How Do Badges Make You Feel: Interest and Motivation in RITs Just Press Play Project

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Abstract: This paper discusses the Just Press Play game at Rochester Institute of Technology. This game is currently available to play for people in the Interactive Games and Media program, for students from freshman through graduate students. Including players that are in multiple stages of education creates a wider range of experiences that the community of players can draw on. The paper explores the ways in which the game creates interest and motivation exploring qualitative data. Then the qualitative analysis will be considered in the creation of qualitative open-ended survey questions. The survey questions are used as a form of assessment for the entire game. The interest and motivation of players was an original design concern and assessing whether players feel self-motivated and autonomous is important to success of the game and the development of the game further.

Introduction

Just Press Play (JPP) is an achievement system created at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) to help undergraduate students establish stronger ties in the community and more engagement with their program of study. This game is currently available to play for students in the Interactive Games and Media (IGM) program, which includes undergraduate programs and graduate programs in Game Design & Development (GDD) and an undergraduate program in New Media. By including players from multiple stages of education, a wider range of experiences are created for the community of players.

A major consideration in the design of the game was that of the impact of an achievement system on player motivation. Research suggests that intrinsic motivation can be negatively affected when extrinsic rewards, such as gold stars (or achievements), are offered to students (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006), but that ensuring that students retain a sense of autonomy reduced or eliminated those negative impacts (Ryan & Deci, 2000a & 2000b). As a result, in the design of JPP every achievement was tested before implementation, to determine what sense of pride or accomplishment a player would take away from completion of the achievement.

In order to tailor the experience of Just Press Play to the specific educational environment, and to create achievements that offered students the most potential of gaining a sense of pride and accomplishment in their specific course of study, designers drew upon the history of RIT. They discovered that the university was originally formed by a merger of two very different institutions: the Rochester Athenaeum, and the Mechanics Institute. The Rochester Athenaeum focused on culture, philosophy, and the arts; in contrast, the Mechanics institute focused on industrial processes and the wonders of technology. The cultural conflicts that resulted from the merger of those two disparate institutions can still be seen at the university today, including in tension between the "design" and "development" aspects of IGM's degree programs.

The Just Press Play game was developed from within IGM, with the intention of having IGM students as the pilot population for the game. It was designed to address the tension between arts and mechanics, as well as that between work done individually and work done collaboratively. Game activities were divided based on two axes—one is "exploration" vs. "mastery," the other "individual activity" vs. "shared activity." Achievements fall into different quadrants based on those axes, such as Individual Mastery or Shared Exploratory, and in different levels of difficulty starting with Initiate and moving out to Master.

This paper examines qualitative data concerning the Just Press Play game. It will examine data that explores the game from multiple perspectives and then consider qualitative interview questions that will explore the interest and motivation of players within the game.

Data Collection and Methods

Qualitative data for this research will come from a variety of sources, including public forum discussions, posts from the website Reddit, public Facebook groups, comments from the Just Press Play game website, and semi-structured interviews with students participating in Just Press Play and faculty at RIT in IGM. The data presented here has been anonymized and pseudonyms have been applied.

This paper consists of an analysis of Reddit forum post which discusses the Just Press Play game as well as a discussion of interview questions that will be used to elicit the motivation of players participating in the Just Press Play game, as well as the social impacts the game has on players. The interviews will be conducted with players who are not playing Just Press Play currently, who are playing Just Press Play but are only marginally interested, who are playing Just Press Play but are neutral toward the game, and who are playing Just Press Play and are very interested and involved in the game. Additional interviews were conducted with faculty who are part of the IGM program and who have varying degrees of interest in participating with the game.

Analysis

The first data point is an exchange made on the RIT forum on the Reddit website. It consists of an exchange of eight turns of talk with seven people contributing to the conversation. The conversation (Table 1) begins with a broad probing question that is intended to elicit responses from other IGM students. Along with the question of whether or not "anyone" had looked at the achievements, Contributor 1 makes a series of statements concerning the available achievements noting their difficulty, the amount of information available, when they are available, and how they are presented. Through this description because most of the information is presented in a negative light like "aren't that hard" and "kinda cryptic" it seems as if Contributor 1 is not that impressed with the achievement system. Yet the last sentence of Contributor 1's first turn of talk reveals the speakers true feelings for the Just Press Play and the available achievements "Go look for yourself!" they also include "(and if you're IGM, go get your PlayPass keyfob and start playing)". The exclamation point at the end of the imperative sentence, along with the second imperative clause inside the parentheses encouraging people to play Just Press Play if they are in the appropriate department, IGM, emphasize the excitement of Contributor 1.

