up about 80% of all unit[...] The Sims FreePlay's audience, but of a broader market trend for mobile games.

Psychographics

EA hasn't really released the psychographics of its target audience, so we're going to have to go off what we know. For a start, as a mobile game, the primary target audience is going to likely have less of a serious, **active** interest in gaming and more of a casual, **passive** interest, compared to the more dedicated audience of the full PC/console games.

A want for light-hearted entertainment as opposed to more intense, story-driven narrative games is likely to be another key f[...]or. [...]e Sims has no set story, and your own actions create the n[...]ati[...] that happen within the world; there are no pre-record[...] [...] sc[...] [...]s. The comical tone of many of the quests, events and [...] [...] [...]e game and The Sims as a franchise (being able to [...]p Si[...] [...] pool, giving Sims 'Whale Rage' in the medieval a[...] [...]als[...] indicates the core audience are not looking for intensely en[...] [...]al gameplay involving violence or distressing and disturbing themes.

Equally, a desire to create and control, instead of following along with a set struct[...] reason why people play The Sims FreePlay instead of a more conventional mobile

with Hall's reception theory in mind, an audience that takes a preferred reading t[...]
that enjoys the relative lack of structure and the more free-from nature of the ga[...]
reading might be from players who value a solid story to relate with and be guide[...]

Industry impact

Often when a style of media or genre becomes extraordinari[...] popular really fast, [...]
oversaturation of the market by copycat texts trying t[...] ride the wave of pop[...]
hasn't really happened with The Sims, and th[...]e [...]een few direct competitor[...]

The only really similar game[...] also become hugely popular is Animal Crossi[...]
for its console[...] and [...]e, but there are major differences between the two. [...]
cartoonish [...]ic, the world is populated with talking animals instead of peopl[...]
the world in[...] of in a godlike controlling role.

The franchise also has a strong dedicated **fandom**. That iconic green
diamond hovering over someone's head has been a common Halloween
or New Year's Eve costume because The Sims is so easily recognised and
so well beloved. As Jenkins puts forward, costumes and merchandise of
a certain media franchise allow people to actively display their interests
and connect with people via this shared fandom, which, in this specific
case, is The Sims. But it's important to remember that this fandom has
been cultivated by the entire series, not just FreePlay, which is a
relatively minor addition to the overall canon.

Fan[...]
joine[...]
dev[...]
acti[...]

Discussion questions

1) What might be a difference in psychographics be[...] pl[...]yers of The Sims Fr[...]
   of the full The Sims 4 game for PC and [...]oles?
2) What is a notable oddity about [...]er [...]raphics of The Sims franchise?
3) Why might the content [...] [...]a[...] affect its commercial success?

2. A history of mobile games – the reborn medium

I need you to imagine you are wading back along the winding, raging river of time until you arrive at the far distant shores of the year 2008. Among the mist and th fog of eternity stands a colossal monolith like one of the giant rocks of Stonehen You see the curved rectangular form, the glimmering reflection of the glass, and a round indent emblazoned with the outline of a square. C ... usly, you press the enticing symbol. A blaze of light erupts, moment ... my bl ... ing you. But as your si returns you see it. The genesis of it all – ... ... App Store.

OK, so maybe I've overdr ... ... paragraph a bit, but the point is that Apple' App Store was ... se ... ... basis for the idea of 'mobile gaming' as we know it today. If y ... t ... et technical, phones did have games before the App Store, such as the ... ... nake application that came loaded onto Nokia 3310s (the insan strong phone you could throw off a bridge and it wouldn't even scratch), but the A Store changed how they were made, marketed and used. Instead of being built in the phone from the factory, Apple and other third-party developers could design new games and post them for sale through the marketplace.

However, the novelty of playing a game on your phone soon wore off and sudden giving a damn about Angry Birds or Doodlejump. It was a bit of fun, but not enoug time on a repeat basis – not like a console or PC game. The games were fun enou mechanics and storytelling that they really weren't engaging for audiences beyon

Now, however, the format is back – it has been remade in a new form, more popu the USA alone the number of people playing mobile games has shot up from appr to 164 million in 2015, and this upward growth has only continued since (source: statista.com/statistics/234635/number-of-mobile-gamers-forecast/).

Why is mobile gaming more popular than ever before?

For one thing, phones have come a ... ... n terms of hardware specs, even jus advanced processors, more ... ... ed graphics cards, and, most importantly, s higher definition th ... ... generations.

Phone game ... always hampered by the fact that, compared to a PC or TV m small to be truly competitive in terms of usability. A game such as Candy Crush d does it need a fancy graphics processor – but something like Fortnite, that you ca probably wouldn't translate well onto a smaller scale.

