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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE BUYING DECISION OF PC AND VIDEO GAMES

– And their weight in the buying decision process



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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE BUYING DECISION OF PC AND VIDEO GAMES

This thesis deals with video and PC game industry and player's buying behavior. The subject is mirrored via marketing and other different factors that contribute to the buying process of PC and video games.

These factors are mainly gathered through Philip Kotler's and Michael Solomon's theories but also from my own personal experiences from games.

The factors are later on studied deeper through a questionnaire which had 233 participants. In the survey there were qualitative 0-5 questions asking about the weight of different factors contributing to the purchase decision of games. There were also free fill answers that asked about the buying process itself.

From the questionnaire I got answers that are analyzed and processed later in the thesis. For example the importance of different genres came clear via these questions as well as that Kotler's and Solomon's buying decision processes are not straight adaptable to every industry.

KEY WORDS:

Game industry, Consumer behavior, PC games, Video games, Marketing

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TERMINOLOGY

A bug, software	= an error, mistake or a flaw in computer system or program
Patch	= a fix for a computer program
Developer	= A company designing and creating games
Publisher	= A company publishing, marketing and distributing games created by the developer
B2C / B2B Marketing	= Business to customer / Business to business marketing
ROM cartridge	= a removable cartridge that contains read-only memory devices and, commonly, flash memory devices to allow some read-write capability
Gameplay	= includes all player experiences during the interaction with game systems, especially formal games.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives of the research

With this thesis I am trying to solve what are the factors that influence players' buying decision when buying video or computer games and mainly what is the weight of the factors in the buying decision process. Also to be researched are the factors that influence to the buying decision and what is the stage where the buying decision has been made are. In the final chapter I will gather all this information together and try to figure out what would a "perfect game" be like, in other words what kind of a game would sell well.

The reason I chose this subject was that there was almost no research made about player's buying behavior. Also as a player, I assume that the buying decision process of a player is significantly different from that of a normal consumer. Also the fact that the Finnish game developers seem to have only little knowledge how players behave as consumers, helped me to choose this subject. By doing this thesis I aim to gain enough information about player's consumer behavior to give some assistance to Finnish game industry in the future.

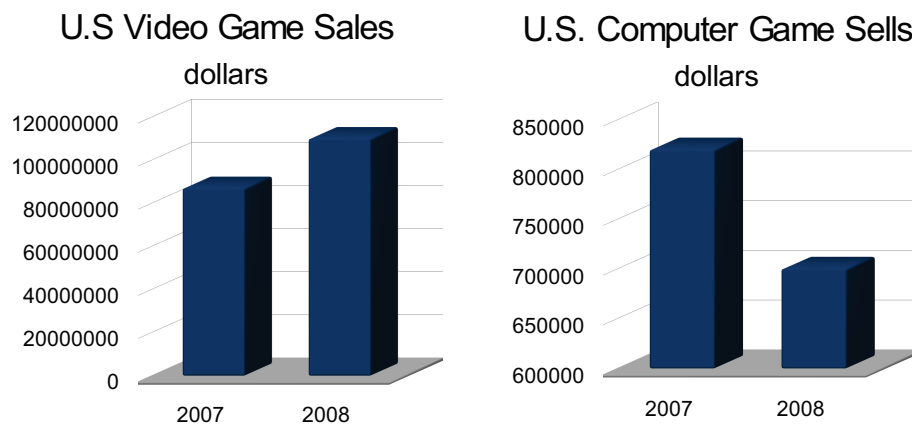
Game industry is growing in a fast pace throughout the globe but it's not studied as well as it should be. It is a very young industry with vast growing opportunities. The old theories about consumer behavior and marketing are accepted although the consumer base and consuming itself is very different from normal consuming. With this thesis I wanted to find out if these old theories apply to game industry and maybe help game developers and publishers to understand the mind of a game consumer.

The goal of this study is to find out if and how the buying process of a player differs from a normal consumer. I'm also trying to differentiate some factors unique to the game industry that influence players buying decision.

1.2 Basics of game industry

To understand the different factors that effect on the buying of games one has to understand how the game industry works and what gaming is all about. Knowing different branches of the game industry is extremely relevant, because before the player buys a game the same game (or the rights to it) has been bought by the game publisher from the game developer. This symbiosis is the essence of the industry but it's also the fact that a change in this dualism is already happening.

Table 1. U.S Game Sales in 2009 (Entertainment Software Association, ESA – Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry. 2009)



There are two major players in the game industry today, computer games and video (console) games. As seen in Table 1 there is a huge difference between the sales of these two mediums. Video games sold over 120 billion dollars in 2008 when PC game's sold modestly under USD 700 000. This is solely because of the piracy of PC game. The reason consoles are not affected by the piracy is that the console must be physically "cracked" or in other words modified so that they can read any copied CD, DVD or Blu-ray discs. This business is extremely hard and expensive and therefore unprofitable. Also acts

from the manufacturer can influence the piracy and modification of consoles. In the late 2009 there were over million modified Microsoft's Xbox 360 consoles in the market. Microsoft responded by shutting the use of Xbox Live (consoles web store and community) and preventing any games being installed to those consoles in the future. Formerly “uncrackable” console PlayStation 3 was also successfully modified by a young hacker George Hotz.

A general perception is that movies make more money than games. This, however, is definitely not the case. For example biggest gross profits for the first two weeks after publication are for games; Modern Warfare 2 and Gran Theft Auto were before any movie in 2009. Modern Warfare 2 (published in 2009) has also made over 500 million dollar sales, a number that only 5 movies have ever reached. A popular online game World of Warcraft (which has over 11 million subscribers world-wide) even tops this. It has approximately over 1,8 billion dollar subscription income per year since its release in 2005 and had over 72 billion dollar total accounting profit at the end of 2008. That is more money than top 10 blockbuster movies have made combined. (Bruce Everiss 2009, Blizzard Entertainment 2009)

Game industry in general has been growing for over two decades. The general misconception about players is that they are young male students that play PlayStation in their student pads. This, however, is far from the truth. Recent study shows (*Entertainment Software Association, ESA – Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry. 2009*) that the average player age is 35 and 68% of American households play games. What is more surprising, however, is that 40% of players today are women. This is a fact that most game developers and publishers have been ignoring for years. Majority of games (and their marketing) that have been published in the last 10 years have been targeted for male audience in their mid 20's.

Game industry is divided into three mediums, PC games, console games and mobile device games.

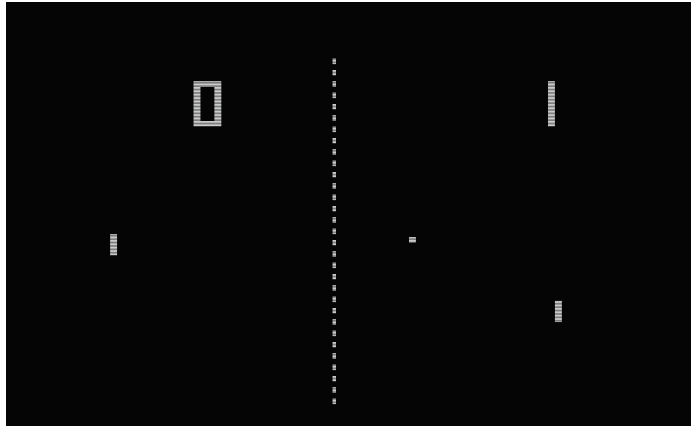
1.3 Platforms

Consoles

A console is “an interactive entertainment computer or modified computer system that produces a video display signal which can be used with a display device (a television, monitor, etc.) to display a video game”. Today there are three major console series; Sony's PlayStation, Microsoft's Xbox and Nintendo's series. Through the history of consoles they have used several medias to play the games; cartridges, magnetic media, cards and optical media such as CD's and Blu-ray discs.

The current history of game consoles is divided to seven generations. These generations mean a new wave of console releases every few years with improved version of the previous model. The developers of video game consoles tend to release their products in same year.

Although the Atari's “Pong” was the first popular game console it was an American company called Magnavox who launched the first ever video game console in 1972 when it released the Magnavox Odyssey. These consoles with Nintendo's first console “Color TV Game” (which was only launched in Japan) are referred to be the *first generation* of video game consoles. These consoles were extremely simple as you can see in Picture 1.



Picture 1. Atari's "Pong" Arcade version. *Source: Wikipedia*

Consoles started to evolve in the late 70's when the new wave of *second generation* consoles appeared with 8-bit ROM cartridge memory. The main consoles were Fairchild Entertainment System (FES), Atari 2600 and Madnavox's Odyssey follower Odyssey².

Third generation consoles were the first to hit U.S and European market's with storm and were the final kick-off for console game industry. Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) was launched in 1985 in USA and Europe. Couple years earlier in 1983 the same console was launched in Japan under a name of Famicom. Sega also launched its first 8-bit console called "Master System".

Fourth generation of consoles is also referred as the 16-bit era. Two major releases (or updates to familiar consoles) were Sega's Mega Drive/Genesis in 1988 and Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) in 1990. This era also introduced the first pocket console, Nintendo Game Boy in 1990.

The first two and quite unpopular consoles of the *fifth generation* or the 32-bit era were Atari Jaguar and 3DO but due their lack of popularity their manufacture was discontinued in 1996. First popular consoles of fifth generation were the Nintendo 64 (1996), Sony PlayStation (1995) and Sega Saturn (1995).

There were only four consoles left competing from buyers in the *sixth generation* of consoles: Sony's PlayStation 2, Sega Dreamcast, Nintendo GameCube and Microsoft's first game console Xbox. This was the first console

to use hard drive to save games. Sega Dreamcast's production was quickly canceled in 2001 due to its poor market position among its competitors.

Currently the consoles we have in our living rooms are *seventh generation consoles* and widely referred to as the “next-gen” consoles. These consoles are Microsoft Xbox 360, Sony PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Wii.

Personal computer, PC

PC is a hardware setup that consists of CPU (microprocessor), primary memory storage (RAM), graphic and sound cards, optical disc drive, a hard disk, motherboard, speakers, monitor, keyboard and a mouse.

The difference between PC and console games is that console is generally played via TV and with a unique controller while in PC everything is done with keyboard and mouse.

Games played with PC or a console are mostly the same. Some differences occur mainly because of the different controllers. For example First-Person Shooters are much more difficult to play with PS3 controller than with keyboard and mouse.

Portable and other mobile devices

These are only mentioned here due to their role and significance in the game industry and it is therefore good to know the current generation of hand-held consoles which descend from the previously mentioned Nintendo Game Boy released in 1990. Current portable game devices are PSP (PlayStation Portable), Nintendo DS and iPhone.

These platforms are not directly influencing the customer's buying decision but they play a significant role in it. Let's say that a game development company decides to launch a game on Xbox 360. Their expected income from that

venture will be significantly lower compared if they would have released the game to PlayStation 3. (*Entertainment Software Association, ESA – Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry. 2009*) Of course the game type effects on what platform the game is going to be published for example a development company can't launch a well working, serious role playing game to Nintendo Wii which is mainly targeted to be an entertainment system for parties and families. But as a raw example some games will be released only to one platform which effects the players buying decisions as a starting point for the buying process.

This also works vice versa. After the hit racing game Gran Turismo was published on PlayStation 1, Sony (the developer and publisher for both, Gran Turismo and PlayStation series) decided to have exclusive rights to the racer. As a consequence a lot of Gran Turismo fans bought PlayStation 2 console just because the sequel from Gran Turismo was to be released only on that platform.

Today game developing and publishing has grown to one of the biggest businesses in the world. Solely the sales of North American games have for several years now exceeded the Hollywood film industry in sales and budgets. In 2008 video game sales in USA were over 110 billion dollars and the number is expected to grow in 2009. (*Entertainment Software Association, ESA – Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry. 2009*).

1.4 Relationship between developer and publisher

Game industry rests on two mediums that co-exist within the industry, game publishers and game developers. There are numerous references to both of these parties so it is important to know the roles of these two.

Developers

Game developers are the companies that are making the games. Their job is to deal with complicated AI systems, 3D graphics, code optimization, programming and hardware planning but more importantly their role is to come up with a great game and deliver it to the gamers. (*Francois Dominic Laramee, 2002*)

Most of these developers are so called “indie”, independent and small companies that function with highly talented staff and niche games. They are usually the ones having the most “out-of-the-box” ideas and thus the most easy to sell games.

Companies that are not independent developers have already made their position on the gaming markets by releasing a popular game in the past. They already have a good brand image and therefore it is quite easy for them to find a publisher for their upcoming games. This is the key difference between indie developers and large corporations - the brand image. This affects not only to the availability of publishers distributing the game but it also has a huge role when players make their buying decisions between numerous games.

The developing company can also be the development team of a major publisher. For example Electronic Arts, which is one of world’s largest game publishers, has their own development team within the company. These teams have probably the most artistic and monetary freedom when creating games.

Publishers

Publishers are the ones with the money in the industry. They are responsible for the global distribution and marketing of the games that they have purchased from the developers. They also monitor the sales, the previews and the reviews for the game. It is vital for the product to have great promotion before and after it is published and therefore the publishers carry an extremely important role selling the game

The current situation in the game industry is that games are sold more and more through Internet. Different shops like PlayStation Store and Xbox Live have revolutionized the distribution games and slightly cracked the co-existence of publishers and developers. No more is it compulsory for the developer to rely fully on the publisher to distribute and promote their games. They can upload them to an Internet store of their choosing and sell it straight without any middle hands. This removes all the packaging costs, logistical costs, publishers labor costs etc which therefore also makes the game much more cheaper for the customer to buy. This will most likely result in increased number of games bought and again be of great boost for industry itself. (Bruce Everiss, 2009)

At this point it is good to know how the development chain for a game works. It is a complex dialog between the developer and the publisher. This is shown in Figure 1

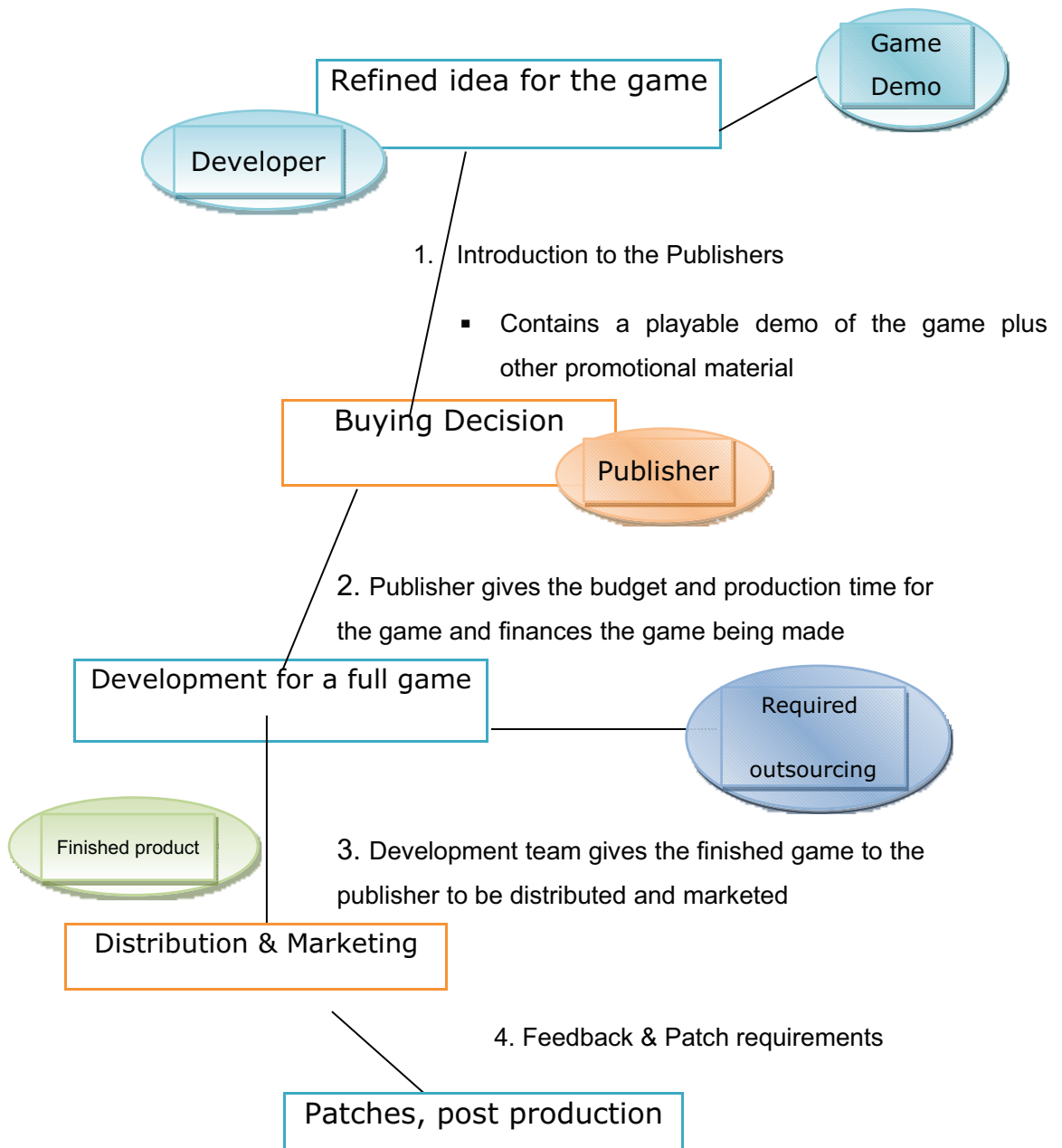


Figure 1. A simplified production chain for a computer or video game

Production of a game

As indicated in Figure 1 the development of a game usually starts with an idea. It is the job of the lead designers in game development companies to come up with great IP (Intellectual Property) that would be easy to sell but serves the customer as well, in other words: is something different from other games.

