

Casual Game Design Values

Annakaisa Kultima
University of Tampere
Kanslerinrinne 1
33014 University of Tampere
+358 50 443 7258
annakaisa.kultima@uta.fi

ABSTRACT

In this article, I examine the phenomenon of casual games and the underlying transformation of digital play which the rise of this particular segment of the games industry is exposing. I argue that instead of a genuinely new phenomenon, we are facing a change that can be more accurately characterized as “the normalization of digital play”. The expansion of the player basis as well as the instrumental and functional approaches to games concurs with the transformations of other digital environments. As digital environments have become more accessible to large populations and are increasingly part of everyday lives, the ways and means of using them are becoming multifaceted and part of wider experiences. In order to respond to the changes, I propose a framework of casual games design values. Transformation in the games cultures requires transformation in design approaches.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.8.0 [Personal Computing]: General – Games.

General Terms

Design, Human Factors, Theory.

Keywords

Game design, casual games, design values, play culture transformation, web-downloadables, analysis, framework.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the first versions of the famous *Pong* in the 1970's, video games have developed into a multi-billion dollar industry in over three decades. Within this time frame, the industry has experienced several different transformations and innovations [1], including the latest breakthrough of mimetic interfaces with sales of around 45 million Nintendo Wii consoles [5] and massive multiplayer games, such as *World of Warcraft* and *Eve Online* with more than 11.3 million monthly subscribers combined [2,6]. Within over thirty years digital games cultures have grown from adolescent male-oriented entertainment into diverse experiences and playful activities serving different functions. In recent years the average age of players has been constantly rising [16]. At the

Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. To copy otherwise, or republish, to post on servers or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee.

MindTrek 2009, September 30th-October 2nd 2009, Tampere, FINLAND.
Copyright 2009 ACM 978-1-60558-633-5/09/09...\$10.00.

same time games are on their way to attracting similarly heterogeneous audiences as TV shows and movies.

We are used to examine games through the eyes of enthusiastic gamers and game fans. Some of the premises may lie in our implicit beliefs acquired through our own game experiences. A wider understanding of game cultures requires an understanding of the context of the experiences and the complex dynamics between design and user throughout the whole experience cycle. Games can bring about different experiences and users may choose different games for completely different reasons. Even though the variety of design options is endless, the direction of the design should embody somewhat coherent design values.

2. TRANSFORMATIONS OF DIGITAL PLAY

Some recent trends include interesting transformations within game cultures. Casual games are among the most discussed current phenomena. As one of the fastest growing branches of industry, they are increasing their market by 20% a year [3]. Concurrently games are developed for the mass market with varying business models and ever wider perspectives on the experience itself. Different kinds of players are supplied with different products and options for diverse activities around the games. Game environments are blending with other environments and social activities and thus becoming normal parts of everyday life [11].

It has become increasingly easy to pop in and out of games. At the same time games are delivered directly to the user's home computer or played without installations in the browser. Games can be small elements among other social activities, and these activities increasingly take place in virtual environments. As other digital phenomena become more accessible, games are accordingly becoming more available for larger target groups.

3. CASUAL GAMES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF DESIGN VALUES

Casual games constitute a rapidly growing industry. In 2006, it was estimated that in two years, the market would exceed \$2 billion in the USA alone [14]. The Casual Games Association 2007 market report published two years later in fall 2008 states that casual games are in fact a \$2.25 billion year industry and that the market is growing at a rate of 20% a year. The numbers of users are impressive and the demographical distribution is somewhat eye opening: over 200 million people play casual games each month over the Internet. 48.3% of these are men and 51.7% of women [3]. It is furthermore estimated that by 2012,

casual gaming on all platforms will account for over 46% of the industry's total sales [13].

The high numbers and the rapid evolution of the industry indicate an important phenomenon that should also evoke increasing academic interest. However, the interpretation and evaluation of casual games research and statistics is complicated since the very notion of casual games is far from unambiguous. Many, if not all of the market surveys refer to only a subcategory of casual games, namely web-downloadables [7], and such titles as those delivered by popular online game services, such as Big Fish Games or Pogo.com. Depending on the point of view, casual games and its derivate terms can acquire essentially different meanings and hence have an influence on which games or players are deemed 'casual'.