The major change in recent years, however, has been major existing gaming franc format. Pokémon Go was the first big hitter, incorporating augmented reality int present battle royale games, PUBG and Fortnite, have also brought the masses b the dismay of every secondary school teacher who was already sick of their stude Fortnite instead of working. These recognisable and established brand names, c reserves of huge companies such as Electronic Arts to fund development, have r capabilities of mobile games shooting up.

The Sims FreePlay is an example of an established, reputabl ... aming franchise ex and it has been notably successful because of the ... ... base that the belo game is an example of the '**freemium**' mobi ... ar ... ... usiness model, where you c and play for free, but, of course, you ... pa ... ... money for the convenience of s something. This business mo ... ... an ... ... the thorny ethical issues surrounding it, p. 25, 'Microtransactio ...

Discussion Questions

1) What technical factors may have influenced the rise in mobile gaming?
2) What major industrial change in mobile gaming has occurred in the last few ye
3) How does the form of mobile gaming influence the content that is produced? compare to The Sims 4?

3. What makes The Sims unique?

There's not really much else like The Sims franchise, and if you tried to make a similar game now, people would probably say that you're a plagiarist.

As a core premise, it doesn't seem like the sort of thing that would actually be that fun or appealing as a game. You have the potential with this amazing new technology to do anything – drive a Ferrari along California's coast roads at 120 mph, take on alien creatures with a laser sword and a hologram woman who tells you where to go – anything is possible! But with all this you choose to... uhh, build a house, and make people do things? Seems like the dull parts of real life but OK, you do you.
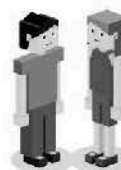
Maybe The Sims' popularity is in how it speaks to the millennial condition that we'd love to own our own house but, hey, the economy is a dumpster to settle for a digital version for the meantime. But really, it's so much more than create something and to almost play God in your own little world.

Social simulation genre

On paper, the notion of a computer simulation of a virtual world of people with di pets, etc. sounds more like a laboratory experiment or the plot of a sci-fi film. But FreePlay, this premise is framed to be a source of entertainment.

In essence, The Sims is a fancier version of when you used to play as a child makin with toy cars and stuffed animals. Perhaps the success of The Sims as a series is h coding to allow us to tap into an inherent desire to play and imagine things.

The Sims' success was in part due to the unique and novel nature of the game, an own new genre in terms of 'social simulation'. There were a handful of pre-existin idea, but The Sims helped to truly cement the conventions of the genre, which are

➢ **Lack of a player character**
This is perhaps the most counterintuitive aspect to The Sims. Instead of inha character within a story, you are in fact more of a godlike force or like a scien You choose what happens, but as the player you don't exist in the world of Th

➢ **Social relationships as a source of entertainment**
In The Sims there is no great battle between the forces of good and evil, no a mythical object to retrieve from a lost Atlantean city, so where does the actu comes from the Sims themselves, and how their lives play out in the world yo which...

➢ **The ability to create and design**
This is a major draw of the series and it is the **sandbox** aspect of the game. Unlike a traditional narrative game where everything has been laid in place for you, The Sims lets you create the world where the dra will unfold. You can build houses, roads, schools, pools, etc. all virtual environment for these computerised people, whose personalities and attributes you shape and design. Essentially, you become a producer for a sort of virtual Big-Brother-esque reality show, but with even more meddling.

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Different priorities

The Sims is an oddity in the game industry because it seemingly has very different priorities from many big **Triple-A** titles. While many game developers and writers are aiming for ultimate **immersion**, extremely cinematic aesthetics, and graphical verisimilitude that truly puts you in the world of the game (especially with VR tech), The Sims games are more focused on being light-hearted fun.

It's important to counter this with the point that EA is by no means going against Hesmondhalgh's theory for the state of modern cultural industries. For starters, at point in the history of The Sims, over a decade of undefined success and sale, there is very little risk for EA to produce FreePlay. Not only that, but EA is most certainly profit-driven, and even though the game is free to play, it is a much lighter version of the full, paid version and is filled with **microtransactions**. So, yes, the franchise is a bit of an oddity in terms of content, but definitely not in terms of industrial practices.

Discussion questions

1) Why do you think that The Sims, including FreePlay, has no direct competitors simulators? Consider industrial factors.
2) Considering the game as a social simulator with human characters, which one gratifications may a player get out of The Sims FreePlay?

4. Production, distribution and marketing of The Si

Series creator Will Wright

The genesis of the original Sims was actually the result of a devastating Californian firestorm that destroyed the house of Will Wright, a budding game designer. Instead of ruining his life, which a solutely could have done, it actually gave him the idea for a virtual doll house' where you could create, from the ground virtual world replete with homes and people and in of the s. It was the kernel of an excellent idea, but it land red for a while before Maxis – the game developme pa Wright worked for – was eventually bought by Electronic A ne years after having his life turned upside down, Wright's vision was shown to the world with the release of The Sims in early 2000. Wright no longer works as the creative director of The Sims franchise, and has been producing other games since 2008, but his role as the series creator is an important part of backstory.