When the idea is refined to a game concept the pre-production can be started. This means everything from graphical & art design and marketing to hardcore programming and code testing.

After having the idea sold to a game publisher, the publisher now decides the frames in which the game must be delivered. Budget and the production time are now set. Budget and production time is dependent on the scale and image of the developer. Large and previously successful developing companies can have free hands with their project while new starting companies can have as short production time as four months.

The game is now being developed to a full, publishable game. This can take from few months to years depending on the challenges faced with the project. Coding, programming, design and animation are the core components of this stage in the game production. Also any required outsourcing is made at this point. Outsourcing is done at any needed phase of the production and consists mainly of art, video & sound design, sound effects, voice acting and motion capture. Also if any consulting is needed it will be outsourced.

After the project is finished the full and publishable game is now being handed over to the publisher which will start the distribution, launching and marketing. During this period the developer is creating the needed patches and bug repairs for the game.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE BUYING DECISION PROCESS OF GAMES

2.1 Consumer buying behavior

Before going deeper in to different factors that contribute to the buying decision process of a game buyer, we have to know the basic rules that apply to the buying process of a “normal” consumer.

Consumer behaviorism is a field that studies the buying decision process of individuals, with a target to understand why we buy and how does it affect the world around us socially and economically. The behavior itself is seen as a continuous process of choosing the product, buying it, using the product and then getting rid of it.

The behavior itself is effected by two factors, the willing to buy and the ability to buy. The needs and desires of an individual are the factors that raise the willingness to buy and these factors are formed and shaped by the characteristics of the buyer and actions of the seller.

Buying decision process

Consumer’s buying decision is a complex process. It is important to know the weight of different steps in player’s buying decision to determine which factors mentioned above contribute the most.

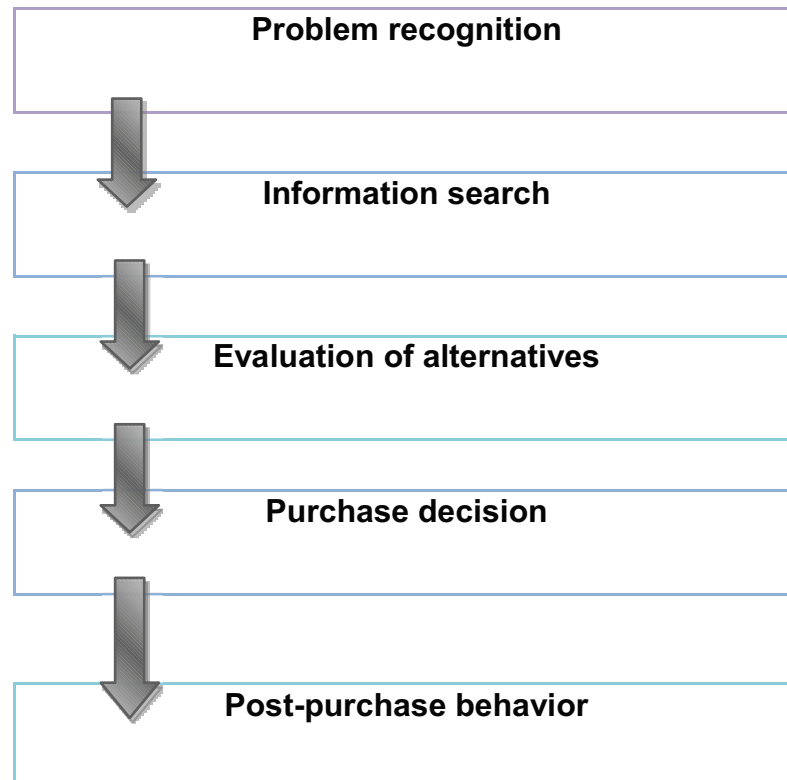


Figure 2. Consumer Buying Process (Adapted from: *Marketing Management and Consumer Behavior* – Philip Kotler, 2000)

As it can be seen in Figure 2 the process starts with problem recognition. The consumer detects a stimulus which raises a need. (Kotler, 2000) The need can be raised from an internal need (e.g. hunger, thirst, fear) or from an external factor (Neighbor's purchases, advertisement, window shopping, newspapers). For example a player sees that he has too few and too old games in his PlayStation 3 console. He is now motivated enough to buy a new game and so he starts the second phase of the buying decision process, searching information about games.

The player is most likely to log in to a game site that holds all the wanted information about games. The process of searching information can be internal or external. Internal search means that the player will evoke memories about games he has encountered in the past or what his friends have suggested for him. It can also be searched from personal sources (such as friends and

family), commercial sources like advertisements, dealers and salespersons, public sources (mass media etc) and experiential sources such as handling the product or using the product. (Kotler, 2007) In this case the search is external, it happens via outside channels and here through a web page. When enough information is gathered the buyer will start to evaluate different alternatives and this is the third step in the buying decision process.

When buying a game there are number of categories and types to choose from: role playing games, first-person shooters, adventure, action, driving, fighting to mention a few. In the early stages of buying decision process all these different types of games are possible alternatives to buy. (Kotler, 2000) The player has his own game preferences that come from social and cultural factors mentioned above. This can also be influenced by personal factors like income, but it influences to the buying decision process only in the early stages, in other words whether he will buy a game at all, not which game he will choose.

In this stage of the process the consumer usually has only few choices to buy from. He now compares these options with criterion that depends on the situation and his own buying habits. (Kotler, 2000) For example let's say that the player has always been fond of role-playing games (RPGs) and is eager to buy one also this time. He now has limited his choices to a specific genre and also looked up new titles that has recently been published. He now has only few options while in the start he had thousands.

The next step in the buying process is the purchase decision and the purchase itself. (Kotler, 2000) The player buys the chosen product if available. Compared to a normal product, there are numerous channels where the purchase of a video game can happen. One doesn't anymore need to walk in to a store to buy a game anymore. Almost every store has its own web site where a consumer can easily order a game at the same price as they would pay in a regular store, plus the shipping fees. The game industry is more and more distributing games directly via Internet stores such as PlayStation Store and Xbox Live store. This reduces or even removes publisher's share from profits and fees from game's distribution which makes the game a lot cheaper for the consumer to buy and a lot less expensive for the developer. In this case the player decides to buy the

game from PlayStation Store since he has the required console and Internet connection.

Factors that also effect to the purchase decision (and that are rather important factors in buying decision process) are attitudes of other people and unanticipated situational factors. *(Kotler, 2007)* Close friends and family can drastically effect on persons final buying decision. Also changes in income, loss of employment or some sudden payments can significantly influence consumers buying behavior.

The player now owns the game and starts to gather experiences from it. This starts the final phase of the buying process, post-purchase behavior and satisfaction. *(Kotler, 2000)* This stage greatly influences on the future buying behavior. If the player experiences the game to be good he most likely will buy again (1) from the same publisher or/and (2) from the same developer or/and (3) the same game series. This obviously works vice versa, if the experiences from the game are negative it is likely for the developer or the publisher to lose a customer. Therefore it is crucial for the developer to have a great product in the market right from the first game. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction created by the game won't effect to the player's choice of a genre since that preference is rooted deep in the players socio cultural behavior and it is not effected by any factor created by the publisher or the developer.

Decision Making Sets

Decision making itself is divided in to five different steps or sets from which the consumer makes the final decision. As indicated in Figure 3. these steps are Total Set, Awareness Set, Consideration Set, Choice set and Decision. *(Kotler, 2000)*

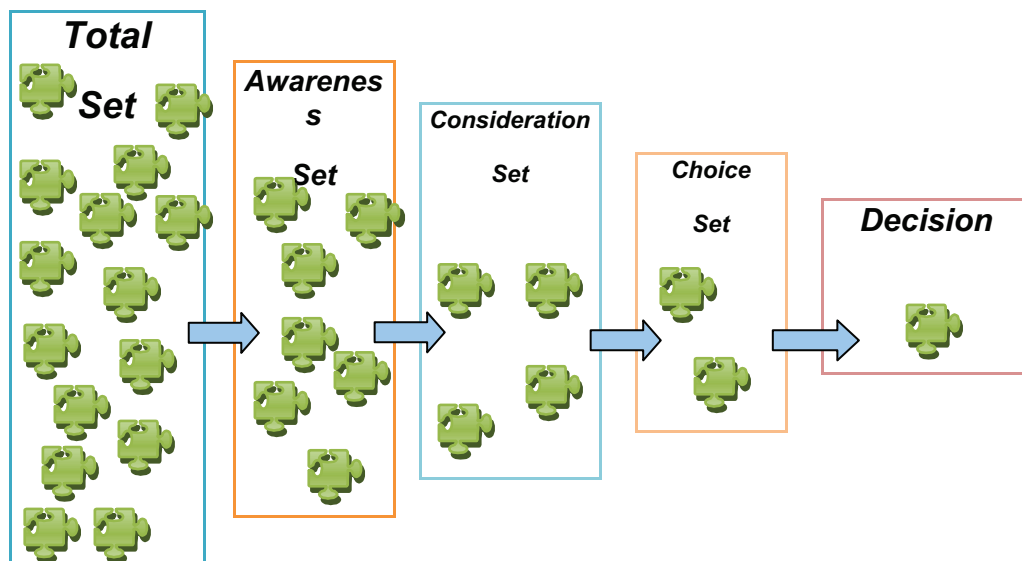


Figure 3. Decision Making Sets (*Adapted from: Marketing Management and Consumer Behavior – Philip Kotler, 2000*)

Total set is all the products available in the market. Let's say a person wants to buy a new PC. Total set includes all the PC's available in the stores. Awareness set is the brands and products which the consumer is aware, in other words has seen or heard before. There are usually less brands/products available in awareness set than in total set. When narrowing down the possible products to buy from we come to consideration set. In this set there are the products the person is aware of and thinks that are good. Final step before the decision is choice set. This is where some brand from consideration set has for some reason been rejected (*Kotler, 2000*). It is extremely important to notice that between every set the buyer makes a decision which is effected by some internal or external factor. All these sets and decisions between them are usually brand dependent and raised from personal experiences.

Types of buying behavior

Philip Kotler differentiates four different types of consumer behavior on the grounds of whether there are significant or minor differences between brands and whether the consumer has high or low involvement to the product.

	<i>High involvement</i>	<i>Low involvement</i>
<i>Significant differences between brands</i>	Complex Buying Behavior	Variety Seeking Behavior
<i>Few differences between brands</i>	Dissonance – Reducing Buying Behavior	Habitual Buying Behavior

Figure 4. Types of Buying Behavior (*Adapted from: Marketing Management and Consumer Behavior – Philip Kotler, 2000*)

In Figure 4 are all the four types of consumer buying behavior types by Philip Kotler. Complex buying behavior means that there is a high involvement from the consumer to the product and significant differences between brands. Dissonance or reducing buying behavior occurs when the involvement is still high but the consumer doesn't see much difference between brands. (Kotler, 2000) In complex and reducing buying behavior models the product is usually very expensive and bought seldom.

The two other groups with low consumer involvement are variety seeking (significant differences between brands) and habitual buying (few differences between brands) behavior. From these two groups only variety seeking fits to the game buying decision process definition above. In this model the consumer has previous beliefs and expectations for the product but his buying decision is rather fast.

Michael R. Solomon etc divides these same buying decision types into three different groups depending on how much effort is seen to make the purchase.

Table 2. Characteristics of limited vs. Extended problem solving (*Adapted from: Consumer Behavior – A European Perspective, Michael Solomon etc*)

	Limited problem-solving	Extended problem solving
Motivation	Low risk and involvement	High risk and involvement
Information search	Little search Information processed passively In-store decision likely	Extensive search Information processed actively Multiple sources consulted prior store visits
Alternative evaluation	Weakly held beliefs Only most prominent criteria used Alternatives perceived as basically similar Non-compensatory strategy used	Strongly held beliefs Many criteria used Significant differences perceived among alternatives Compensatory strategy used
Purchase	Limited shopping time; may prefer self-service Choice often influenced by store displays	Many outlets shopped if needed Communication with store personnel often desirable

As indicated in Table 2 the extended problem-solving occurs when there are high risks involved with the purchase. Consumer tries to gather as much information as possible from the sources available and carefully compares every option one by one. From these criteria he now determines which product would be the best for his own personal needs. (*Solomon etc, 2006*)

Limited problem-solving is a much simpler model compared to extended problem-solving. Consumer simply gathers information from easily acquired sources but not as much and as detailed as in extended problem solving. As seen on the Figure 5 this type can be compared to everyday purchase of food and drinks. (Solomon etc, 2006)

According to Solomon etc. the third type of consumer decisions is Habitual decision making. In limited and extended problem solving types both have some degree of information search involved in them. Habitual decision making is purely based on routines. Decisions made can be so schooled that the consumer doesn't even notice making them, e.g. picking up the same milk and cereals for the next morning and so on. In many cases this kind of decision making is very efficient and saves a lot of time and even money, if the purchase decision made for the first time was due prices.

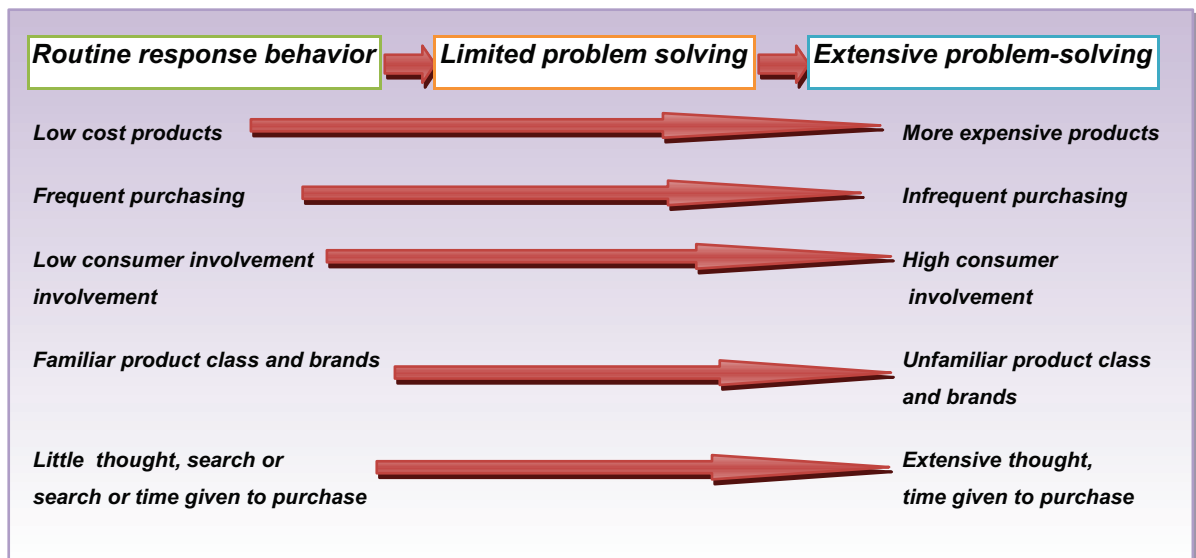


Figure 5. A continuum of buying decision behavior (Adapted from: *Consumer Behavior – A European Perspective*, Michael Solomon etc)

Figure demonstrates the types of products, brands and consumer involvement in relation to the buying decision behavior types. It also indicates a lot of similarities with Kotler's brand based consumer buying behavior types.

