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Essay: The worth of retro games and why they will survive
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Why do retro games still have a big influence in our current culture?

Recently retro games still have a huge impact on the gaming industry. Referring to an American study, the average age of a gamer today lies in the middle 30s, which implicates, that these gamers lived during the birth of the rise of the home consoles and possibly got their first experiences with games. Therefore a nostalgic value of the classical games has a big influence at the popularity of retro games. At present, retro games are in a revival process, which underlies not only economical aspects but also collector interests.

Today the video game industry takes an important role in the entertainment branch. Since the 80th not only the understanding of video games has changed, but also the form of the games itself. In the beginning pixelated graphics were highest standard, but nowadays the players are able to explore nearly realistic worlds. The game mechanics also have been improved constantly, graphics have been polished up and the highly qualitative music is very popular.

Does a technical improvement of recent games mean at the same time, that they are more popular? Definitively no. This is shown partially by the popularity of retro games. Even decades after the release, retro games like the classical "Giana Sisters" are highly in demand.

Modern games that follow the "retro" principle, like "Game Dev Story" for iOS show clearly, that also pixel graphics are still popular and used in modern games, where they can contribute to the success of a game, with no use of bright lustre graphics, to be economically profitable.

However, what is the main motivation that animates thousands of gamers to put aside technically high-quality games of the today's time and deal with games from their youth? Nostalgia seems to be the reason of the revival of retro games. Nevertheless, on the other hand remakes of retro games, also seem to be very attractive to this gamers. A recent example for such a game, is the sucessfully crowdfounded game "Duck Tales: Remastered". Nostalgia itself is therefore not only limited to pixel graphics and 8-bit music to make a game successful, but the narrative value of a retro game can also help to raise the attention and success of a remake.

What are retro games?

Answering to this question directly is difficult, because these games are strongly rated subjectivly and seperatly by every gamer.

Nevertheless, a current opinion points out. Retro games in a wide sense can be understood as games which represent the technical state of the time of their development and therefore received a classical value be the invention of new technologies. In the narrower sense, retro games are games which were published during the 1960s and 2000s and represent the pioneers of their genre like "Doom", "Monkey Island" and "Donkey Kong" to mention some representatives. Nowadays retro games still keep up with new games in concern of their popularity.

You can recognise their presence partially also in other media in which pixelelated artworks are present in the living rooms. 8/16 bit music is still popular by Remixers and classical game music yearly inspires thousands of visitors in the concert halls. According to current opinions, the concept "retro" has also been set up as a genre name where games of the 8 bit era (in 1970-1985), like Pong or Frogger are counted in, because these games can't be subordinated in a genre from today's point of view.

The consumption of retro games is not only a phenomenon of the recent culture. Collectors and game enthusiasts, discussed computer games & arcade games already since the 1970s, long before Internet communities were created. Since the 1990s and the extensive use of the Internet, the retro communities started to grow and set the bases of the today's retro communities.

At this time also a community of coder was established, that developed emulators which simulates the hardware of real gaming consoles on home computers to play gaming software. These emulators also have a branch in todays smartphones and retro fans can run their beloved games on that devices. This emulation enabled the discovery of long forgotten games from their childhood or let them play the games of their collection on their home computers. Indeed, the emulation of not official digital copies of the games, so called ROMs is not legal. This subject was quickly recognised by the gaming industry and suitable laws were remitted.

However, the quality of the emulation software still is not very comparably with the original character of the game console. This also led to to the success of the official retro games of the Virtual Console of the Nintendo Wii, which offers official downloads of Nintendo retro games. Emulators also have other determining disadvantages in contrast to original consoles in view of the game value. They offer additional functions, like a direct saving system or the acceleration of the game speed or even the manipulation of the graphics which devaluate the original experience with the retro games clearly. Emulators are one of many factors which helped the retro games to be popular again.

Is there a revival of retro games taking place or is it just a temporary hype?

The meaning of the retro games at the moment is also visible in economic aspects of the sharing networks and auctioneers big inflow. More than before classical and popular rare games as well as widespreaded classical games are traded here. Besides, the market values are not congruent with the real value of the games.

Price Charting is a good indicator, where the economical value of retro games can be seen. The indexes which are provided on the site, give a good impression about the development of the average prices of retro games. The site also offers information about most retro and recent systems. The best example on the price development of retro games, can be seen on the trend of NES games. Here the average prices of NES games are revalued strongly since 2010. The price was set at approx. 7.07$ in 2010, but today the price is already at an average of approx. 18.96$ which is an increase of nearly 268.2%.

Retro games have to owe their success of their revival to social networks and Youtube users like the Angry Video Game Nerd aka. James Rolfe. These have brought the games back to the public consciousness. By the resulted fan communities the popularity recently successfully helped to support the development of remakes of retro games with crowdfounding campaigns.