Electronic Arts

Electronic Arts is an absolute behemoth of the industry. In fact, in 2019, EA is the company in the world, and in 2018 alone it generated an approximate revenue of converts to around £2.8 billion). It owns the insanely popular FIFA franchise, Batt whole bunch of stuff that makes the company so wealthy and powerful. The vide modern industries – not just the media – is pretty much dominated by a small har expansive companies, and EA is one of these companies. Consider EA as an equivalent of a major Hollywood studio such as Param n. Pictures or a major television network such as Sky TV.

The four production companie at we involved in the making of FreePlay were Maxis, Fi l, ys Studios, Blue Tongue Entertainment (two small- us an companies) and EA Mobile. All four of these production hies are owned by Electronic Arts, which operates both **vertical and horizontal ownership models** in the gaming industry.

Mobile game development

You're probably switching between reading this and looking at your phone, which is probably either using an iOS or Android operating system. Because these two s mobile games need to have different versions in order to work on both, and this i of companies involved in the development as they may specialise specifically in o operating systems.

Mobile games also have **engines**, the fundamental coding and software that the b game are based upon. This is exactly the same as PC and con ple products, but o scale, because smartphones are multipurpose object w a hole bunch of func specialised for one task.

The technical format will di be ntent of a mobile app compared to a full-s the size and co ple e game files. For example, The Sims 4 for PC is 10 GB which is a v ng x larger than The Sims FreePlay. It makes practical sense t going to be sibling to a full game, and more simplistic simply because smar processing power.

Distribution

The distribution process for selling mobile games is a highly efficient and low-cost company such as EA. Unlike traditional games sold on a cartridge or disk, all a co file onto the digital marketplace, and pay a fee in order to do this, and they can se accessibility and affordability is why there are so many independent creators post do it for very little expense.

Clay Shirky, a media theorist, has noted how user review sites and functionality ha power to consumers by letting their actions and critiques be visible. As a result a mobile app on the App Store Google Play store can be a highly influential fact purchased or not. On these marketplaces, people can either simply leave a star ra short review. Importantly, the number of ratings is also displayed, something tha represent the overall perceived quality of a mobile game. A 4.2 star rating from 1 balanced and fairer than a 5 star rating from only 10 reviews simply because of th going to be more accurately reflective of how people view the game, similar to ho

The Sims FreePlay is an example of how the production and distribution methods risk and efficient from a business perspective, especially for a major conglomerate need to be as large, the graphics don't need to be as high definition, and the gam less money and time, and then distributed on a global scale with ease.

Regulation and age-rating

Surprisingly, The Sims FreePlay isn't actually rated E for Everyone, and in fact you game. In terms of actual content, the game is suitable for children, but the issue i microtransactions and their potential appeal to children who don't yet fully under Mobile games aren't yet (in November 2019) regulated board like PEGI in Eu these age ratings are imposed by the App Store Google Play.

Marketing

The Sims FreePlay, like almost every media text released today, makes use of soci a lot of sense; incredibly cheap, you can directly interact with your audience, a swathes of people who scroll through Twitter or Facebook when they're bored or these two outlets, the Facebook page is much more popular than the Twitter acc million likes (Facebook) compared to around 70k followers (Twitter). Both their t content, about updates to the game or prompts to play a particular quest with a game and a click-through link to an app store or to the EA website.

The interactivity that social media marketing allows is both a blessing and a curse. mockery, is publicly and openly displayed in a way that isn't really possible with a For the social media team behind running the FreePlay Twitter and Facebook pag could be a source of backlash from users on social media who disagree with the d

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Discussion questions

1) The Sims speak in their distinctive fictional language 'Simlish' – what industrial re influenced this creative decision?

2) Do you think The Sims FreePlay benefited from the App Store / Google Play St user ratings?

5. The lucrative market of casual gaming (The Sim

Casual versus competitive gamers

Gaming is now a very much a mainstream pursuit, especially among younger audiences, but not everyone is on the same level of investment in and dedication the hobby. For the majority of people, video games are a source of sporadic entertainment and they play casually. At the other end of the spectrum, there are people who would class themselves as gamers – they play regularly and competitively, and have a strong personal interest in the medium and the industry beyond just here and now.

A 'casual game' one with a broad appeal in terms of gameplay and subject matter – something that pretty much anyone can get into without needing an interest in a particular genre of game or a certain skill level. A casual game is something you can play by yourself or with some friends, pick up for a few minute and just have a fun time where no one fights anyone, whereas a hardcore game is to be more difficult and to reward playing for longer periods of time.

