

Games and Digital Games: A Cultural, Design, Moral, and Ethical Perspective

The Sims

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Games, in their myriad forms have been an integral part of human culture since the dawn of civilization. From ancient board games like Go and backgammon to modern digital games like Baldur's Gate, games have served as a source of entertainment, education, and socialization. The concept of "game" itself is multifaceted, encompassing a wide range of activities that share common elements such as rules, challenges, and goals. The advent of digital games in the latter half of the 20th century has revolutionized the gaming landscape, offering unprecedented levels of immersion, interactivity, and storytelling. Digital games stand as a captivating and transformative phenomenon. This paper delves into the multifaceted concept of games and digital games exploring the cultural significance, design principles, moral implications, and ethical considerations.

Cultural Currents: Digital Games as a Mirror of Society

Games transcend social boundaries, reflecting and shaping cultural values and norms. Serve as potent mirrors, reflecting and shaping societal values, beliefs, and practices. Provide a window into diverse cultural practices and traditions. *As Hume noted in his treatise on human nature, games often embody storytelling elements, conveying narratives that reinforce cultural beliefs and transmit shared knowledge across generations (Hume, 1740).* From the athletic contests of ancient Greece to the elaborate role-playing games of modern times, games have served as a mirror to human society, offering insights into motivations, aspirations, and fears. Games like "Civilization" and "Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri" embody fascination with history.

The cultural impact of games extends beyond traditional forms. Digital games, with their immersive virtual worlds and engaging interactions, have emerged as powerful cultural forces. They often incorporate multicultural elements, drawing inspiration from various mythologies, historical periods, and artistic styles. *As Huizinga observed in his seminal work on play, digital games can foster cross-cultural understanding by introducing players to different customs, perspectives, and worldviews (Huizinga, 1950).* Games like "Journey" and "Absolver" employ non-verbal narratives, relying on environmental cues, music, and gameplay to convey profound emotional experiences. These games demonstrate the unique ability of digital games to transcend cultural boundaries and foster shared experiences.

Design Principles: Shaping the Game Experience

Game design encompasses a complex interplay of creativity, technical expertise, and psychological understanding. Designers meticulously craft mechanics, rules, aesthetics, and narrative elements of their creations, aiming to create engaging and meaningful experiences for players. *David Huron, in his book "Aesthetics," explores the role of beauty and pleasure in game design. He argues that games can be considered works of art, and that their aesthetic appeal is a key factor in their success (Huron, 2005).* Scott Rigby, Richard Ryan, and Edward Deci, in their article "The Player Experience of Need Satisfaction," identify

three fundamental psychological needs that are met by games: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Games that provide players with opportunities to feel competent, make choices, and connect with others are more likely to be satisfying and enjoyable (Rigby, et al., 2009). So that one of the fundamental principles of game design is the establishment of clear goals and objectives that guide player progression. These goals provide a sense of purpose and motivate the players to continue engaging with the game. Designers carefully balance the level of difficulty to ensure that challenges are engaging without becoming overwhelming. Digital game design also involves creating compelling characters and narratives that immerse players in the game world. These characters can serve as role models, mentors, or antagonists, evoking empathy, admiration, or even fear in players. Narrative elements can weave together storylines that engage players emotionally and intellectually, adding depth and meaning to the gameplay experience. As a conclusion digital games that are visually appealing, aurally stimulating, and intellectually engaging are more likely to captivate players and leave a lasting impression.

Moral and Ethical Perspectives on Games

Games often present players with moral dilemmas, challenging them to make choices that carry ethical implications. The moral and ethical implications of games have been a subject of debate since the advent of digital games. Critics have raised concerns about the potential for games to desensitize players to violence, promote harmful stereotypes, and encourage unhealthy behaviors. *Michael James Heron, Pauline Helen Belford, and Mark J. Smith, in their article "Do You Feel Like a Hero Yet? Externalized Morality in Video Games," explore the concept of externalized morality in video games. They argue that video games often present players with moral dilemmas that are detached from the real world, allowing them to explore moral issues without facing the consequences of their actions (Heron & Belford, 2019).* So that, these choices can have consequences for both the player's character and the game world, prompting players to reflect on their actions and consider the potential outcomes of their decisions. *Cameron Moure, in his book "Making Moral Choices in Video Games," examines the role of player choice in shaping the moral landscape of games. He argues that games can be powerful tools for moral education, allowing players to grapple with complex ethical dilemmas and develop their own moral compass (Moure, 2009).* For instance, role-playing games may allow players to make choices that affect the well-being of non-player characters, encouraging them to consider the ethical implications of their actions. The moral realm of games extends beyond individual choices.