2.2 Factors contributing to the consumer behavior

Philip Kotler sorts out the b2c consumer behavior into 4 groups which are linked to each other i.e. the qualities or the factors are not from one specific group but different combinations of the four groups. These groups are later on mirrored to the buying habits of a player and the factors that contribute to the player's buying decision. The groups are:

1. Social factors

Social factors are influenced by the buyer's social life. Persons placed in his/her social environment, the family and friends of the individual, other relationships like marriage, cohabitation etc. all contribute to the buying habits of the specific individual.

According to Kotler, social factors can be split into three different groups. Reference groups are all the groups an individual wants to identify with. An example of this could be a clothing brand which is popular among youth, let's say Tommy Hilffiger. It is marketed by beautiful models that the youth is eager to identify with. The models are the idea and the paragon for a successful and popular person that the youngsters want to be. They are just one reference group for a young buyer. Other groups can be for example their friends and families which all contribute to the buying decision. Consumer him/herself belongs to many different groups simultaneously. In every group the individual has a role that consists of different "tasks" that are required to be completed by the individual. Each of these tasks and roles gives the person a status within

every group which again reflects the social standing of the person within a community or society in general.

Affiliate groups, such as family and closest friends, is the second social group that effects buying decision. It can also be minor groups such as sports club and effect directly to the behavior of the individual.

Third social group is called paragon groups which are the groups the individual is aiming to join in to. This group can also be simplified to a person who is highly admired. *(Kotler., 2000)*

2. Cultural factors

Another group influencing b2c consumer behavior is called cultural factors. According to Kotler the basis of these cultural factors are driven from history, values, society structure, religion, beliefs, accommodation and relationships. These are the factors that are grown up into. Other minor cultural factors that can also contribute to the buying decision of an individual are symbols, heroic characters, traditions and rituals. All these factors change over time, some faster than others. *(Kotler, 2000)*

3. Personal influences

Personal factors that effect the buying behavior are demographic factors such as age, sex, occupation, economic circumstances, life cycle stage. These factors with cultural and social factors influence on the lifestyle of the consumer which again influences consumers personality and self-concept that both influence greatly on buying habits. *(Kotler, 2000)*

4. Psychological factors

Psychological factors that contribute on the buying decision process are motivation, beliefs & attitudes, perception and learning. (Kotler, 2000) These factors are based on Hierarchy of Needs by Abraham Maslow.

2.3 Marketing influencing the buying process

The marketing of games is generally much more complex and different than the usual b2c product marketing. Where a normal product, let's say a detergent, is marketed mainly on the brand image, a game is marketed not only with superb brand value and great product but also through extensive communication (with the users) via different game community channels. This occurs mainly in gaming Internet sites and forum discussion. Developers and publishers posting screen shots (pictures taken in-game for promotional or informational purposes) to different game sites and forums is just one example how games are promoted. Internet advertising for game publishers in general is an excellent way to market and sell their products since it's cheap and it reaches the targeted demography world-wide. Screen shots, videos and developer diaries are a great way to build up the hype around the game before the announced release date.

The marketing of a game differs greatly from the marketing of other normal products. A large portion of overall promotion occurs before the game is even published while a normal product would have a continuous marketing schedule. Most of a game's sell happens two weeks after it has been published which explains why the marketing must take place well before the release date. The marketing of a game starts at the same minute the publisher decides to buy the rights for a game. Majority of the marketing is done during production time. Games are usually bought on the basis of how well a title has been promoted and marketed and most important of all, seen by the customer before the release date. For example if a player sees good looking screen shots or videos

about a game that is to be published in six months, the player most likely will keep the date in mind and buy the game when it's released. On basis of my personal empiric research, basic principle of game marketing therefore could be split in to two: 1. Marketing and hype built well before the game is released and 2. The release date promotion which main purpose is to tell the already interested crowd that the game is now out. This form of marketing is quite different than for example in movie industry. Movies are mainly sold with good trailers and well placed promotion campaigns, not with 'buzz' months before the premiere.

As an example of this kind of marketing, the marketing of Napoleon: Total War (published by Sega and developed by Creative Assembly) started in the July of 2009 when it was first announced. The game is to be released in February 2010 so the promotion started almost a year before the release date. Even this is not extraordinary in game business when the giants start to promote their game well over a year before the release. A good example would be Activision Blizzard which is world's largest game publisher. Their upcoming game Diablo 3, which is a part of highly popular Diablo series, has already started its' promotion when the release date is said to be "it is done when it's done".

2.4 Brands

Like in any well known product brand image is the key to long term success. In game industry branding is rather new thing to be taken into marketing. In the early and mid 90's game publishers usually thought that a good game will sell itself with minor promotion. This was a widely accepted opinion that no one really questioned. Saying that, good games built themselves a great brand just by being popular games everyone knew. Making game brands, however, wasn't intentional before the early 2000's.

One exception to the “rule” was Nintendo in the 1990's. This Japanese company had integrated innovation and new ideas to hardware and software development which gave them an edge over the few competitors they had. With Famicom (published in 1983) and Nintendo Entertainment System (NES, published in late 1985) they ruled the video game industry in the 1980's and 1990's with almost a monopolistic status. They created the “Nintendo Generation” meaning the 80's youth that knew how to control joysticks and other gaming hardware that is taken for granted nowadays. This was all based and sold on extensive brand creation and youth marketing. They e.g. adapted Disney character to their games which made it easy for them not only to promote the games to children and teenagers but to invade the US entertainment industry with characters that had strong links to North American culture. Nintendo kept its' monopolistic status until 1995 when Sony released its first, more powerful console, PlayStation. *(Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witford, Graig De Peuter 2003)*

In the Nintendo case they also boosted their own brand with already known brands (Disney) which is also done today. License games made from blockbuster movies started to appear to gaming industry early on in the 90's. Batman, Jurassic Park, Lord of The Rings, they have all been converted in to numerous games in several platforms. What these licensed games success is based on is not in review scores but in the original product itself. Electronic Arts had a 10 year contract with Lord of the Rings movie franchise and it made several highly popular games from them. They didn't receive good review scores but they sold rather well *(Electronic Arts, 2009)*. Licensed games will bring easy visibility to the publisher and the developer.

According to former Codemasters marketing manager Bruce Everiss, the procedure from a movie to a game can also be rather bumpy. Since movies and films are totally different forms of entertainment experiences, the games made from movies can easily be very disappointing. “Films are not interactive, you sit down and get comfortable and then the film is imposed on you, you have no influence whatsoever over events. Video games are the exact opposite, they are very highly interactive, the player directly influences events on screen. So

one is a passive media, the other is an active media. Also films are totally lacking of the fundamental mechanism of games where the player is rewarded for their success”, Mr. Everiss says in his blog.

Another good example how brands are created and sold is the Tomb Rider game series. In this case licensing was not made from a movie to game but from a popular game in to a movie. The game and its hero Lara Croft were first introduced in 1996 when the first *Tomb Raider* was published. The games tells a story about a treasure huntress with a sensitive trigger finger. Game's huge popularity was due its main character and her appearance. Before Tomb Raider there were no female heroes in game business, only the bulk action hero stereotypes with big guns and a smoking cigar. Tomb Rider was fresh and a huge success well before it was published. After publishing the first game it had seven sequels in forms of games but the largest triumph for the series was its makeover to a movie in 2001 which followed a sequel in 2003. These films and a comic book release made Tomb Rider series a media franchise and one of the strongest brands known in game business. (*Core Design 1995, Crystal Dynamics 2003, Eidos Interactive 2009*) This is a great example how strong brands are formed in game industry today..

Brand personality

When defining gaming brands and harnessing them to marketing purposes, having a personalized brand helps a lot in the process. Brand personality means the human characteristics of the brand. Adjectives such “serious, elegant, playful” could be used to define the brand personality. This helps copywriters and art directors to get deeper in to the brand itself which helps designing the marketing for it. (*Kelley, Jugenheimer 2006*)

In game industry this means that every game has its own brand and brand personality. Also every publisher and developer has its own brand and therefore own personality. Defining or building these personalities for games will help to

build lasting brand images for customers and therefore to guide consumer's buying decision process towards your own product.

Brand loyalty

Well selling games today are a combination of great marketing, great game and a great brand. Like in any other industry, branding a product or the company itself is extremely important in game industry as well. Game business is becoming more and more competitive when more games and developers appear to the markets. In game industry different from so called normal consumption, however, is that not only can be the products themselves but also the companies making or publishing the product can be brands. This means publishers and developers. There are also some examples where the designer of the game has been turned in to a brand. Good example is Sid Meier's games. Majority of them has the designers name (Sid Meier) in the game's title, which is extraordinary in game business. Loyalty to these brands is fully dependent on the consumer experience of the product.

Branding publishers and developers

There are two types of factors contributing to the publishers' and developers' brand image: genre and former games published.

Publishers are in charge of marketing and promoting the game. Therefore publishers' name is more exposed than the developers' and therefore it is more easily affected by positive or negative reactions towards the published game. Publishers' brand image is also based on previous games they have published. It's not the type or genre of the games they publish but it is the success and visibility they've got from them that matters. After reading great reviews or playing a game from a certain publisher, it is likely that the same player will get interested on their next ventures.

Developer on the other hand is much more genre dependent than the publisher. If a developer releases for example an arcade racing game, it is very unlikely that a role-playing game from them would sell afterwards. Good example of this is BioWare's success story which started in 1998 with a release of a Role-Playing game (RPG) called Baldur's Gate. It was based on a licensed rule-set and a world of Forgotten Realms. The game became hugely popular and followed by two expansion sets and one sequel. After Baldur's Gate BioWare followed the road it had chosen by publishing a new RPG series "Neverwinter Nights" which followed by two expansions. After building an enormous brand image in RPG genre BioWare now dominated the field with its two new releases, Mass Effect (and Mass Effect 2 which was released in January 2010) and Dragon Age: Origins. These two are the two most popular games in the RPG genre.

The reason, however, for a developer to continue in the same genre it has chosen does not entirely depend on the desire to build a strong brand image in that field. It is the intellectual property within the company. The designers, animators and programmers making the game are one reason why developers tend to publish similar games. When these people are developing the game they have researched and studied a vast amount of information needed to create for example an believable imaginary historical setting with wooden houses and ships. In this example blueprints of old houses and ships must be researched, the environment and clothing must be historically correct etc. If a development team would jump from for example RPG genre to racing games all the required info would have to be studied from scratch.

As an example how brands influence the markets, Electronic Arts dominated the sport games genre with NHL and FIFA series in the 90's. Their success in this field was due branding of EA Sports (the development department of Electronic Arts' sport games) and timing of their releases. Before the EA Sports series there were random attempts to create selling sport games. NHL 94 fast

became a legend in PC and FIFA series followed in 95 although its first edition was published already in 93. These two games were the first two proper sports games in the field. They were also the first ones to brand their sports series under one flag, EA Games with a slogan "It's in the game". EA's success continued all the way to the 2000's until they had a rival from developer/publisher 2K Games with NHL 2K (which first highly successful game was released in 2003 and called NHL 2K3) and developer/publisher Konami's Pro Evolution Soccer. Before these two games the consumers didn't have any other choices but now it was realized that these two games of better quality than highly branded EA series they turned to buy these games. This continued until EA released NHL 2009 and FIFA 2010 which were much more popular than the rival games. (*Gamespot.com*)

2.5 Previews and Reviews

Previews and reviews mean the professional game critics given by journalists whose job is to evaluate games. Usually these reviews are published in game magazines and web sites, but some are now finding their way even to local newspapers.

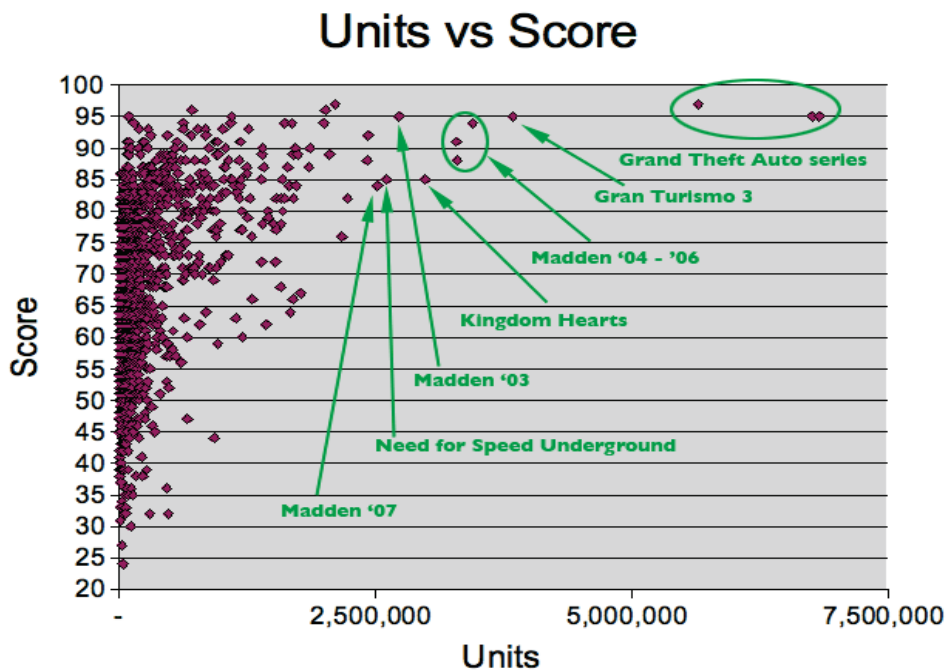
Previews and reviews are important mediums when talking about factors that influence players buying decisions. Especially reviews have always been considered to be an indicator how well a game is going to sell. Critics or reviews made by different independent journalists or critics are generally very similar and therefore just one review in a popular game site can influence games sale rates significantly. So it is important that the information about game being good or bad is easily available when the game releases.

There is a general myth in game business that reviews are the largest factor that contribute to game sales. (*Divinch, 2009*) This, however, is now proving to be wrong. Research made by EEDAR shows that high marketing budget

influences gross revenue three times more than review scores. For example BioShock (developed and published by 2K Games) had 5,5 million US dollar marketing budget behind it and sold twice as many copies as Electronic Arts' Dead Space, which had a budget of 2 million dollars. BioShock made 15 million dollars more in the first three months than Dead Space, even when they spent more money on marketing. However, Divnich also added that “publishers can't just rely on marketing to sell their game – it has to be targeted correctly to sell the product”. (*gameindustry.biz*, 2009)

This doesn't remove the fact that player's buying behavior is influenced by the review scores. This is shown in the Table 3 and 4 which is put together from different game sales and popular game review site Metacritic scores.

Table 3. Units vs. Game Scores



On the horizontal axis there is the number of sold units and vertical the Metacritic score. In the table it can clearly be seen that only few titles reach over 2,5 million copies sold and only a couple sell over 5 million. All these games are console games which can be explained with Table 1 statistics; computer sales are extremely low. What else is in common with these games is that they all are

extremely well known titles published and/or developed by a huge company with high marketing budget.

Table 4. Zoomed version from Table 3.