There also tends to be a split in aesthetics and visual styles between casual and sp games are often brighter, more colourful and less of a focus on a less realistic visu difference between Super Mario Kart – vibrant, cartoony, fun – and Gran Turismo white, realistic-looking car models and scenery, more rewarding for long-term pla rules on what falls into which category, but there are notable and recognisable tr

Dedication versus size

So, the trade-off between those two target game is that while dedicated gamers on games, equipment, subscriptions, etc. are also the smaller pool of people time-consuming one if you want to really get good at a particular game. So, from have a choice: do you want to sell products worth hundreds of pounds to several you want something similar to people spending the price of a coffee on an app?

If you're trying to sell a console game for £50+, expectations will be high because money to spend on a piece of entertainment. If a £50 game is a mediocre or disap likely to be refunds, backlash from customers, and a negative impact on the sales (see Fallout 76 as an example of a recent catastrophic failure) – but is that going t course not; who has the time to complain about a cheap mobile game? In this ec

Is The Sims a casual franchise?

OK, so cool, we've established some basics, but it's time to focus in on The Sims –

On the one hand, the genre and the core premise of building a virtual world with very casual. It has broad appeal, it doesn't have missions or a long-form storyline people of any age really. But, on the other hand, The Sims is a game that rewards playing, as the longer you spend building your world and getting your Sims to do can expand your creation.

An important perspective to note on this topic is from the EA executive in charge commented, 't think of it as a casual game. We were one of the first games audience...', it's interesting to know that the business behind the series views

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Zig Zag Education

The Sims FreePlay and casual gaming

The Sims is one of the most successful gaming franchises ever made, and The Sims 4 (2013) has become a billion-dollar title thanks to the extreme demand for and consistent popularity of the series. But these larger, full-scale games are designed for PC or consoles, and not everyone has the interest in purchasing a £30 title nor may they have a decent computer that can run video game graphics smoothly. Currently, the Sims 4 is available for about £39, with more expansion packs and **DLCs** that can run that price up even more, but The Sims FreePlay is, well, free* to play, which is instantly more appealing.

Whether or not the Sims series as a whole is casual is a big old debate, but it's hard is not a vastly more casual form of the medium, and it would be a fair assertion to FreePlay is a casual game. It's significantly cheaper, it can be played when you've for a train, or wherever, and the game is much lighter compared to its PC/console

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Discussion questions

1) Why might The Sims FreePlay be described as more casual in nature compared
2) Referring to uses and gratifications, what use might a hardcore/hobbyist gamer casual gamer might not?
3) What element of The Sims FreePlay's gameplay could be described as not bein

6. Microtransactions and DLCs – the ethical issues game design (The Sims FreePlay)

There is no avoiding the issue of microtransactions, one of the most widely detested trends in modern game design, and one that has raised many issues of regulation, and even legality. In a few ~~~~ e unknown term has fast become a byword for exp~~~~ business tactics in the video game industry. Thes~ ~~ ~~~me transactions where you can pay for something ~~~~ ~~tual money, a new weapon or a character skin – but~ ~~ ~~~~ a larger **DLC** pack, you pay smaller amounts of ~~~~ ~~ ~~~ller reward, hence the 'micro' element of the name.

DLCs ~
conter~
add-o~
vehicl~
These ~
the ba~

On the surface, it seems like a pretty fair and understandable option, but some m~ criticised for being unfair to their customers. Consumers, commentators and gov~ complaints and concerns about the gaming industry's increasing focus on incorpo~ and loot boxes into their products.

The problems with microtransactions

In mobile games, which are often free or pretty cheap to purchase, microtransact~ expected – either that or you have un-skippable ads pop up every so often that y~ get if you paid for the game – so it's not too unsurprising in this segment of the i~

But the problems are the same; microtransactions prey upon the desire that many o~ which is to reach a goal by the path of least resistance. If you want to achieve somet~ game and your options are to grind away for hours and hours or to pay a small fee t~ immediately, then what's the problem with that? It's an even choice with two fair o~

But the world is not so straightforward or balance~ ~nd ~ here there is money to ~ there is exploitation. We can never know ~~~ ~~~re~ ~~t who's to say that the game~ make the free avenue much more ~~~~ ~~~~uming and less rewarding, in order to~ simply for the convenience? ~~~~ ld it not be more honest and upfront to simply ~ but then have ~~ m~~~ ~~~me methods of trying to crowbar open your wallet?

Another as~~~ why microtransactions are so widely reviled by the general publi~ lawmakers/g~~~rnments, but we'll get to that) is how often they entice children i~ of money through the promise of quick success. It's bad enough for teenagers and ~ have no real perception of money as a concept, these in-game microtransactions c~

Why is this relevant to The Sims FreePlay?