The overall structure and mechanics of a digital game can also raise ethical considerations. For example, games that glorify violence or promote unethical behavior may raise concerns about their potential impact on players' values and behavior. These concerns include the potential for games to promote violence, discrimination, addiction, and other negative outcomes. One of the most common ethical concerns about games is their potential to

promote violence. Digital games that depict violence can be seen as glamorizing or normalizing violence, and digital games can potentially desensitize players to violence in the real world. Another ethical concern about games is their potential to promote discrimination. Digital games that depict negative stereotypes about certain groups of people can reinforce existing prejudices and make it more difficult for people from these groups to be accepted by society. For example, digital games that depict women as weak or helpless can reinforce sexist stereotypes.

Other concern is game addiction, is a serious problem that can have a devastating impact on people's lives. Because digital games can have a real-world impact on players. Game addiction can also lead to physical and mental health problems. Many digital games collect data about their player, including personal information such as their name, address, and social media. This data can be used by game developers to personalize the gaming experience, but it can also be used for other purposes, such as targeted advertising. The ethical considerations of games are complex and multifaceted. However, it is important to be mindful of the potential ethical concerns associated with games and to make informed decisions about whether or not to play digital games.

Conclusion: Digital Games - A Reflection of Human Complexity

Games, in their various forms, serve as cultural mirrors, design landscapes, moral dilemmas, and ethical challenges. Particularly digital games, have permeated modern society, shaping cultural expression, influencing individuals, and impacting communities. Their pervasiveness necessitates a thorough understanding of their cultural significance, design principles, moral implications, and ethical considerations. Games, when responsibly designed and thoughtfully used, can serve as powerful tools for entertainment, education, and socialization, contributing to a more engaged, connected, and informed society.

The Sims as a Cultural Phenomenon

The Sims has transcended its status as a mere game to become a cultural phenomenon, shaping societal perceptions of gender, social norms, and consumerism. The game's popularity has spawned a vast array of user-generated content, including clothing designs, custom mods, and even fan-fiction. This active engagement with the game's virtual world highlights its transformative impact on popular culture.

The Sims has also served as a platform for social commentary, addressing issues such as gender equality, disability rights, and economic inequality. Meaning is the game's open-ended gameplay allows players to explore sensitive topics in a safe and engaging environment.

The Sims: A Microcosm of Game Design

The Sims, a life simulation video game released in 2000, epitomizes the intricate interplay between game design and player experience. The game's graphics are simple but effective, and the game's user interface is intuitive. The game is also very replayable, as there are endless possibilities for creating Sims. Players assume the role of a god-like figure, meticulously crafting the lives of virtual humanoids known as Sims. Players can build homes, furnish their homes, and choose careers for their Sims. Players can also control their Sims' social interactions, career aspirations, their hobbies, and their daily activities. It provides a rich case study for exploring the cultural, design, moral, and ethical dimensions of games.

Moral Dilemmas and Ethical Considerations in The Sims

The Sims, like many digital games, raises intriguing moral and ethical questions. The ability to control every aspect of the Sims' lives raises questions about power dynamics and the potential for exploitation. Within its meticulously crafted world lie intriguing moral dilemmas that challenge players to confront ethical quandaries and navigate the complexities of human relationships. For example of moral dilemmas, A sim discovers that their partner is having an affair. Should they confront their partner, try to work through the issue, or end the relationship ? These moral quandaries provide an opportunity for self-reflection and encourage players to develop a moral compass that guides their actions both within the virtual world of The Sims and in the real world beyond.

The ethical considerations in The Sims, players must consider the ethical implications of their actions on the Sims and the game world. For example of ethical considerations, A Sim has the option to build their dream home by demolishing a historic building in the neighborhood. Should they prioritize their personal desires, or should they consider the preservation of cultural heritage ? These ethical dilemmas extend beyond the Sims themselves to encompass the relationship between players and the game environment. As players grapple with these ethical quandaries, they engage with profound questions about power, responsibility, and the boundaries of human interactions.

Both moral dilemmas and ethical considerations play a significant role in The Sims, prompting players to reflect on their choices and the impact they have on the virtual world. These dilemmas and considerations encourage players to engage with the game on a deeper level, transforming it from a mere form of entertainment into a thought-provoking platform for exploring human values and ethical principles.

Conclusion: A Moral Compass in the Virtual World

The Sims, with its intricate worldbuilding and emphasis on player autonomy, stands as a testament to the power of games to transport us to new realms of imagination and challenge our perspectives on life, society, and the very nature of play itself. As players continue to explore the evolving landscape of games, delve deeper into the rich tapestry of human experience, forever intertwined with the allure of play.

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