In an earlier paper entitled "Casual Games Discussion" we examined the different issues around the casual games phenomenon and developed different meaning categories in connection with 'casual' (see Figure 1). 'Casual' was attached varyingly to the games themselves in the form of their design solutions, to the players and their activities according to their demographic nature, game choices, behavioral patterns or even attitudes. The confusing and inconsistent use of the terms and definitions seemed to lead to some biased reasoning. It was particularly difficult to distinguish between the meanings of casual game players and casual players as the data on the former was easily interpreted to directly subsume information on the latter. However, casual game design does not make the playing style or attitudes of a player 'casual': playing a casual game does not necessarily lead to casual play. In this sense, by examining a group of players playing a game with a casual game design will not necessarily yield any information about the casual players [8]. Although the terms are interrelated, the relations are not always symmetrical and hence there is a need to make a distinction in the meanings.

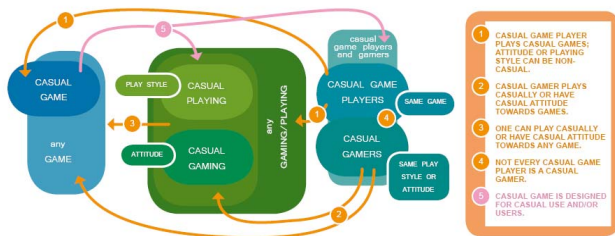


Figure 1. Relations of the meanings of casual in "casual games discussions"

We also found that the discussion around the casual games dealt with numerous other issues and was not confined to observations of gameplay interaction. One of the pervading topics of the discussion was the issue of accessibility within the game experience. It was considered important from the casual point of view that the game product is physically and mentally reachable: easy to purchase and fast to adopt [8].

3.1 New User Groups and Play Expectations

The casual games phenomenon is indicative of certain intriguing transformations in digital games cultures. There appears to be a growing need to talk about new player groups and about the

different and varying ways in which they use, enjoy and think about games. One can easily accept a relatively narrow picture of the functions and pleasures associated with digital games, such as the enjoyment of highly immersive and challenging game experiences. The casual games phenomenon can broaden the spectrum of game experiences beyond these clichés. The phenomenon shows how games can also be secondary activities and serve as instruments for different agendas, blended into the everyday lives of different people in various ways. In short, the transformation can be divided into two phenomena:

1. Entry of new and heterogeneous user groups. Within the discussion of casual games, it is often pointed out that females, especially those over 30 years, enjoy playing games at casual games sites. The division between the sexes is more uniform than in most digital games, even to the point that paying customers are predominantly females [3]. However, we are not faced with a rise of "women's games" [4] but rather of games with heterogeneous groups of players with different backgrounds, skills, and interests. Players may have different reasons for turning to casual games, which may include lack of game literacy, skills, time, money, and interest.

2. Games as secondary activity and instrumental uses of games. Games are usually treated as a highly immersive and engaging activity. Often when compared to such activities as watching television, playing games is regarded as highly active. In general, there is no particular reason why digital games should always play such of a role. Sometimes games can provide a light interaction loop for secondary activity, such as what might happen in the gameplay of *Microsoft's Solitaire*. While playing the popular digitalized version of the solitaire card game, players may be actively processing other issues, such as daily social problems, work tasks, tomorrow's dinner plans, future projects or anything whatsoever as the gameplay does not require rapt attention. The design of *Microsoft's Solitaire* supports social and temporal pervasiveness. The play session may be easily suspended if a phonecall is received, the laundry is ready, the boss is entering the room, or whatever kind of distraction the player may encounter.

Games become secondary activities as the player is doing something else in parallel: thinking, eating, watching TV, talking on the phone, waiting for something and so on. The parallel activity is often prioritized; while the player may choose games that do not require much attention and/or use of resources. On the other hand, secondary play may also mean that the gameplay is motivated from outside the game itself. For example, one may play games solely for their social functions or because of the mental exercise that they provide. The execution of the game story and fiction or other qualities may then become secondary and the outcome of the experience and the utility of the game session more important. One may be interested in using games for learning, losing weight, changing the mindset or perhaps even falling asleep. This may also provide an excuse for engaging in a playful activity, as otherwise useless activity can be explained as connected to something vital.