It's relevant because The Sims FreePlay has microtransactions in it! Surprise, sur~ page tangent – it's a relevant point. In the game, which is admittedly the free ver~ game, you can earn 'SimCash' through quests/activities in-game, or you can chuc~ and get some instantly, exactly the same mechanics for pretty much any microtr~

In this game, however, it is more controversial simply because of the company tha~ More commonly known as EA, this giant of the video game world has garnered a ~ for a number of questionable business practices. Most rec~~ ly, and most infam~ misuse) of microtransactions, such as the huge user ~~~ ~ dr~~alistic backlash aga~ in Star Wars Battlefront 2, a game which alr~~ ~y ~~~~ ~~ound £50 to begin with. ~ means the only mobile game with m~~ ~~a~ ~~ions, but it is important to note th~ game including EA's proclivity ~~ ~ar~ ~sing microtransactions at almost every o~

Discuss~~~ ~~e.~ions
1) What ~~~~ ~o microtransactions in games, especially mobile games, raise in re~
2) Give a point for and a point against the statement 'Microtransactions are an ex~
   a. For
   b. Against
3) What aspects of The Sims FreePlay's gameplay might encourage players to ma~

7. Pocket-sized universe – postmodernism and rep[...] of reality in The Sims FreePlay

Oh boy! Postmodernism and The Sims – where to start? A digital simulation that resembles the real world filled with little people whose lives you can control is definit[...] [...]ripe for postmodern analysis.

Simulacra

Like the an[...]on [...]tatues of gods and goddesses without the 'essence[...] e subject matter that was the origin of the term, a Sim could absolutely be described as a **simulacrum**. It is a tiny 3D model of a human, with a virtual personality performing actions and tasks, but with no humanity or autonomy of its own. Equally, the same could be said for all of the models of buildings, animals, plants and other items that exist in our real world but are being replicated in the world of The Sims FreePlay, but the Sims themselves are perhaps the most obvious and complex examples of **simulacra** in the game.

Simulacrum – th[...]
simulacra – an i[...]
without the inhe[...]
original thing th[...]

Hyperreality

Umberto Eco, a postmodernist theorist and author, referred to Disneyland as a pl[...] worlds of the 'real' and the imaginary overlap. But hyperreality doesn't refer only [...] such as those you'd find at a theme park; it can also refe[...] edia texts. On a vis[...] with imagery that is recognisable but stylised. A [...]ou[...] f a house in the game is [...] becomes hyperreal in the way in which t[...] [...]ation makes it appear more real t[...]

Implosion

Media and [...]n society are inextricably linked (whether that's a good thing or [...] won't get int[...]ere), and this is the postmodernist notion of **implosion**. The Sims[...] content and gameplay that are utterly integral to the text are all rooted in real lif[...] mundane parts of it. Recently, there was a 'Barista' update to the game where y[...] it with all the assorted props and people in your virtual society. With all the unli[...] escapism that computer technology and games could offer, some people just wa[...] coffee shop.

The Sims doesn't explicitly make intertextual references to wider society or existi[...] draws upon the imagery and mechanics of our society and our world that we see [...] social simulation, The Sims FreePlay is a strong example of the breaking down of t[...] constructed and the real.

Representation of reality

Where The Sims differs wildly from [...]v[...] games, and other media in genera[...] 'characters' made by the de[...]er[...] n The Sims, the diversity of the Sims in you[...] you design them [...] [...]se you need a variety of options to do so. The devel[...] options for [...]stc[...]isation of Sims, including racial identity, sexuality, age and [...] psychologic[...] [...]ents such as personality traits, likes and dislikes, particular abili[...] often predetermined or not addressed in other games or fiction media.

As a version of 'reality', The Sims is a heightened, comical and playful reflection of modern life in a colourful, cartoonish world. The game developers aren't aiming for **verisimilitude** in the visuals or in the quests and actions – aspects of the real world that are dark, miserable and depressing don't make it in because why would anyone want to play a simulation of the same thing they tread through every day?

Discussion questions

1) The Sims FreePlay has been updated to include virtual reality (VR) capability – postmodernist thought does VR relate to?
2) Why might not having written characters alter how social groups are represented?
3) How might the fact that the Sims speak in 'Simlish' be disguised as a simulacrum?

8. Why do people play video games?

This is always a good question; with anything, it always comes back to 'why?' Except for eating, sleeping, reproducing, avoiding getting eaten by wolves, and all the other autopilot stuff we do so we don't die, everything else humans do can be questioned and dissected. So why do we play video games?

Entertainment

'Why do people play games?' Because it's fun, Socrates – not a deep question. Then again, we probably do want to go more in-depth because if you write that as an answer in an exam, you'll probably get a terrible grade, so get the scuba gear on because it's time to descend.

For a start, games can be seen as a form of task. Once you complete a task, you n dopamine and other feel-good hormones as a reward for achieving something. U something is satisfying and rewards you in this way, you're going to keep doing it psychological and emotional level, you feel as if you've achieved something – posi you to carry on doing what you are doing.

Gaming is often rewarding on that very basic psychological and neurological level, things you do in games are just fun and exciting. You don't do paperwork or vacu things, drive impossibly fast, fight dragons or whatever.