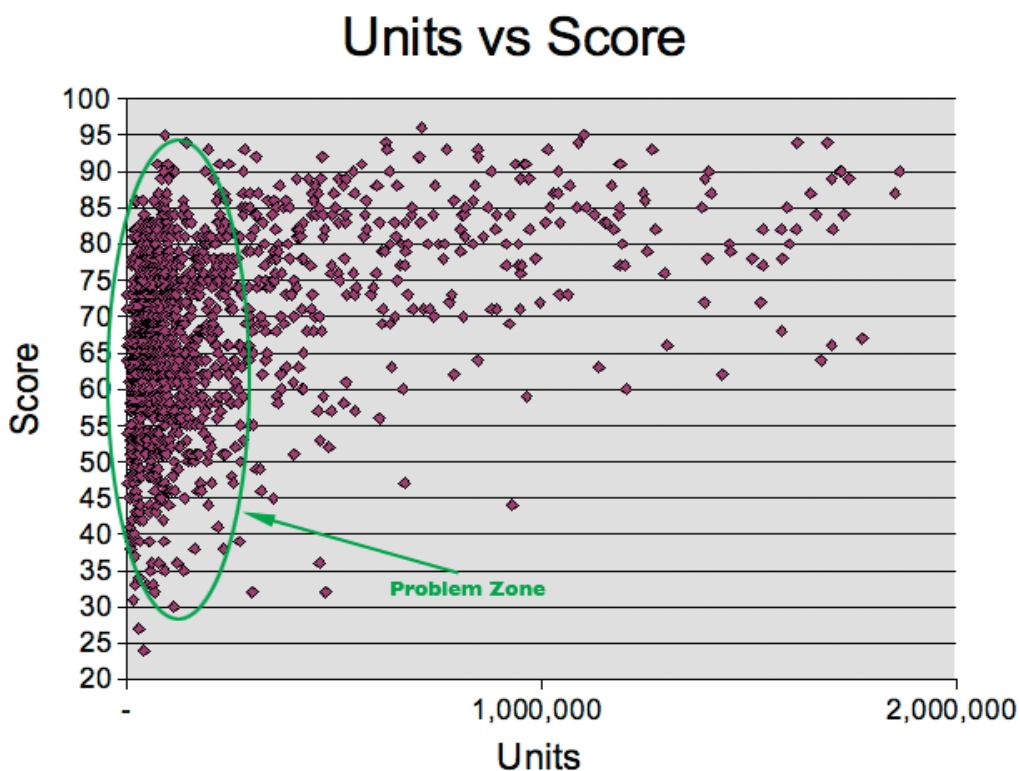
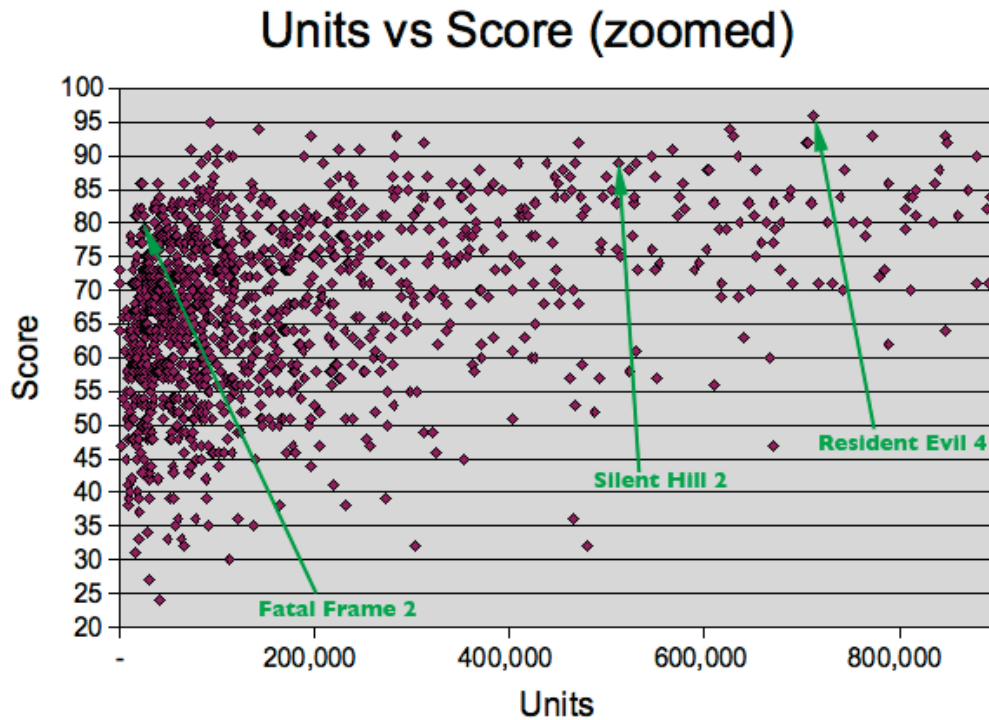


Table 4 shows more clearly than Table 3 that there are no games under 60% review score that has sold over 1 million copies. There are still a few titles reaching high sales with under 50% scores which is most likely result of intensive marketing. Rule of thumb could therefore be that if a developer wants to sale over 1 million copies the released game must be good and equipped with good marketing force.

Table 5. Zoomed version from Table 4



These tables show that a great game is not a guarantee for great sales. Marketing and good product image & brand value are needed for a successful game. In Table 5 there are two well known game series (Silent Hill and Resident Evil) both selling over 500 000 copies while an unknown game, Fatal Frame 2 with almost the same review scores had extremely low sales. The trend in the graph still appears to be clear; the higher the critic scores the higher your sales are.

2.4 Social Media

Today social media is becoming more and more important and bigger part of our everyday life. In the early 2000's there was no Facebook or Twitter to chat or to tell your friends your daily thoughts and chores. Now these mediums are dominating our daily time usage. If an Internet based communities have such an important role in our everyday life then what is social media exactly?

General definition of social media is “a media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques”. In other words it uses Internet for people to publish their own thoughts to desired audience and for the audience to reply to any publication from the user and vice versa. Great examples of such activity are Facebook, Twitter and different blogsites. Social media is often referred as user generated content (UGC) or consumer generated media (CGC).

Social media has drastically changed the way businesses promote and market their products. Companies can now reach customers in a new and efficient way. It is also interesting that social media users are unknowingly turning to the marketers themselves. For example when a PC game called Modern Warfare 2 came out, there were more than 10 status updates in my Facebook frontpage telling how great of a game it is. This automatically got me interested and I obviously bought the game. Harnessing the marketing potential of a single consumer is exactly why social media is great for companies.

This huge potential of a single user can also be a downfall for a company. In 2002 a 22-year-old Casey Neistat was a happy iPod user and Apple fan until his iPod broke. Its battery wouldn't charge anymore and so Neistat decided to call to Apple's technical support. They said it would cost 255\$ plus mail fees to get a new battery to the iPod. The price is almost the same as a brand new iPod. Mr. Neitat didn't like this and decided to take matters in to his own hands. Neitat with his brother decided to spray some visible iPod posters with “iPod's unreplaceable Battery Only Lasts 18 Months” and called again to the Apple's tech support. This time they recorded the call and spread it to 30 of their friends

who spread it further - all via Internet. The audio track soon got over million downloads. Neitai got a call from Apple saying they are currently working on the issue and can give the battery for 99\$. (*Ben McConnell, Jackie Huba, 2006*)

Social media has the power for one person to start a massive domino effect, whether it is good or bad.

Forum discussion

When talking about games and game industry it is extremely important to know what different forums exist and what forum discussion means. Forums are a vital part of social media and an advertising tool in game industry. When buying a new game or having questions about a recently bought one, majority of players will go and check the developers/publishers forums about the matter. It is a direct link between the user and the developer.

Forums themselves are discussion channels (or boards) for a specific theme or subject. There also are forums for game publishers, developers and fan-sites. There are practically forums for every subject that exists. Forums are kept up by administrators (managing the technical details required to run the site) and moderators (moderating, deleting etc. discussions) and used by members.

Forums are based on posts of a subject. It is a submitted message to the board. Posts are contained in threads which is a collection of two or more posts. (*Wikipedia*)

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and quantitative researches are the two types of making a research. Qualitative research is for example an interview or something else that is related to or something that is concerned with quality rather than numeric values. Quantitative research on the other hand is all about gathering hard data and numerical values for comparison. For my study I chose to do a quantitative research because numerical values were needed to create a good picture of different buying habits from large number of players.

As a research to test these theories in practice I made a questionnaire about games and what influences the buying decision of a casual player. Majority of the players that answered were between the age of 18-25 and 26-35 but there were some over 36 as well.

It was problematic at the beginning of the survey to choose a channel through which the questions would be published to reach an audience large enough and complex enough. I choose to promote the questionnaire through Facebook, TUAS emails and some forum channels including some well known World of Warcraft (WoW) guilds forums (Paragon etc).

This gave me a wide player base since most of my Facebook friends are casual players, there are men and women in all of these sources and the TUAS email list had a large number of casual and hardcore players.

The questionnaire was formed of 17 questions which were scored from 0 to 5 (0 being “no importance” and 5 being “extremely important” based on how important they found price, advertising, genre, theme, game rating and violence, reviews, forum posts, graphics, developer and publisher, previous releases, replayability, and friends recommendations.

All of these questions were asked from PC players and console players.

There was also open questions in the survey: “Explain briefly your buying process” and “List three biggest factors contributing to your buying decision”.

There were 233 participants to the survey of which 66 (28%) were women and 167 (71%) were men. It's extremely difficult to know the exact answer percentage since most of the channels that the questionnaire was published are open for public and therefore the amount of people not answering to the survey can't be tracked. My personal estimate is that about 15% of people in Facebook & forums and around 5% of TUAS network answered the survey.

The reliability of the survey relies on the amount of people answered to the questionnaire. Since every player has own criteria for which factors contribute their buying decision and what kind of buying process they have the answer percentage is not important. With 233 answers the random sample is good and reliable.

The results of the first 17 questions (0-5 questions) were analyzed via MS Excel graphs after the raw info was collected from the database. Graphs gave clear picture for which factors have most impact on buying decision process and which factors are not important. Open answers were all read, translated and moved to MS Word from the Internet database. After this they were read again and sorted by different keywords. This helped me to see the similar buying processes more easily.

The reason why I chose to do a questionnaire is that the data is easily collectible and analyzable and with it I could have answers from hundreds rather than dozens. (*Research Methods for Business Students – kirjoittaja?, Tutki ja kirjoita – kirjoittaja?*) I first planned to do an in-depth interview after the questionnaire to get better results from the free fill questions in the survey but it turned out that the free-fill answers were more than enough to make conclusions about player's buying process.

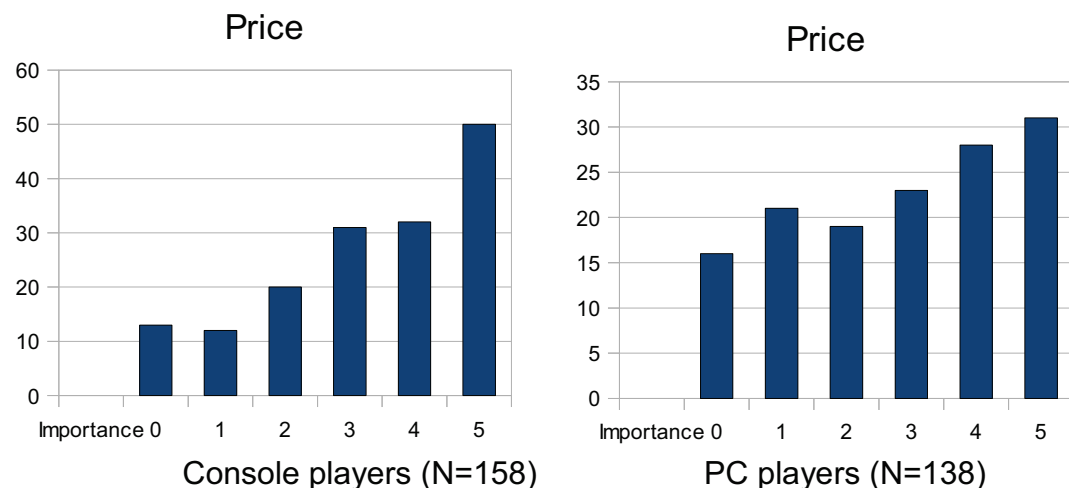
RESULTS

4.1 Questionnaire – Factors contributing to the buying decision

The results were as I expected when I started the survey – there was no significant difference between the answers of PC and console players. There are some differences between men and women players and these will be brought up. Here I present only the factors that clearly influence the buying decision of games. The rest of the results can be found as an appendix. There were 233 answers in the survey with almost equal spread between PC and Video players. There were 158 answers from console players and 138 from PC players. Some players play both platforms and also answered to both platform's questions. In the result graphs there is the amount of people answered on the Y-axis and the importance indicated between values 0 to 5 on the X-axis.

Price

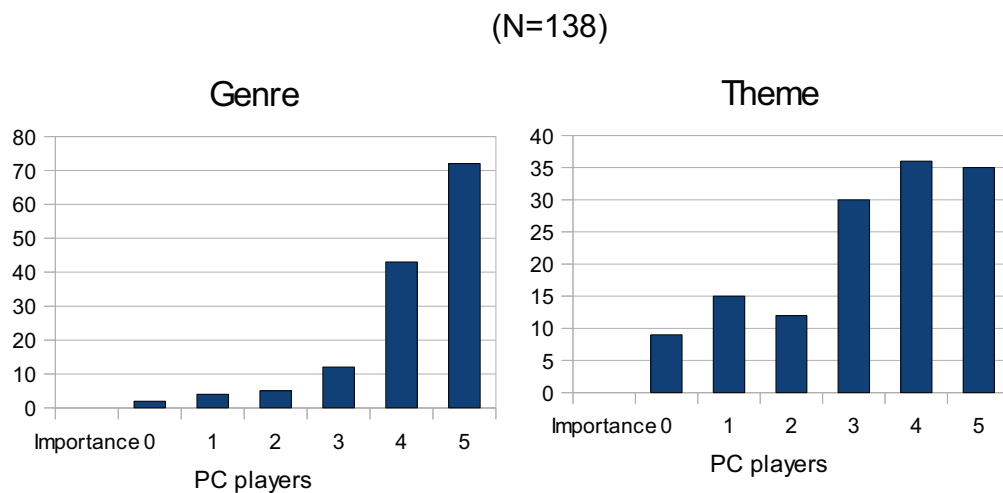
Table 6. Console and PC players answer distribution from price



As seen in Table 6 the price seems to be rather important for majority of players. On the right there is the PC and left the answers from console players. The trend is clearly the same in both of the graphs and the conclusion is that price has influence to the buying decision of games.

Genre and Theme

Table 7. PC players answer distribution from Genre and Theme

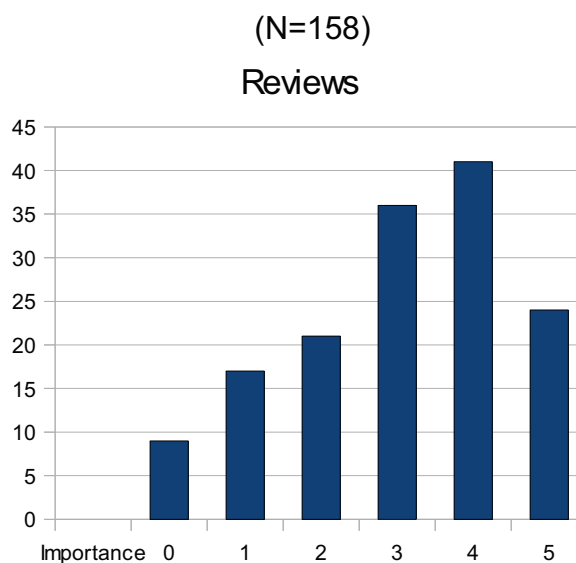


Genre and theme is both sort of a backbone to the game. They dictate the frames in which the game experience and gameplay occur. Let's take an example from Wolfenstein game series. The game is set in World War II, in an imaginary Nazi experiment facilities and other dark and gloomy locations. The idea of the game is to shoot all the Nazis in sight. This is the theme of the game. The genre is First Person Shooter, FPS.

For me this was probably the most surprising discovery from the study. As seen in Table 7, genre has a huge role when deciding which game to buy. 72 people from PC players considered genre to be "extremely important" when buying a new game. This was the case in both, console and PC players' answers. Also the theme of the game is very important as indicated in Table 7.