Contributor 2 and 3 ask qualifying questions wanting to know where the achievements are listed and what Just Press Play is. Contributor 4 gives a simplistic break down of what just Press Play is and how it functions, although noting that they are not able to play because they are not in IGM. Contributor 1 agrees with the description, and shares that she/he believes that the game may be expanded if the beta goes well. Contributor 5 expands this saying that it will be expanded beyond RIT. Contributor 6 disagrees with the excitement that Contributor 1, making her/his sentiments know through the use of sarcasm. "Awesome...because we should totally being treating education as a game...that's sure to be gain A LOT of respect in the academic community -.-" The ellipses are used to emulate pauses in speech. The phrases "we should totally" and "that's sure to gain" are supposed to denote skepticism, just as the skeptical emoticon. Contributor 7 describes the activity she/he went through in order to accomplish an achievement. Contributor 7 expresses their zeal for the activity and regret that most of the achievements are not available until future points in time. Over all this exchange is positive concerning Just Press Play, being initiated by someone who has obvious enthusiasm for it. It also shows that the game is drawing interest from those who are unable to play because they are not in IGM, as well as skepticism from someone has reservations about the role of video games.

Contributor 1	Anyone looked at the achievements for Just Press Play [JPP] yet? (Sorry if you're not IGM) So, I just took a quick look at some of the JPP achievements. Some of them aren't that hard, but their descriptions are kinda cryptic. Some of them aren't available for a few months (one isn't until the end of February). But, honestly...ohdeargod, so many bad puns. Go look for yourself (and if you're IGM, go get your PlayPass keyfob and start playing)!
Contributor 2	Where can I find these?
Contributor 3	What is Just Press Play?
Contributor 4	They're testing an achievement system for IGM majors. They have small RFID tags that they carry around, which activate achievement tracking. I don't know all the details (not being IGM myself), but you can read more here. http://play.rit.edu
Contributor 1	Actually, you pretty much covered everything. If this beta goes well, the plan is to expand the system to all of RIT...I believe.
Contributor 5	And then other campuses, then K-12, etc etc.
Contributor 6	awesome...because we should totally being treating education as a game...that's sure to be gain A LOT of respect in the academic community -.-
Contributor 7	Just swarmed Jay's with 20 people for two achievements. Totally worth it. Too bad most of 'em don't work until later.

Table 1: **An exchange on Reddit (October 17, 2011)**

From the above several opinions about the game are expressed, from excitement and interest expressed both by those who could and could not play the game. Also, skepticism about equating games and education is expressed. However, this is an ill-informed opinion as a plethora of research has been conducted in supporting both the educational use of games and education occurring within commercial games (for examples of this literature see Barab, Arica, & Jackson, 2005; Barab et al., 2005; Chen, 2009; Gee, 2003; Gee & Hayes, 2010; Ketelhut et al., 2007; Martin & Steinkuehler, 2010; Squire, 2011; Steinkuehler, 2007; Steinkuehler, 2008).

Discussion and Continuing Research

As noted in the introduction, a major design concern for creation of Just Press Play was that of creating a game that focuses on intrinsic motivation and supports player autonomy. Vansteenkiste and Deci (2003) found that even those who play and lose a game, if given autonomy and competitively contingent rewards, still remained motivated to play. Intrinsic goal framing produces a different quality of motivation than extrinsic goal framing which has a high cost to enjoyment and valuation of persistence (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). Vansteenkiste et al. (2004) found that offering intrinsic goals and autonomy increased learning-related outcomes.

The following questions will be asked of players and faculty concerning their interest in Just Press Play, games, and the social aspect of games.

1. Why did you participate in the Just Press Play game?
2. How do you feel about the game?
3. What do you think are the benefits of participation?
4. Are there any changes you would like to see made to the game?
5. How many achievements have you earned through Just Press Play?
6. What achievements were your most favorite?
7. What achievements were you least favorite?
8. How often do you visit the Just Press Play website?

9. What program are you part of at RIT?
10. Why did you choose this program?
11. Do you think the game brings any added benefits to the program?
12. What other games do you play? Titles? Genre?
13. Do you participate in any game communities (such as forums, wikis, websites, etc.)? If so which ones?
    i. If you do participate in online communities for games, what does your participation look like?
    ii. Why do you participate?
14. For you, are the social aspects of games important? Why or why not?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share concerning your participation in the game or the your program at RIT?

These questions are meant to elicit detailed information about both the activities and the motivations of the participants in Just Press Play. The information concerning interest in other games, as well as the interviewee's participation in the constellation of information around the game—that is to say the information and social resources around a game—are included to help determine the type of gamer and the what types of player identities that each player or faculty member displays (Martin, 2011). This will help build a more complete picture of motivation and player interest. Building on the evidence of underlying interest in the game, as illustrated in the example from Reddit, we intend to explore the motivation of players in reference to Just Press Play to help create a more enjoyable and engaging experience, and to help refine one function of the game which is to create a sense of community and connectedness amongst player for each other and to the program.

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