Escapism

A protagonist in a film is normally a character designed to be relatable to the view part of the 'escapism' aspect. Video games can take this to the next level of imme fictional world.

➢ Character creation – you can model the character on yourself, or create a whole new identity of who you want to be
➢ **NPCs** directly address you and the narratives revolve specifically around you and your actions as the player character

Equally, when you play a video game you become more than an audience membe consuming a text, you are taking on a role within the story. Life will beat you ove from time to time, so being able to take a break by exploring some virtual world a valuable, and a way to de-stress.

Education

This one is lower down on the list because video games are an overwhelmingly fic are very few games that are factual or learning-based apart from ones designed fo However, while you might not be learning facts and figures from playing video gai some mental and physical skills and abilities tested, such as:

➢ puzzle-solving and lateral thinking
➢ response and reaction times
➢ fine motor skills in using controllers

Identity

Another important aspect is forming an identity through video games. There's a r popular term, even if it's been mocked and satirised a lot recently in Internet cultu people place a lot of stock in gaming as a part of their personality and their social

You might be someone who plays online regularly, and you might talk to people i[...]
wouldn't have met in real life – maybe even establishing a friendship online throu[...]
Equally, real-world friendships may be strengthened through discussing and playi[...]

Real-world competition

E-sports, just like regular sports but with more… 'e'? Even th[r]ough e-sports (comp[...]
pursuit, competitions and tournaments are just as fie[rce]ly [f]ou[g]ht and widely wat[...]
sports. If you're dedicated enough, and you h[...]ve s[...]i[...]ibuprofen gel handy to fe[...]
you could become a world-class pla[...]

It's a huge ph[...]m[...] [...] leagues, teams, and solo tournaments being compe[...]
South Kore[...] cr[u]cible of today's e-sports, the gamer promised land, where th[...]
Energy and [...] single seat is a gaming chair, and the country treats it as a very [...]
equivalent to becoming an athlete or a football player. The racing game franchise[...]
competition in conjunction with Nissan to find the fastest virtual race driver on th[...]
skills could transfer over to a real-world circuit. Called GT Academy, the inaugural[...]
broadcast on TV as a series and proved to be a hit. Some of the winners of the sh[...]
high-level motorsports, all because of a computer game.

So, being really, insanely good at a video game might not be a waste of time at al[...]
potentially be a viable career, or even help you with a rare real-world opportunity[...]
only is it good for the players, but there are millions of people who enjoy watchin[...]
YouTube/Twitch streamers, just as plenty of people enjoy watch football or racin[...]

Prioritising positive emotions

Broadly speaking, emotional response – particularly enjoyment – is the
primary reason people play video games, and learning/expanding
knowledge is either a secondary reason or not a priority. This is a
generalisation, and of course [i]t [isn't] going to be 100% an unbroken rule,
but it is an obs[er]vati[on ba]se[d on] the existing **canon** of video games.

Emotional f[actors] may be a factor in why the intended emotional
response is often skewed towards positivity and happiness. You might
binge-watch a comedy series, but chances are you probably wouldn't
binge-watch a docuseries about homelessness because experiencing an
onslaught of negative feelings is intense, and, frankly, it sucks. A fiction
film can explore deeply distressing and upsetting topics because it ends
after a certain time, and you can go away and process those feelings.
But games don't end, not in the same manner as a television programme or a movi[e]
developers to keep audiences engaged with their game for long periods of time. If [...]
feel rubbish, they're not going to keep using it, and then you're going to lose a ton [...]

Canon [...]
in a me[...]
to be i[...]
instanc[...]
of the [...]

Emotio[...]
of bein[g]
and/or[...]
though[...]

Discussion questions

1) What could be an audience use or gratif[ic]ati[on] o[f] [Th]e Sims FreePlay?
2) Do you think the audience's rea[son fo]r p[l]aying a video game are different fro[m]
   and, if so, what are thes[e] [diff]er[en]ces?
3) Why might vid[eo gam]es b[e] described as a more exclusionary form of media fo[r]

9. How are video games made?

Any form of media requires a lot of graft and hard work to get it made, and video
most technologically intense forms. For clarity, we're not talking about the ins an
studios and all that corporate noise, we're talking about the craft, bro.

Once you've got an idea together and all the #deep a   ec tation is over, you
have to take off your artist beret and put on ur   u   er hard hat to get a
decent product together. If your id   re   but your execution is
garbage, people will only   e ber the garbage. Once he came
up with his pl   fo   ichelangelo then had to hammer the hell
out of a 17   o stone for years to get it done.

Unless you're an enthusiast, it can seem difficult to grasp how video
games are made. If you want to make a film but you've got no money,
you can borrow someone's DSLR or shoot it on your iPhone. If you have
dreams of making cash from rapping or singing or playing guitar, you can
get a cheap microphone and make a start towards that. But if you want to
go about making a video game, how the hell do you get started?