Reviews

Table 8. Console players answer spread from reviews



As indicated in Table 8, reviews have a dramatic impact on the buying decision with both, PC (see appendixes) and console players. Over 100 players answered 3 or above when asked how reviews influence to their buying decisions. Large number of players also thought reviews being their top 3 buying decision factor. The results clearly tell the expected; review scores have a strong impact to the buying decision of most players.

Graphics

The visual side of the game is as important as the game content itself and therefore a lot of players consider it to be important to them when buying a new game.

Table 9. Console players answer spread from graphics

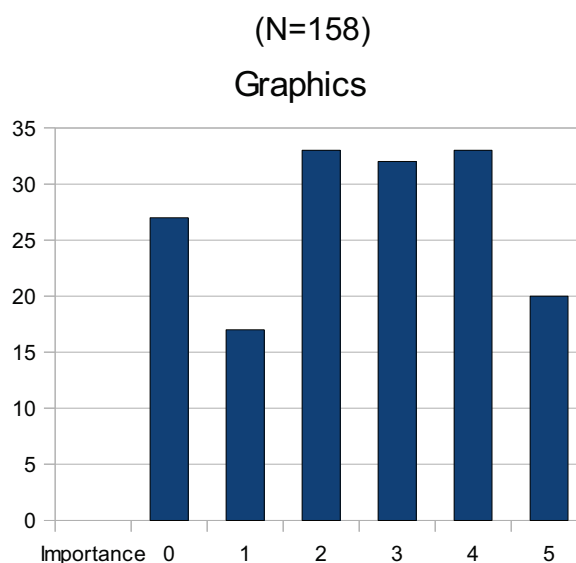
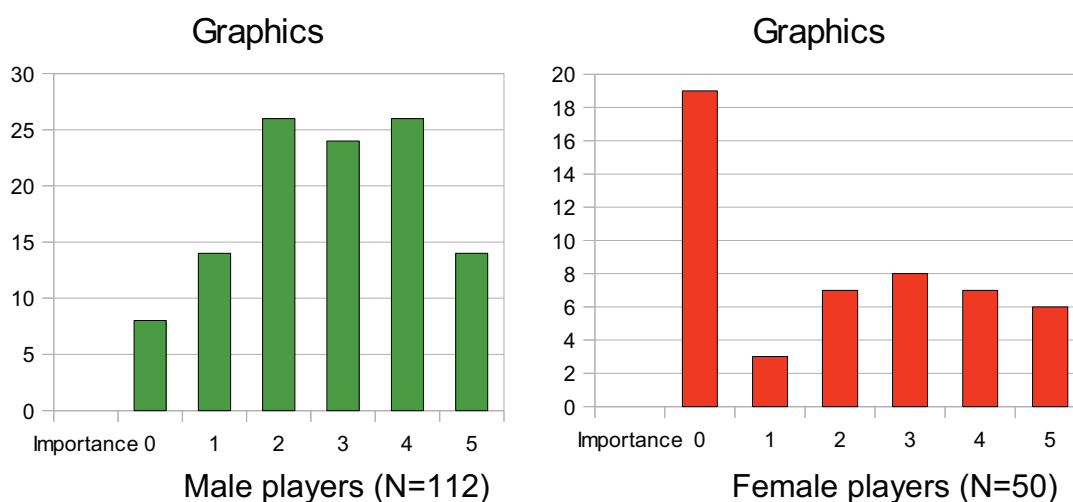


Table 10. Answer spread from graphics between male and female players

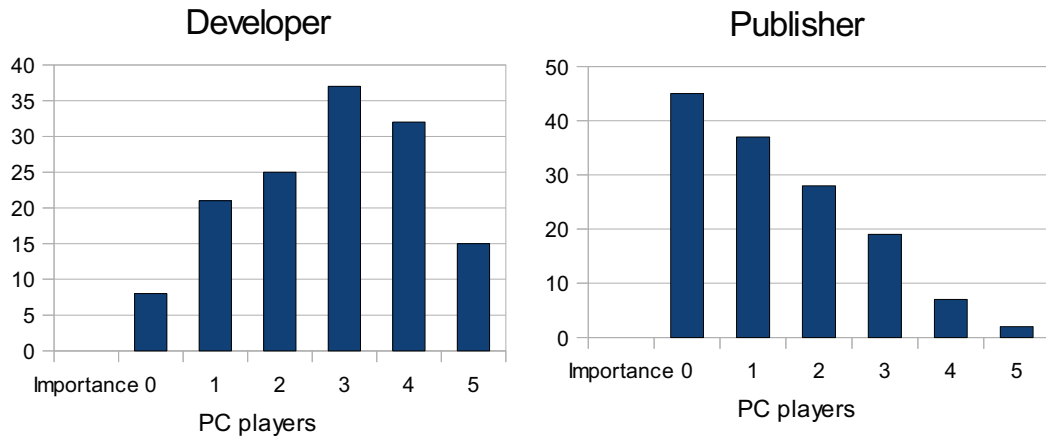


In Table 9 there is an equal spread between the answers from 0 to 5. Graphics are generally considered as one of the major reasons people buy games so this result was quite interesting. Therefore I decided to look deeper into the results in this case. In Table 10 we can clearly see that male players consider graphics to be much more important than female counterparts. This explains the equal spread seen in Table 9. The difference between these two can be found in the psychological factors. Men are more visual thinkers than women which explains why they also consider the appearance of the game to be much more important

than women. Women on the other hand are seen to be more interested e.g. about the dynamics and content of the game than the looks.

Developer & Publisher

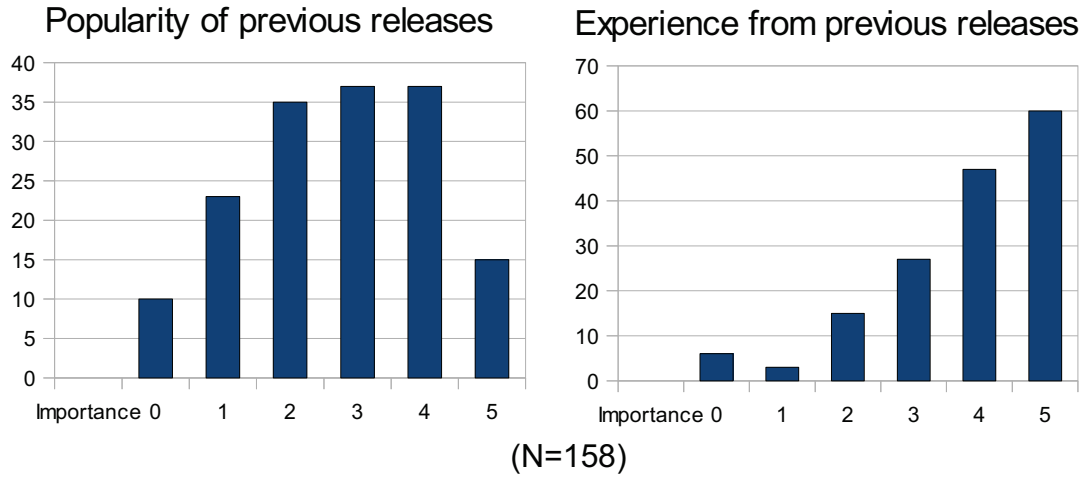
Table 11. PC player's answer spread between developers and publishers



(N=138)

Table 11 clearly shows the importance of developer to PC players compared to publisher. The same result was also seen among console players as seen from appendixes. What supports this is the importance of popularity & experiences from previous releases from a developer as seen in Table 12 below. This is an interesting fact since I personally thought developer and publisher as brands would be equally important for players. Publishers have little to do with the content of the game which could explain these results. Players are more interested about the game itself rather than who's promoting it.

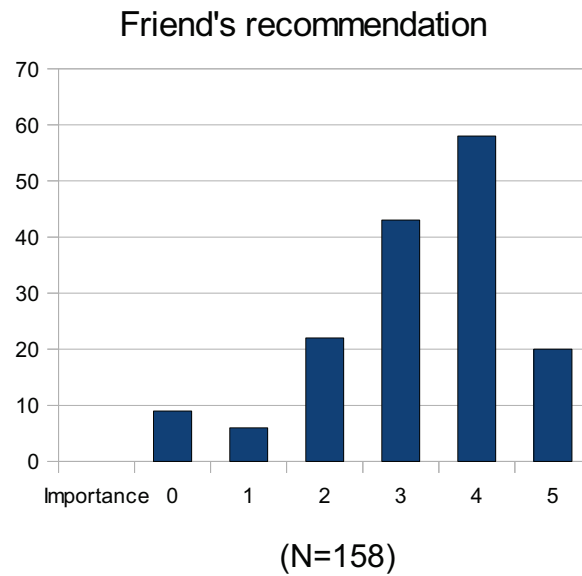
Table 12. Console player's answer spread between popularity and experiences from developer's previous releases.



Personal experiences from any previous release seem to be the most important factor that contributes the buying decision process of players. This reflects the importance of game series and the quality of the first game in the series. As indicated in Table 3, 8 out of 9 top selling games are part of a game series. When players have found out that a certain game is worth playing it is easier for them to make the decision to buy the sequel for the game rather than some similar game. This lowers the involvement and problem solving of buying decision from High problem-solving towards Low problem-solving (*Solomon etc, 2006*), in other words makes it easier for the player to buy the game.

Friend's recommendations

Table 13. Console player's answer spread from friend's recommendations



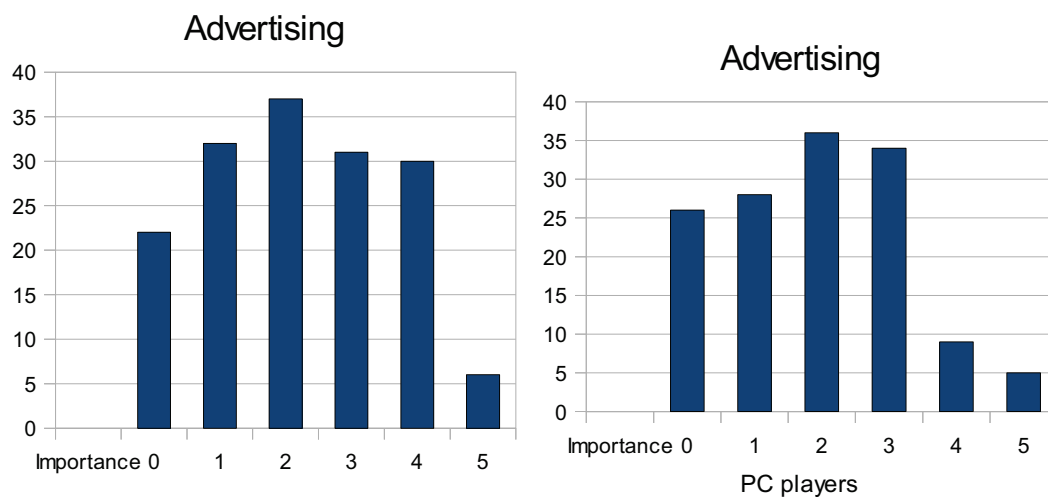
As Table 13 shows, social factors play a big role when deciding which game to buy. The results from PC players were the same as seen from appendixes. This reflects the marketing power of a single consumer. With one extremely satisfied player the creators of the game can gain even 10 or more new customers and again from those 10 some might recommend the game to their friends and so on.

This again reflects the experienced quality of the game. If a player has found the game to be good he/she will most likely promote it and vice versa.

Advertising

Table 14. Console and PC player's answer spread from Advertising

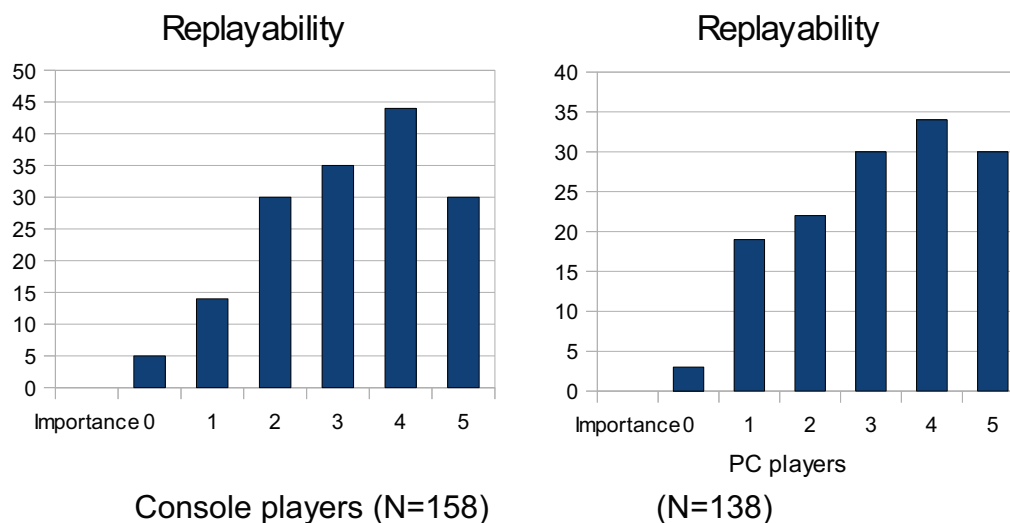
(N=158)



Advertising is quite evenly spread (Table 14) among the answers. This shows that the advertising doesn't directly have much influence to the buying decision. It's merely a reminder about the game but it is the previous experiences will determine whether the advertisements have any impact or not.

Replayability

Table 15. Console and PC player's answer spread from Replayability



As Table 15 indicates, the replayability value is important for most of players. Replayability is a one indicator for the quality of a game. If the lifetime of a game is under 20 hours it is most likely to be forgotten quickly and the expectations for any following publishes are low. Some critics also measure game's lifetime span with the price. If a game costs 50€ and has 50 hours of play time the lifetime value is 1€/h. The less the value is the better. With good replayability the lifetime span can be stretched with dozens of hours.

Factors that had low significance to players or were very evenly spread were:

- Forum posts
- Material posted to Internet
- Demo played
- Rating / Violence

- Possibility to buy from Internet

As said before, all of the answers can be found from appendices.

4.2 Questionnaire – Free fill answers

As explained in Methodology chapter in addition to the "0 – 5" questions there were two open questions in the questionnaire: "Explain briefly your buying process" and "List three biggest factors contributing to your buying decision". The first question gave interesting answers since most of them didn't match with the buying process theories by Kotler and Solomon. More about that is written in Conclusion chapter. Here are some examples from the answers got from "Explain briefly your buying process" -question:

- *"A commercial could raise an interest towards a game but it's not the only factor. I often read forums and blogs if the advertisement was interesting. Other option is a recommendation by a friend."*
- *"I had chosen the game well before it was published..."*
- *"Following forums and reviews. Also friends' experiences from the game"*
- *"If the game or the developer is familiar the decision to buy the game is made months before the release date..."*
- *"Advertisement can strengthen or weaken already existing buying decision."*
- *"(the buying decision) Usually made before the release although advertisements can have a positive impact on the decision."*

- *"I choose a game in basis of advertisements and material posted to Internet but sometimes before the release if I hear that a great game is to be released"*
- *"Usually I have chosen the game months before the release date."*
- *"Most of the times I choose the game well before it's published. For example Battlefield:Bad Company 2 was in my shopping cart five months before it was published. I am a big fan of the Battlefield series and this had a big impact on my buying decision"*
- *"I see a commercial about a game or it's been discussed in the Internet. After that I see the reviews and if they are good I will buy the game if it has come out"*

There are two things that can be seen from these quotes above and all the free fill answers for the survey. Firstly, it seems that the buying decision is often been made months before the game is even published. This is clear differences between Kotlers and Solomons theories. These processes are explained in the Conclusion chapter.

Secondly, there are only a few major things that effect the buying decision. These factors are friends' recommendations, reviews & previews (and everything that is published before release date), advertising and any experiences from the game series or publisher & developer. Advertising had importance for some respondents but no significance to some of them as it can be seen in Table 14.

When asked players about their three most important factors that influence the buying decision of games the top 5 answers in random order were: friend's recommendations, reviews, experiences from previous releases, price and genre.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I am trying to figure out what would a “perfect game” be like e.g. how it would be marketed and distributed. First I'll gather the required information and at the end of the chapter I'll tell my personal opinion of a perfect game based on my research.