The online auctioneers like Ebay or Amazon also offer a good fertile soil for the disproportionate prize increase of retro games. The "immediately buying" function in addition to the auction, is used often by not circumspect bidders, unnoticed whether the price is justified. Thus originate some unrealistic prize settings, which other shop users also use their favour, which creates a vicious circle in favour of the shop users and against the buyer .

Can this trend be followed up in future or does the prize bubble burst soon? We will probably have to wait for the answer.

Nostalgia   as   a   driving   force   of   the   retro   scene?

As already mentioned, a new market has been established by the official introduction of the legal service to download retro games with the Nintendo Wii in the end of 2006. Later this model was also introduced by other publishers like Sony or Microsoft. The success of these services also opened up new methods of the marketing of these games, by new print media (Retro), Blogs (IGN) or Youtube channels (Cinemassacre). To understand the popularity of retro games, nostalgia is a factor that has to be described first.

Nostalgia generally means the affection for objects from the past of the life of a person with whom an idealised experience predominates. It is derived from Greek nóstos (homecoming) and álgos (pain). Generally it is also called homesickness. The name and concept was created by the doctoral candidate Johannes Hofer (1662-1752). He describes nostalgia as an expression of mourning of old times in which according to opinion of the nostalgics, everything was nicer and better than in the present. This mourning is compensated by collecting objects, like stamps, crown caps or records from the past. Thereby it is said, that nostalgics are often accused to escape from the present. With retro games, nostalgia seems to partially apply, however, this should also be seen from other points of view. According to Edward Casey (2000), nostalgia is an emotional answer to the consciousness, that there is no return of the past and therefore a   strong   emotional   connection   has   been   build.

Covered to digital plays, nostalgics can relive the good old experiences of the past in almost original surroundings. A player can consume a retro game once more to recreate the past feelings, which is difficult to handle in other forms of media (films or music). This effect will be generated by the active component of video games in contrast to the more or less passively consumeable films or music.

Nostalgia is a possible answer to the recent retro game pricing boom. Because it shows especially a personal and emotional form of the memory. Damien McFerran wrote in 2012 for EuroGame.net, why nostalgia for him is the driving force and why he would rather buy a whole collection of the Neo Geo Pocket edition to himself instead of dedicating his attention to the newest graphically breathtaking next-gen title which is praised on the Internet.

The effect of the nostalgia as an impulse of the retro branch, can also be found in newer titles, where the game mechanics of old proven games are used, to raise attention of the games for an existing genre. As an excellent example, Super Mario, who had his debut as an icon of Nintendo in the 1983s in Super Mario Bros, still has a big popularity and also by the introduction of new consoles will still be popular.

Retro games vs. next-gen, who leads the future of the gaming industry?

Next-gen consoles are very popular at the moment and have edged out retro games from the footlights. The question will be, which influence will the new generation consoles have on retro games? Will the Retro branch disappear in the future or has it to reorientate itself anew? In the last section of this essay, the highly influental factor for the survival of the retro branch, nostalgia was described. Now we can take a step further to the future and make pediction and ask, what place retro games will take beside Oculus Rift and augmented reality?

The expectations of recent games are very high. New 1080p resolutions and photorealistic graphics already replaced the edgy pixelated 3D graphics of the N64. Cardridges and even CDs will become a relict of the past. However, this doesn't mean that titles like Mario, Zelda and Sonic will vanish in the vortex of time and disappear from out of sight. Like mentioned retro games nowadays are officially selled by the stores in the next-gen consoles, which means that the gamers are able to play games from old consoles without owning the original console.

However, there is a loss of downward compatibility of newer consoles, which doesn't allow the players to play older games with the same device, even the software media doesn't change. Microsoft or Sony's Playstation 4 are examples. This forced suggestion for the gamers to buy new software and forget about the old one, does not match with the buying behaviour of many gamers and should be taking into consideration in future inventions.

Retro games will always co-exist with next-gen games, because the market always develops and today's games can will be "Retro" in a couple of years. Even if the media broadcasts of the hype of the new consoles and demanding games, retro games will always find new generations of fans and collectors who appreciate its value, as a time capsule of the game history itself.

Conclusion

Retro games are by far not only restricted to the past. They are also a component of the today's gaming culture like next-gen titles. In spite of their reputation to be obsolete, many lovers and collectors have fun with them.

Due to the reentry in the market by the official console stores, by the social network and the nostalgic value of the retro games which takes place currently in a regular sales boom in the sharing networks and auctioneers, retro games are still popular. In spite of the boom, retro games own not only an economic but also a cultural value. Where, otherwise, a revival of old concepts can be seen which is inspired by retro games. Old gamers need the relation to past games and young gamers profit from the proven concepts of the past games. In this sense, retro games will never become extinct, also because the games from today are the retro games of tomorrow and the cycle is never closed.

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