Production process

Like film or television, game design is **multidisciplinary**, meaning that it requires a
areas of tech to come together to produce one complete piece of media. The list
guide to how to make a game, but is instead just an insight into the various elemer

➢ **Writing –** video games are highly scripted affairs, and the writing process for
   the first steps on the road to a finished produc

➢ **Voice acting and/or motion capture –** Ok so v u e got the script – now you
   motion-capture performances f e i aracters.

➢ **Original scores –** like c   st video games (especially big-budget titles)
   been origi ally   specifically for the game to create mood, drive actio
   identit e g e. The Nordic-inspired chanting of The Elder Scrolls V: Sky
   atmosp   just like the beat-driven bass-heavy music used in the Call of Du
   action, warfare and rage.

➢ **Modelling and texturing –** these are the processes of making the virtual envi
   objects for the game, as well as then adding the textures, colours, lighting, s
   visual elements.

➢ **Play-testing / beta builds –** you've got to make sure that what you've made i
   you've also got to make sure that buyers aren't going to hate it. So, what do
   video game designer, you do what's called beta-testing. You pay a group of
   your product to see what they like, what they hate, and what they think coul
   build. This can be a great way to polish a promising-looking game, or even he
   screw-up.

Artistry or childish games?

Are video games art or not? I don't h w   swer to this one – in fact, nobody
opinion. But it is a debate that   s   e   circling around the industry since its ince
probably keep raging   t   Sun swallows up the Earth.

In the early   f Tetris, Pacman, Galaga and the iconic neon arcades of the eig
pressed to argue that these were on the same playing field artistically as cinema
but these were just the beginnings.

But now that the technology has developed so much, the scope of modern games
aesthetics is definitely on a par with that of other media.

Costs and expenses

The frustrating aspect about trying to make any media or artwork is the inevitable [...]
producing it, and a major aspect is the technology you need. There are some for[...]
cheap – you can write a script for next to nothing, you can buy a decent micropho[...]
very little money. You could even make a short film on a microbudget, and you c[...]
level of quality if the creativity and dedication are there. But making a game, esp[...]
an expensive endeavour. There are small developers making brilliant games for e[...]
there are, but, as for film or television, you need to have deep, deep pockets to pr[...]
For instance, Grand Theft Auto V is the most successful entertainment product ev[...]
years since launch (get bodied, Avatar), but it still cost an absolutely colossal $265[...]

Discussion questions

1) Video games are expensive to develop and produce – why is this? Try to give [...]
   elements of production in your answer.

2) Why might a game such as Metroid Prime 2: Echoes have been more expensive [...]
   The Sims Mobile?

3) Referring to Hesmondhalgh's theories on cultural industries, what do multimill[...]
   indicate about the nature of the mainstream video game industry?

Show What You Know

1) Compared to other forms of fictional narrative media, such as a television se[...]
   the major differences between how video games such as The Sims FreePlay [...]
   Consider structure, character archetypes, and the di[...]ht technical attribut[...]

2) How does The Sims FreePlay relat[...]e? [...]ow much does it conform to [...]
   categories, how has this [...]d, and what are the effects? Consider [...]
   your answer.

3) As a fo[...]edia, what relationship do video games have with technology[...]
   production and distribution utilise technology, and how do video games com[...]
   of media texts?

4) There has been an ongoing debate over whether video games cause violence[...]
   against the statement that 'video games cause violence', referring specificall[...]
   to audience theories.

Answers

1. 'The Sims' audience breakdown and cultural legacy

1) A difference in psychographics might be how much of an interest the players ___ players of FreePlay are likely to be much more ___ whereas players of The ___ because the game is much larger and longer.
2) The fact that the audience is ___ heavily towards female, instead of being ___
3) Content that is mature ___ or niche is likely to limit commercial success ___ broad audience ___

2. A history of mobile games – the reborn medium

1) Phone displays have become larger and have higher definitions to cope with ___ Internet networks have become faster and more versatile for online gameplay ___
2) A major industrial change has been existing franchises such as The Sims expanding ___ console and PC to having mobile versions as well.
3) Mobile games are much smaller in size and complexity because of the limited ___ of phones – they may have less functionality and game content simply because ___ no longer operated by a controller or keyboard, but by the touchscreen instead ___

3. What makes The Sims unique?

1) Electronic Arts is a major conglomerate with a large amount of power – any ___ are likely to be met with copyright claims from EA's legal team.
2) A player may experience escapism through being ___ to simulate their own ___ and shape the lives of the Sims in a way they wish they could do with their own ___ entertainment from the simulated actions and events of the game.

4. Production, distribution and marketing of The Sims FreePlay

1) By having character dialogue in the game's own constructed language, EA avoids ___ actors in a variety of languages.
2) The Sims FreePlay has benefited because the game has been very well received ___ are relatively high, there are large numbers of user reviews, and the majority ___ positive – the games downloads have probably been helped by this.