5.1 Consumer's buying behavior

Philip Kotler and Michael Solomon see the consumer buying decision process as a five step process as it was indicated in Figure 2 and Figure 5. However, based on my research this five step process doesn't adapt to the gaming industry and the buying process of games. As seen in Figure 4 , the process of buying games has similarities with Kotler's and Solomon's models but is different enough to make the separation.

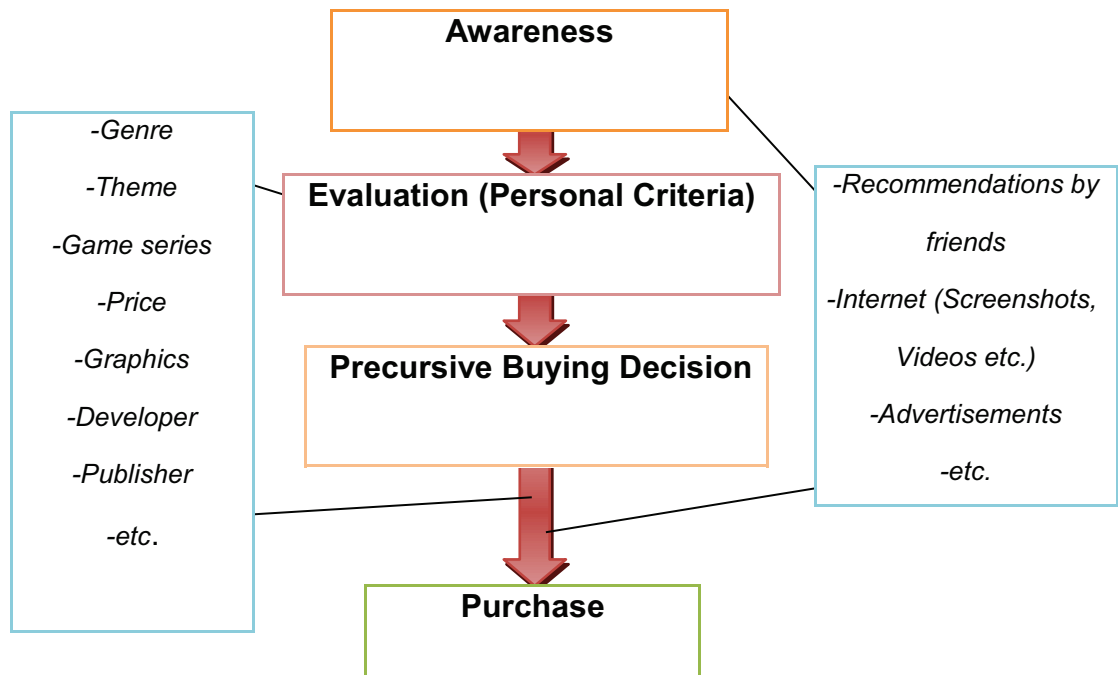


Figure 5. Buying Decision Process of Games

Figure 5 demonstrates the buying decision process in game industry. Compared to the Kotler's model it only has four steps instead of five. Like Kotler's model, it starts with the recognition of a need, meaning the awareness of a game being released or developed. The awareness will raise from friends recommendations, advertisements, Internet sources like screenshots, developer's diaries, videos, facebook status updates etc. In Kotler's model the second step is information search, when here the second phase is evaluation through personal criteria.

There are as many criteria for a great game as there are player's but, as my research shows, the most common are genre, theme, price, developer and publisher. Personal criteria can also be the game belonging to a popular game series. Evaluation is probably the most important stage in the buying process. If the game doesn't look good enough, come from the right publisher, doesn't

belong to the right genre, doesn't have the right theme and atmosphere or any other minor detail, the buying process will most likely end here.

When sufficient amount of these criteria are met (depends on the player) the precursive buying decision takes place. The reason why the buying decision is not yet final after the evaluation stage is that in most cases the decision is done months before the release date and based on previews and other material published before the release. The precursive stage of the buying process could be explained with a frase "wow, that game looks great, I'm going to buy it when it comes out!". As one can clearly see, the decision is far from final. This is why it is important to separate the buying decision and the purchase itself. In Kotler's buying process model the purchase decision and purchase itself was under the same topic because in a normal buying process the product itself is already available in stores.

Because there can be months between the precursive buying decision and purchase, a lot can happen during this time. Same forces that started the buying process in the first place now effect on the final part of the buying process. If the game was first recommended by a friend it is likely that the person won't buy the game if the same friend for example tells him/her that the game is bad. Also material seen in Internet (screenshots and videos), can strengthen or weaken the buying decision. Same applies to advertisements and other promotional material.

An example from a game purchase that explains these steps: Hank Toms is a 21 year old college student who is incredibly interested about historical strategy games (personal criterion). His younger brother calls to him from home and tells about a new game that is situated in the 18th century that is going to be released in three months (Awareness). It is involved with naval warfare from which Hank has always been very keen to know about (another personal criterion). After the call Hank looks up the game from the Internet and sees the game's great graphics and forum's discussion which praises the gameplay (Awareness). Hank is now convinced that he has to buy the game but remembers that it's not possible until few months (precurative buying decision). After few weeks of looking the game's websites and new updates Hank decides to pre-order the

game because doing so he will get ingame bonuses (Purchase). When the game is released Hank will get the game delivered to his home door and he starts to play the game. Doing this he is influencing to his next buying process that is going to start after six months of playing when he hears that there is a sequel coming to the game he is now playing (Awareness).

Decision Making Sets

As seen in Figure 3 Philip Kotler divides the decision making into five sets of products from which the consumer makes the final decision. These steps are Total Set, Awareness Set, Consideration Set, Choice Set and the final decision. When these sets are adapted to the game industry the process doesn't apply anymore. There is the Total Set from where the player will ultimately choose the game by his liking but there is no Total Set without the corresponding sets.

The reason why these sets don't apply to game industry is simple. The basis of these sets is that there is a pool of similar products from which the consumer will ultimately make the decision. Games, however, are all unique in some way and can't be compared in the same way that for example different toothpastes can. Toothpaste has one function and the reason why consumers are choosing specific types of toothpastes is often brand-dependent. Games have multiple functions depending on their genre, theme etc. Therefore every decision to buy a game is unique and can't be put into sets. As it can be seen in the survey's open answers the buying decision is made to a single product which is not filtered from and compared to other similar games.

If however a player wants to buy a game from a specific genre or theme and doesn't know which one to buy, the decision making sets by Kotler can be adapted here. At least according to my studies, this type of buying behavior is very rare.

5.2 Buying behavior types

There is clear resemblance between buying process of games and Kotler's different buying behavior models. These models were complex, variety seeking, dissonance/reducing and habitual buying behavior. (Kotler, 2000)

Complex and variety seeking buying behavior models applies to buying behavior of games since there are significant differences with the game brands in titles, publishers, developers, game series etc. There is also usually high consumer involvement in the process. These types, however, are not as good to explain the buying behavior of players as Solomon's model.

Solomon etc. divided consumer behavior into three different groups depending on how much effort and involvement the purchase needs. The groups are as indicated in Figure 5, routine response behavior, limited problem-solving and extensive problem-solving. Player's buying behavior is usually between the two latter. Since games are rather expensive and infrequent purchases as well as they usually are bought after relatively extensive though, they can be considered to belong to extensive problem-solving group. They are far from routine response consumer behavior with one exception, the monthly subscription purchases to MMO's (Massively Multiplayer Online games). They are bought with little consumer involvement and are bought frequently.

Comparing the purchasing of games to Table 3, all the criteria presented for a extended problem-solving are met when buying games. Therefore it can be said that the purchasing games involves extended problem-solving.

5.3 Factors contributing to the consumer behavior

Kotler divides b2c consumer behavior into four different groups; social factors, cultural factors, personal influences and psychological factors. Consumer behavior is the combination of these four groups. As it can be seen from the questionnaire results, social factors play a huge role when talking about buying process of games. 77% of console players considered friends recommendations to be important or very important (Table 13).

Cultural and psychological factors are not as important but can be an ethic and personal backbone when buying a game. Let's say a Finnish 35-year-old male is going to a game store to buy a first-person-shooter. He has two choices, one located in 21st century with U.S troops shooting Taliban forces and one situated in 1940's World War II played with Russian forces invading Finland. There is a high possibility that the person will not choose the latter. Same rule would apply to two different games played with World War II Nazis or one played with the Allied troops.

Resale value

One of Kotler's ideas of consumer behavior is the way they dispose products they've bought. If a consumer has decided to get rid of a product there are a few alternatives he/she can do: giving it away, trading it and selling it to be reused or sold/resold. This is an interesting point when compared to the gaming industry. More and more consumers are taking the resale value of the game into consideration. Selling secondhand games that players have sold to the middlemen (game shops like GameStop or Game) is far more profitable than selling new ones. This means that game developers/publishers are missing on millions if not hundreds of millions of dollars on secondhand trade. If these two core mediums that make the game industry exist, are not included in their own sales process, makes more and more games and game publishers to move out from the plastic high-street retail model and move their games online. (Everiss, 2008) As mentioned earlier this also lowers the cost of new games.

5.4 Marketing influencing buying process

As seen on Figure 5, there are many similar factors contributing to the buying process at the beginning and at the end of the process. Marketing is also one of these factors. As it can be seen from questionnaire answers (Table 14), advertising can create the need to buy a game and at the end of the process, strengthen or weaken the precursive buying decision.

Brands

What also appears from my research is that developer as a brand is more important to the consumer than the publisher. This is not a surprising result when considered that quality is what players require and developers are the ones assuring the quality. With only one quality game the developing company can upgrade its' brand status and make the company more valuable.

When talking about game brands there are no stronger brands than game series have. According to Entertainment Software Association's Essential Facts, 2009 the top 20 video games sold in North America are all from game series, ranging from sports games such as Madden series to more violent Grand Theft Auto series.

What is it then that makes these series flourish? It's a combination of their brand value, their successful previous volumes and the fact that they consist of innovative and good quality games. As my survey's results show (Table 12) , a large majority thinks that previous parts of a game and especially personal experiences from it have a dramatic effect on their buying behavior. This is mainly because it is extremely safe to buy a game from a well known game series. The person buying a game expects high quality but low risks for worth of every penny -type of thinking.

Reviews

As seen in Tables 3, 4, and 5 reviews have a dramatic impact on how well game is going to sell. This reflects the importance for the developer to create a quality game but at the same time game to be for the masses. Games should not be too artistic and different (which usually get great review scores but low sales) from the mainstream but at the same time they should somehow be differentiated from other games on the market. Reviews have been and will surely always be one of the main selling points of any game and a requirement for a game to be successful and selling.

5.5 A profitable game is - ?

What does a profitable game consist of? As seen from the review tables 3, 4 and 5 a game doesn't necessarily have to get the best scores but however the top selling games often have great scores. This is due to the marketing and the branding the product. According to my survey a successful game needs to have high quality and especially be from the right genre. According to Entertainment Software Association, (*ESA – Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry. 2009*) the most popular genre for PC is Strategy games having 34,6% of all games played and from video games Action genre gets 20% share. When considering that video games make much better profits than computer games I will choose PS3 as my platform to define a profile for a successful game and Action-Adventure as my genre since Adventure genre had 5,3% share from all games played in North America and Action-Adventure is a popular genre combination.

Now we have selected the platform and the genre. Next we will need a theme and a developer for the game. Because the game would have to be a new game I can't select any game series to continue, although it would be the best possible solution. I will make a space themed Action-Adventure and BioWare as

the developer since they have a huge brand status among the gaming community. I decide to launch the game without any publisher and distribute the game in Internet via PlayStation Store. This will lower the game price to the consumer making it sell better but causing no extra costs to the developer while no share from the profits will have to be given to the publisher. Also as seen from Table 11, the publisher doesn't contribute to the sales of the game in form of a publisher brand, only by good marketing.

I now have the genre, theme, developer and distribution method cleared. Space themed action game is targeted for male audience. Thus the game itself has to have good graphics (as Table 10 indicated) and the whole package has to have high quality for the reviews to be successful. Reviews play a huge role in players' buying decision as seen in Table 8 and therefore to achieve high sales (in millions) the reviews have to be more than praising.

The quality and uniqueness of the game on the other hand reflects on the word of mouth marketing made between players verbally or through social media. Facebook and Twitter communities built up to promote a game and communicate with players has a huge role these days.

After having this all cleared and the game released all we need to do is to sit and wait for the profits. Sounds easy? Why aren't more developer's doing this? Because it isn't easy. Most of developers are indeed thinking about the profits gained from the game but maybe even more the quality and innovativeness in the game.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 represents the survey results recieved from console players.

Appendix 2 represents the survey results recieved from PC players.

Taulukko 1

Console player survey results

Men		Women		Sum	
Price					
<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	9	0	4	0	13
1	11	1	1	1	12
2	10	2	10	2	20
3	21	3	10	3	31
4	23	4	9	4	32
5	33	5	17	5	50

Advertising					
<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	16	0	6	0	22
1	20	1	12	1	32
2	26	2	11	2	37
3	22	3	9	3	31
4	22	4	8	4	30
5	4	5	2	5	6

Genre					
<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	2	0	1	0	3
1	5	1	4	1	9
2	4	2	8	2	12
3	17	3	5	3	22
4	29	4	14	4	43
5	53	5	16	5	69

Theme					
<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	8	0	4	0	12
1	6	1	5	1	11
2	17	2	7	2	24
3	22	3	14	3	36
4	31	4	10	4	41
5	25	5	9	5	34

Taulukko1

Rating / Violence

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	65	0	18	0	83
1	13	1	7	1	20
2	10	2	9	2	19
3	10	3	8	3	18
4	9	4	2	4	11
5	3	5	6	5	9

Reviews

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	5	0	4	0	9
1	8	1	9	1	17
2	10	2	11	2	21
3	29	3	7	3	36
4	33	4	8	4	41
5	20	5	4	5	24

Forum Posts

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	24	0	18	0	42
1	13	1	9	1	22
2	18	2	8	2	26
3	26	3	8	3	34
4	26	4	3	4	29
5	7	5	0	5	7

Graphics

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	8	0	19	0	27
1	14	1	3	1	17
2	26	2	7	2	33
3	24	3	8	3	32
4	26	4	7	4	33
5	14	5	6	5	20

Developer

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	31	0	6	0	37
1	25	1	13	1	38
2	18	2	13	2	31
3	23	3	4	3	27
4	19	4	3	4	22
5	3	5	0	5	3

Taulukko 1

Publisher

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	35	0	19	0	54
1	29	1	13	1	42
2	12	2	9	2	21
3	17	3	6	3	23
4	16	4	1	4	17
5	1	5	0	5	1

Popularity of Previous Releases

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	6	0	4	0	10
1	13	1	10	1	23
2	17	2	18	2	35
3	27	3	10	3	37
4	33	4	4	4	37
5	13	5	2	5	15

Replayability

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	3	0	2	0	5
1	6	1	8	1	14
2	25	2	5	2	30
3	24	3	11	3	35
4	30	4	14	4	44
5	21	5	9	5	30

Experiences from Previous Releases

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	4	0	2	0	6
1	2	1	1	1	3
2	10	2	5	2	15
3	20	3	7	3	27
4	31	4	16	4	47
5	45	5	15	5	60

Material Posted to Internet

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	10	0	9	0	19
1	15	1	11	1	26
2	17	2	16	2	33
3	32	3	4	3	36
4	26	4	2	4	28
5	11	5	3	5	14

Taulukko 1

Friend's Recommendation

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	5	0	4	0	9
1	3	1	3	1	6
2	15	2	7	2	22
3	28	3	15	3	43
4	41	4	17	4	58
5	15	5	5	5	20
					0