5. The lucrative market of casual gaming

1) Because FreePlay is a mobile game, it requires much less investment both of ___ played on the go instead of at home.
2) A hardcore gamer might use video gaming for the purpose of forming an identity ___ themselves as a gamer or form social bonds with other players through the ___ to do this.
3) The fact that The Sims FreePlay allows you to ___ your game and continue ___ to build your world, instead of being a 'one-and-done' game where your progress ___

6. Microtransactions ___ the ethical issues surrounding modern ___

1) Microtransactions raise the issue that game companies are potentially taking ___ especially given the popularity of mobile games with younger audiences.
2) Exploitative tactic for and against:
   a. For – microtransactions are often in games targeted at younger children ___ value of money; equally, developers may make games more difficult so ___ to skip ahead.

b. Against – microtransactions are shortcuts, and people can still achieve th
game for more time. They have the choice whether to buy or not.
3) The Sims FreePlay's gameplay requires long periods of time to achieve thing
ahead could become an appealing prospect.

7. Pocket-sized universe – postmodernism and representation of reality

1) Virtual reality is an example of hyperreality wh digital simulation dire
physical existence.
2) Having no written characters dynamics of social groups being repre
becomes the deciding ow groups of characters are represented th
their Sim
3) Simlish described as a simulacrum of real languages, as it expresses
words meaningless gibberish that resembles a real language but with no

8. Why do people play video games?

1) These are example answers, as there can be many applicable uses and gratifi
reasoning and explanation.
  • Escapism – because of the fantasy setting and the heroic player characte
  • Entertainment – the portable nature of the game means it could be use
    e.g. on public transport.
  • Entertainment – long-form story combined with the exciting nature of t
2) People might play a game for social reasons; people may play games more fo
emotional reasons, as they would when they watch a film; they may play gan
shorter periods of time than the time spent watching a film, which tends to h
two hours.
3) Video games could be described as being exc in to new audiences bec
and you can be bad at playing a vide ke other forms of media (e.g
games might put off new pla se they don't enjoy the feeling of mal

9. How ar o made?

1) The pro of making a video game is multidisciplinary and requires a numb
as voice acting, music recording, motion capture, 3D modelling, texturing, c
2) Metroid Prime 2: Echoes was made in 2004, when computer technology wou
and much more expensive than the same technology needed to develop a m
Sims FreePlay. Equally, Prime 2 is a full console game, which would have tak
develop and produce.
3) The huge budgets of mainstream games indicate the fact that the video gam
commercialised and that these development companies are ultimately run fc
their money back and then some in order to survive.

Show What You Know

1) Narratology comparison between film/television an video games.
  a. Character archetypes are simila th conventional media and vi
    and antagonist driving t
    i. Video gam more heightened in the moral divide betwee
      he they have to often actively fight the villain.
    ii. and television often have more moral ambiguity in their hero
      maged and conflicted, whereas game heroes are the audience su
      clear-cut.
  b. Narrative structures are different because of the media form.
    i. Many video games have a set storyline, but many also have open na
      action affects the ending.

    ii.   The Sims FreePlay has even less of a narrative structure because it i
         character in the story.
- c.   Stories in film and television are often much shorter and fixed due to th
- d.   Game stories have similar narrative arcs and result in a final climactic en
    much longer.

2) The Sims FreePlay with regard to genre.
    a.   The genre is social simulation.
    b.   The conventions exhibited in The S   FreePlay are lack of a player char
         create a virtual world; t'   nce of simulated virtual people and th
         of drama.
    c.   Th   e   ns to the genre conventions closely, even though socia
         in   der industry.

3) How video games utilise technology compared to other media forms.
    i.   Video games are wholly reliant upon technology as they couldn't exist w
    ii.   The production process relies upon technology including coding, physics
         animation, sound and dialogue recording.
    iii.   Distribution relies upon customers owning the hardware (PC, consoles,
         are either physical copies or online digital marketplaces and downloads.
    iv.   Compared to conventional forms of media, video games are the most re
         television predominantly use human actors and real-world settings/loca
         with added VFX, whereas 100% of video game visual content has been g

4) Video games cause violence – for and against argument.
    a.   FOR
        i.   Video games often use violence as a ma   n onent of their con
        ii.   Unlike in many films and television ro   mes, there is little focu
            real-world ramifications   lence.
        iii.   Unlike pre-reco   m   a, you as the player are actually choosing
            potential   re amaging psychologically.
        iv.   du   's media effects study on the aggression of children expose
               ible link between consumption of violent imagery and physical
    b.   AGAINST
        i.   Video game violence is often far less visually graphic than film viole
            obviously unreal.
        ii.   Many video game enemies are not human.
        iii.   Many films and television programmes display violence in a similar
            has never been a concrete link between consumption of media and
        iv.   The Bandura media effects theory has been criticised for being over
            both small in scale and solely focused on young children.