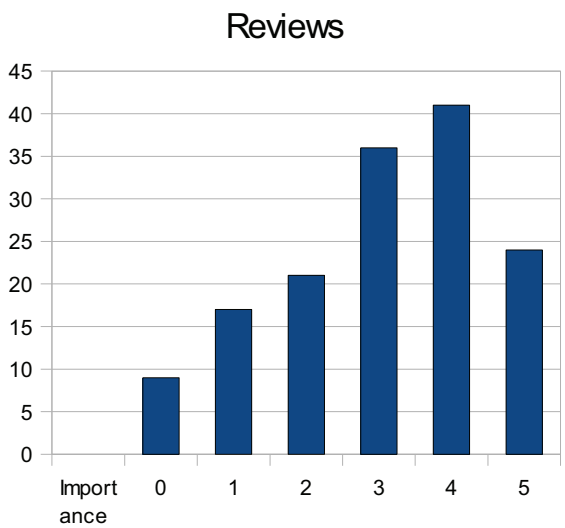
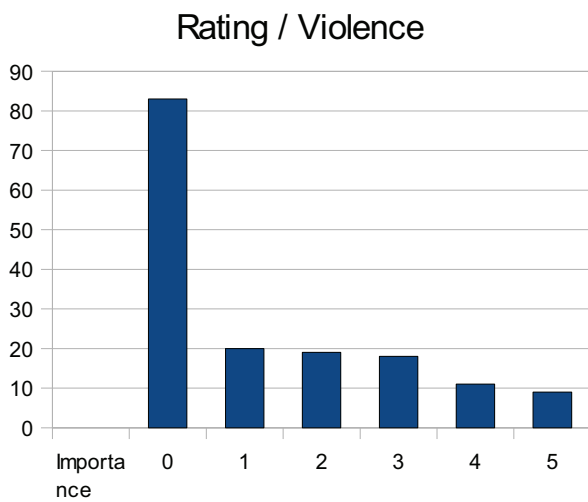
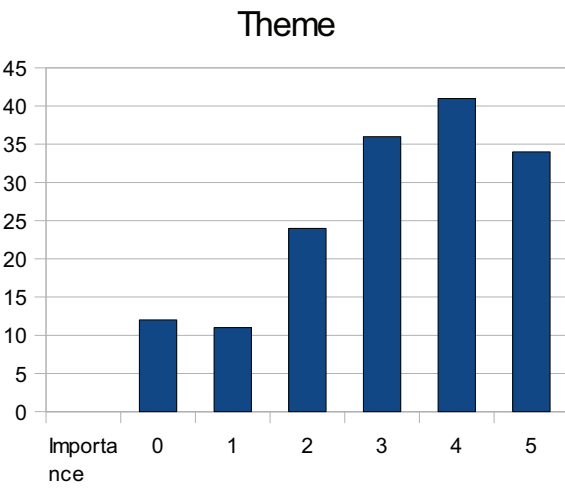
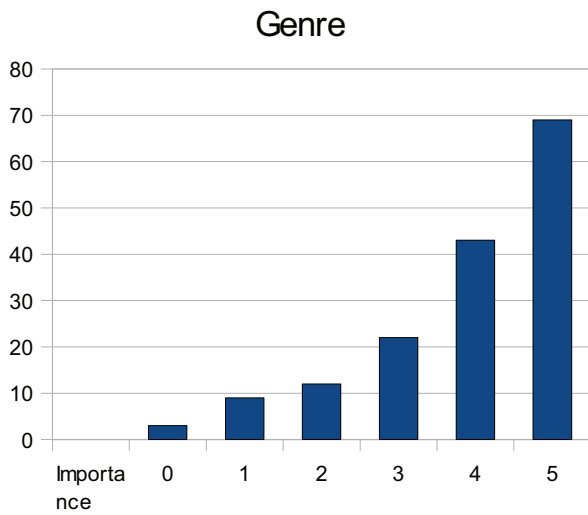
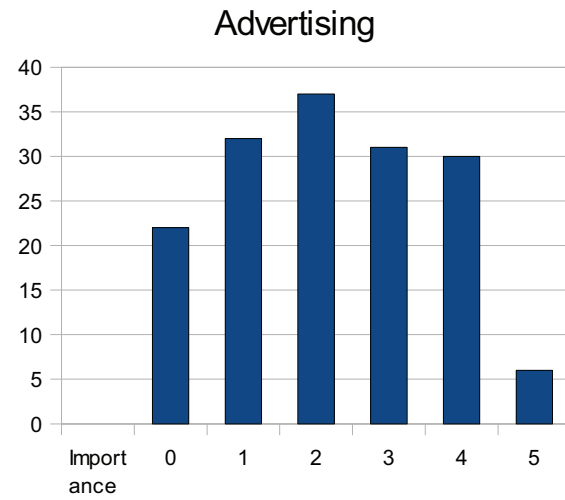
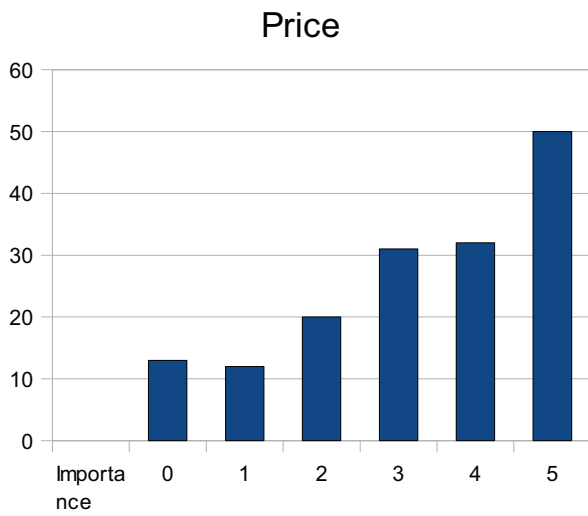
Demo Played

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
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1	14	1	2	1	16
2	21	2	9	2	30
3	25	3	10	3	35
4	26	4	13	4	39
5	14	5	5	5	19
					0

Possibility to Buy from the Internet

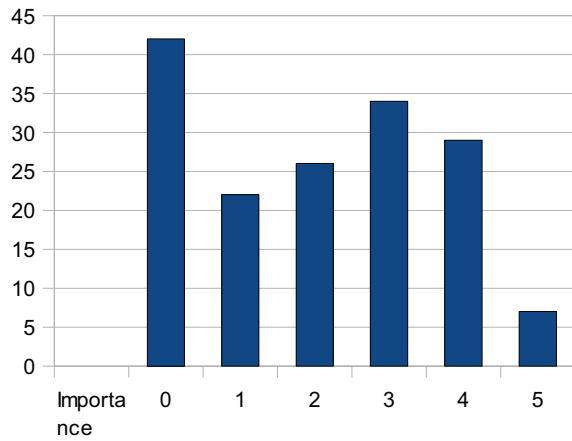
<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	65	0	26	0	91
1	18	1	14	1	32
2	11	2	4	2	15
3	8	3	3	3	11
4	4	4	4	4	8
5	1	5	0	5	1

Taulukko1

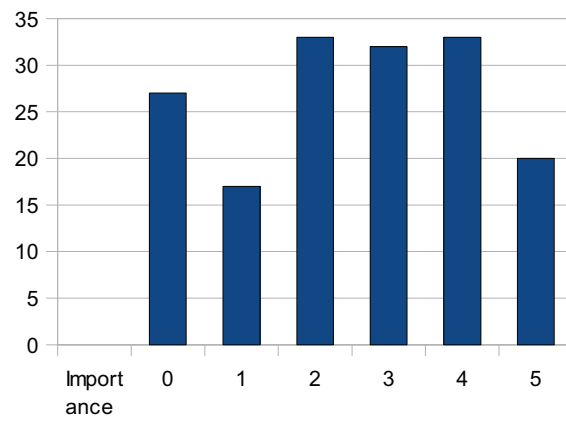


Taulukko1

Forum posts

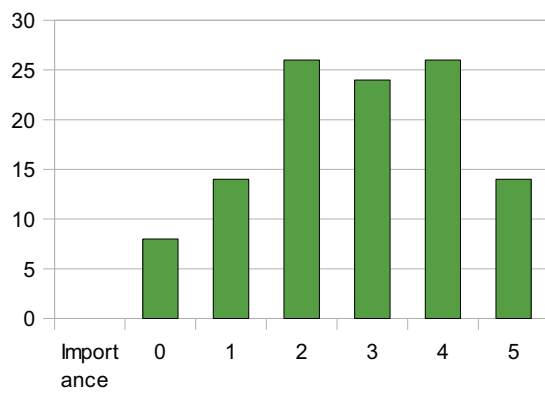


Graphics



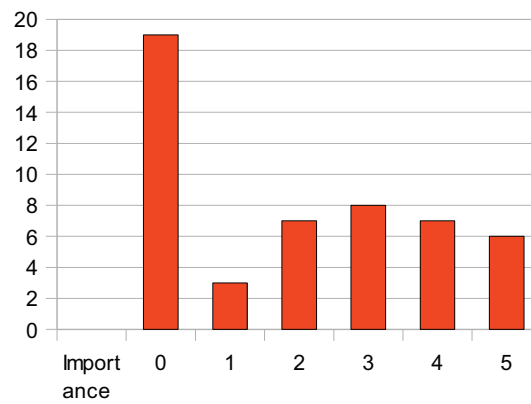
Graphics – Men

Graphics

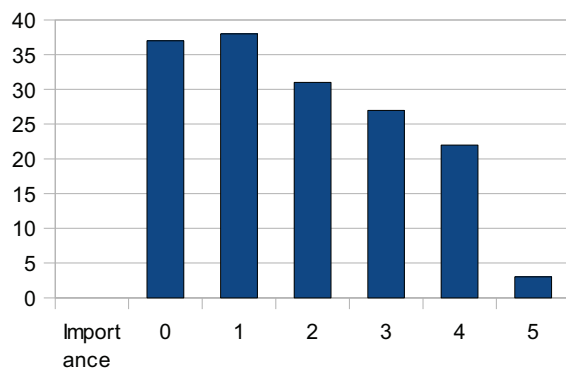


Graphics – Women

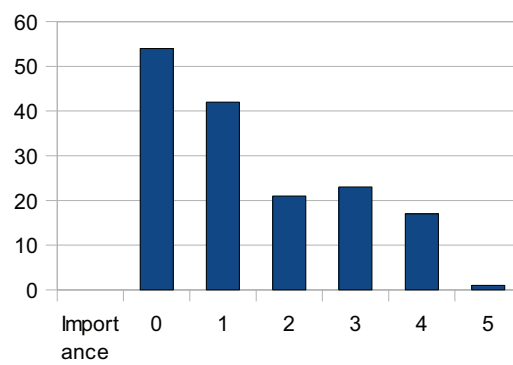
Graphics



Developer

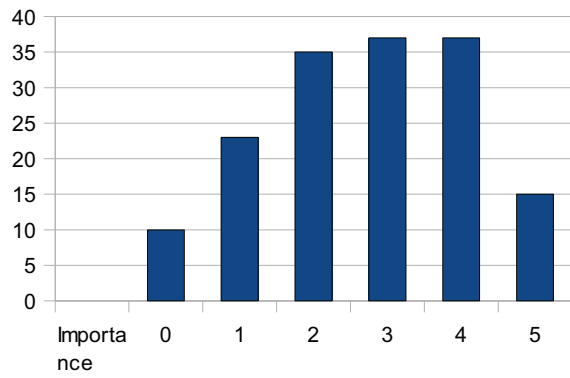


Publisher

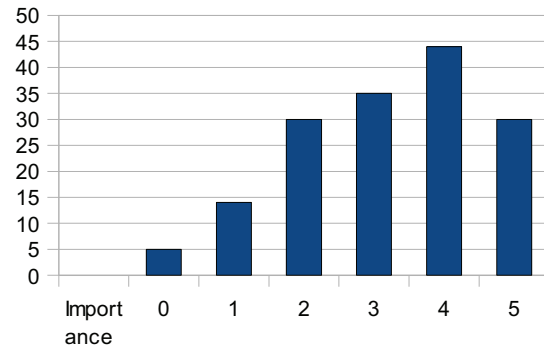


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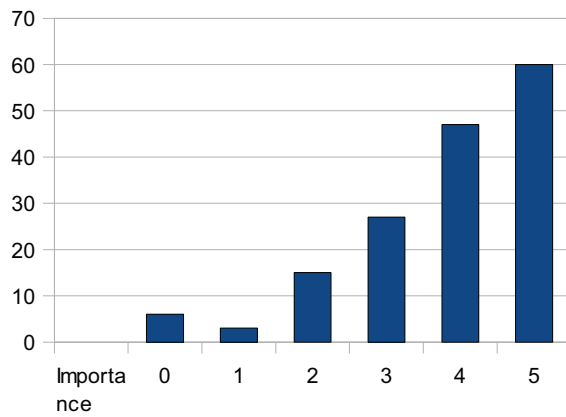
Popularity of previous releases



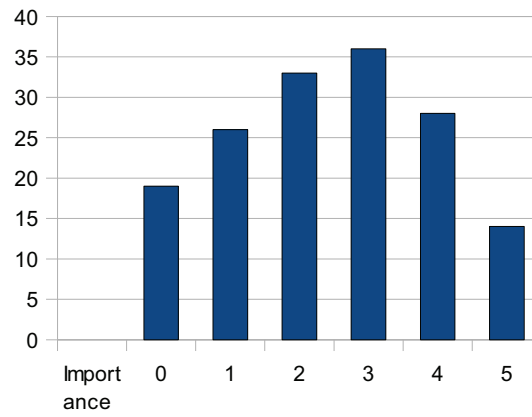
Replayability



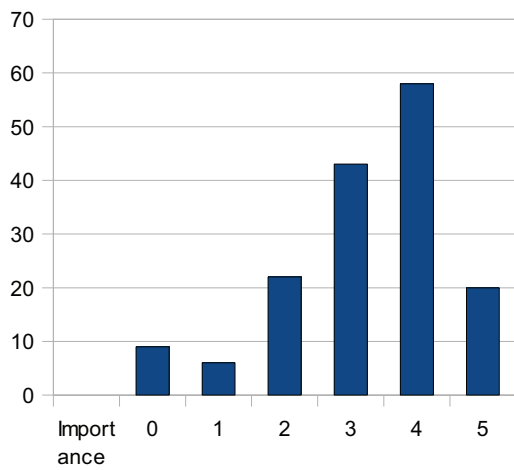
Experience from previous releases



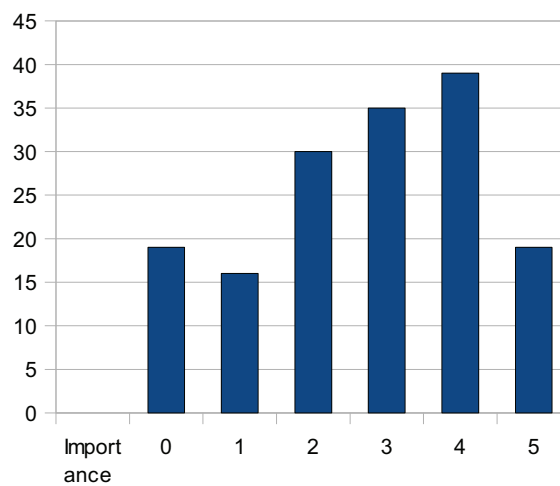
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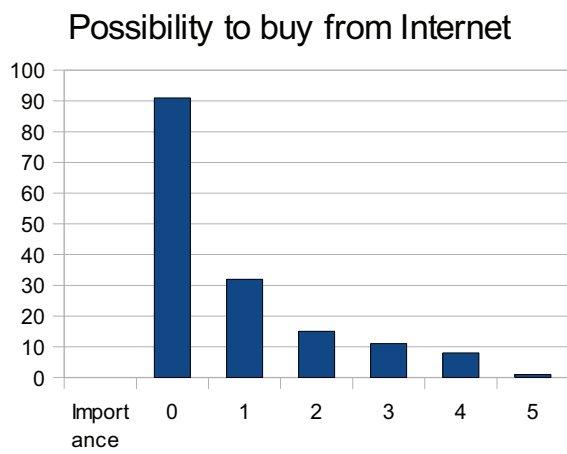
Friend's recommendation



Demo played



Taulukko 1



PC-player survey results

Men		Women		Sum	
Price					
<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	11	0	5	0	16
1	16	1	5	1	21
2	18	2	1	2	19
3	19	3	4	3	23
4	24	4	4	4	28
5	23	5	8	5	31
Advertising					
<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	18	0	8	0	26
1	27	1	1	1	28
2	27	2	9	2	36
3	27	3	7	3	34
4	8	4	1	4	9
5	4	5	1	5	5
Genre					
<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	2	0	0	0	2
1	3	1	1	1	4
2	4	2	1	2	5
3	11	3	1	3	12
4	37	4	6	4	43
5	56	5	16	5	72
Theme					
<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	8	0	1	0	9
1	13	1	2	1	15
2	9	2	3	2	12
3	24	3	6	3	30
4	30	4	6	4	36
5	28	5	7	5	35

Taulukko 1

Rating / Violence

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	68	0	5	0	73
1	21	1	6	1	27
2	6	2	5	2	11
3	10	3	0	3	10
4	8	4	1	4	9
5	6	5	2	5	8

Reviews

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	2	0	1	0	3
1	10	1	8	1	18
2	18	2	7	2	25
3	30	3	5	3	35
4	36	4	2	4	38
5	18	5	1	5	19

Forum Posts

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	4	0	2	0	6
1	15	1	10	1	25
2	20	2	2	2	22
3	28	3	6	3	34
4	30	4	2	4	32
5	11	5	0	5	11

Graphics

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	6	0	2	0	8
1	17	1	4	1	21
2	24	2	1	2	25
3	30	3	7	3	37
4	24	4	8	4	32
5	10	5	5	5	15

Developer

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	7	0	1	0	8
1	17	1	4	1	21
2	24	2	1	2	25
3	30	3	7	3	37
4	24	4	8	4	32
5	10	5	5	5	15

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Publisher

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	35	0	10	0	45
1	31	1	6	1	37
2	25	2	3	2	28
3	16	3	3	3	19
4	7	4	0	4	7
5	2	5	0	5	2

Popularity of Previous Releases

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	4	0	5	0	9
1	8	1	7	1	15
2	24	2	4	2	28
3	34	3	7	3	41
4	24	4	4	4	28
5	10	5	1	5	11

Replayability

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	2	0	1	0	3
1	14	1	5	1	19
2	19	2	3	2	22
3	27	3	3	3	30
4	28	4	6	4	34
5	22	5	8	5	30

Experiences from Previous Releases

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	0	0	0	0	0
1	2	1	1	1	3
2	6	2	3	2	9
3	20	3	2	3	22
4	36	4	7	4	43
5	51	5	12	5	63

Material Posted to Internet (Screenshots etc.)

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	3	0	1	0	4
1	19	1	8	1	27
2	19	2	4	2	23
3	31	3	6	3	37
4	29	4	3	4	32
5	15	5	0	5	15

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Friend's recommendations

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	4	0	1	0	5
1	10	1	6	1	16
2	14	2	3	2	17
3	28	3	3	3	31
4	42	4	11	4	53
5	16	5	0	5	16

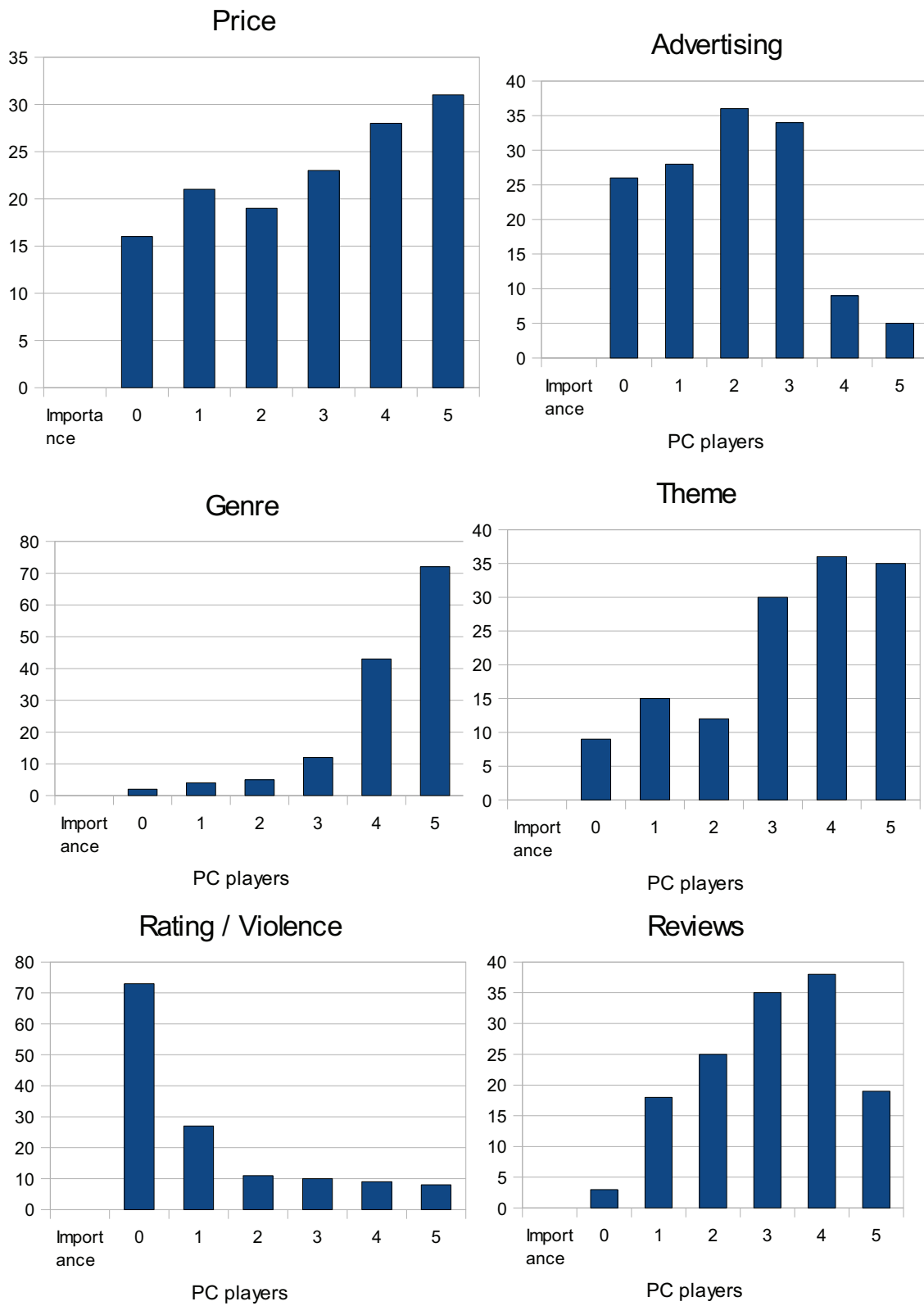
Demo Played

<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	7	0	3	0	10
1	10	1	2	1	12
2	29	2	5	2	34
3	16	3	7	3	23
4	26	4	4	4	30
5	18	5	5	5	23

Possibility to buy from the Internet

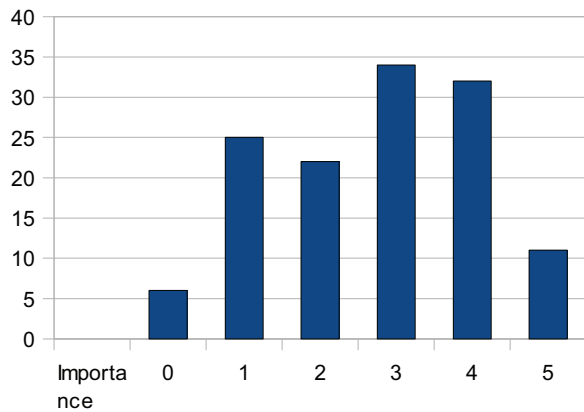
<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Amount</i>
0	51	0	7	0	58
1	15	1	4	1	19
2	15	2	4	2	19
3	19	3	2	3	21
4	9	4	5	4	14
5	5	5	2	5	7

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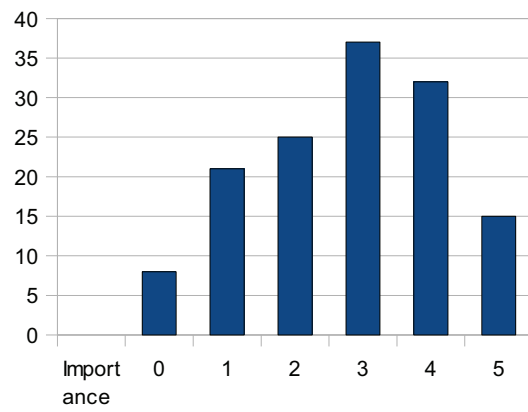
Taulukko 1

Forum posts



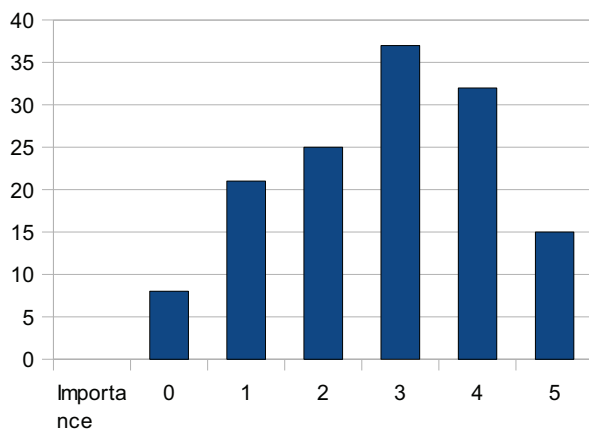
PC players

Graphics



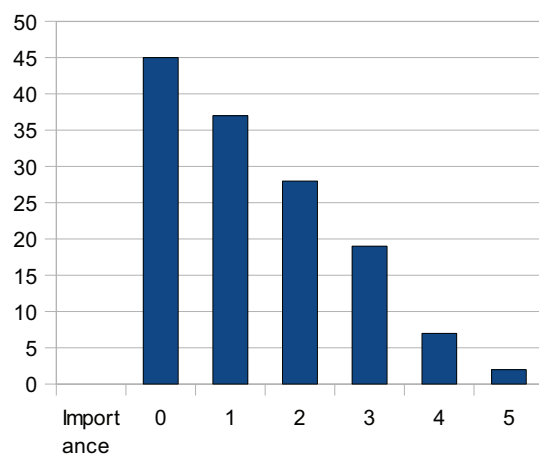
PC players

Developer



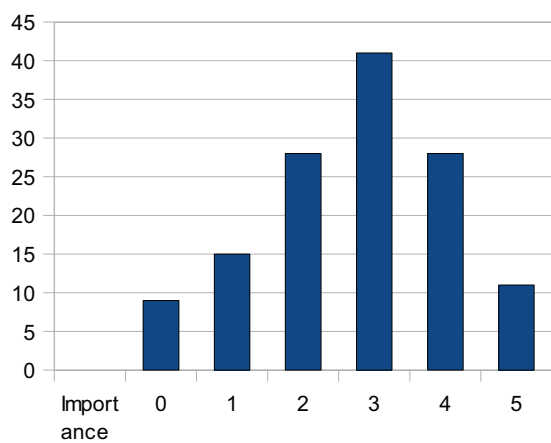
PC players

Publisher



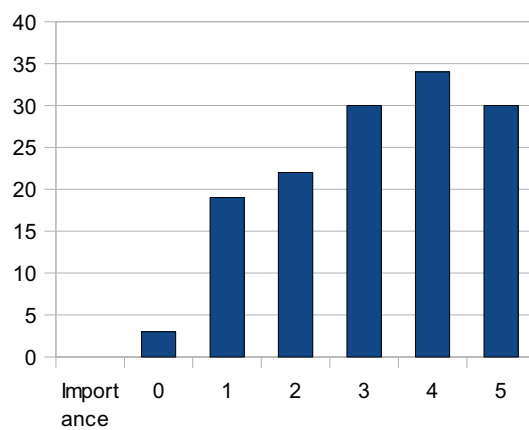
PC players

Popularity of previous releases



PC players

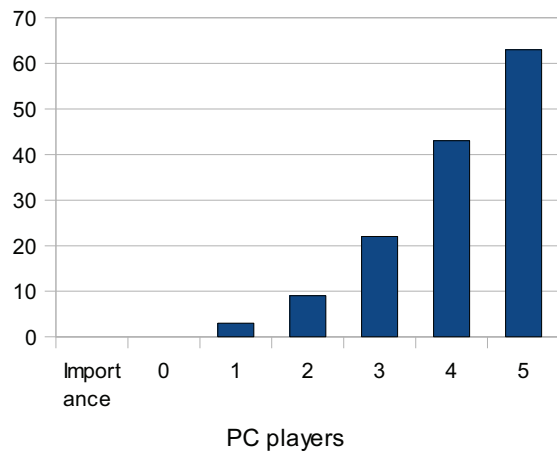
Replayability



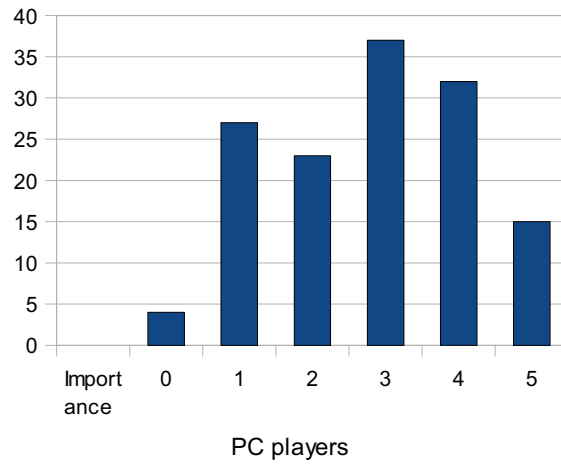
PC players

Taulukko 1

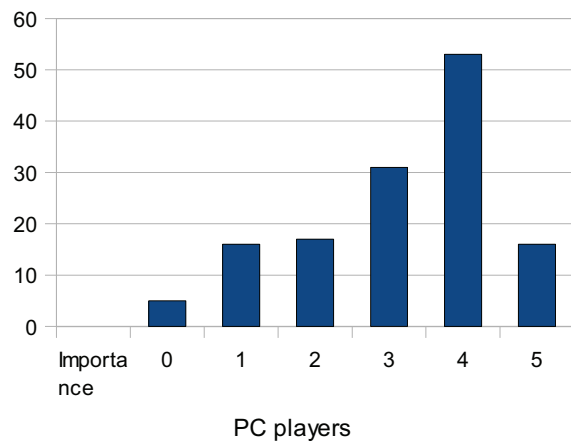
Experience from previous releases



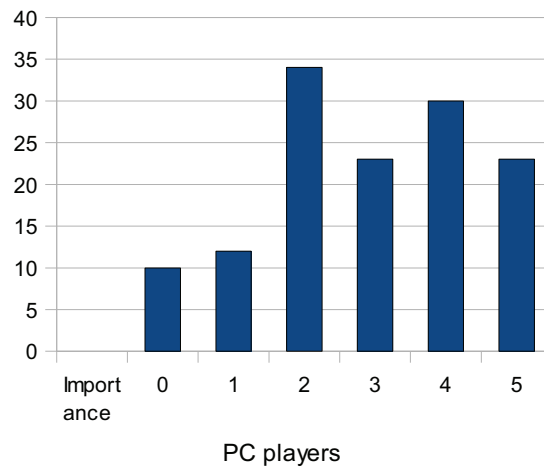
Material posted to Internet



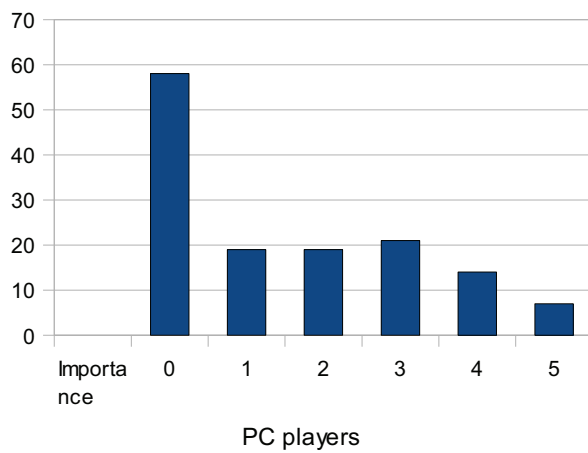
Friend's recommendation



Demo played



Possibility to buy from Internet



Taulukko 1