The change in player groups and play habits can be seen to transform the field of digital games by broadening the consumer base and play environments. However, it can be argued that in general there is nothing strikingly new or surprising in this phenomenon. Games have been used for different functions

throughout their history. If we take a look at games outside the digital world they have always been played by a variety of different people. Games, such as different outdoor sports games, children's games, tabletop games and card games are such a common part of our culture that we may not even recognize their similarity to their video games and computer games counterparts.

The transformation of digital play, understood as an enlargement of player groups and play habits, goes along with the other transformations in digital environments. Digital and physical worlds are increasingly merging and many areas of everyday life, if not all, are increasingly digitalized. Thus, I argue that the casual games phenomenon as a transformation of digital play is merely a "normalization of digital games cultures".

3.2 Changing Design Approaches

The relation between design and play behavior is not rigid in nature. For example, Salen & Zimmerman (2003) suggest that game design is in fact second order design. This means that a game designer can only indirectly design the players' experience by directly designing the rules of the game [15]. Placing certain elements in the game system does not always have the same effect. Design can support different play activities, but it is much more difficult to trigger exact reactions or restrict certain play patterns. In general design has no logical outcome and therefore no sequence of operations will guarantee a result [9].

Lawson (2006) has argued that design solutions involve value judgments and the nature of the process is prescriptive rather than descriptive. Designers aim to deal with questions of what might be, could be and should be instead of what is and why this is so [9]. In this sense, to design is to adopt an approach based on certain value assumptions and principles.

There are many different ways of supporting changes related to casual games. Some of the casual game design solutions may be aimed at solving only one part of the transformation, some may try to work with a larger area and there may be several design solutions for one design problem. Hence there is more than one road to "casual game design" and room for different kinds of casual games. What the solutions may have in common is the shift in the design approach. As some of our current design approaches may be founded on old assumptions about gamers and their play expectations, we should pay attention to the following issues:

1. Different affordances and user thresholds and
2. The significance of the context

Catering to wider and heterogeneous user groups requires attention to different affordances and user thresholds of play environments. As we are dealing with larger player domains the motives and driving forces, skill levels and game literacy, game equipment, resources, and even worldviews and beliefs may differ radically among the players. What we provide and enable for the players should be rethought, likewise the requirements of the play should be re-evaluated. Users make choices whether they play at all, how much they invest in games in general, on what they are willing to spend their time and what is necessary or paramount in their lives. There may be obstacles that they are not willing to overcome, which may include buying new equipment, using their time for learning something new, waiting for the product to be shipped, or even adjusting the environment. Therefore lowering

the thresholds of use may be critical in retaining the consumer's interest.

But this is not enough; some of the obstacles may be due to the lack of affordances. The play environment may not afford anything interesting, meaningful or useful for the player or what is provided does not match the norms, needs and life situations of the users and thus appears irrelevant to them. In this case the values of the design should be rethought.

Secondary nature of play increases the significance of the context. In designing casual products, there is a need to look beyond the gameplay and design games as part of a wider experience to support and serve the players in different stages of the experience. It is not enough to just put games "out there" with easy gameplay, instrumental play functions, mundane themes and universal appeal. The adoption, preparations, use and management of game experiences should be supported in phase. The secondary nature of games makes playing even more susceptible to changing situations [7]. It may not be relevant to tailor games to suit a specific target group, but to suit the possibility of changing situations and make it possible to blend games with the different contextual factors in various ways. To design casual game experiences is to design experiences in a wider experiential context.

In practice, a large number of different design solutions can be found in the midst of different opinions over casual games. They may not provide any definite definitions or recipes for archetypal products or services. It is, however, no accident that casual games are touted as games with short play sessions, emphasizing certain genres, providing positive and "happy" game experiences, promoting mental exercise and other advantages [10, 12], offering opportunities for inexpensive game experiences with safe themes and topics, generally familiar user interfaces, low immersion levels and so on. The changes in game cultures are already catered for with various different solutions.

3.3 Casual Game Design Values

As design is based on principles and certain approaches, instead of exact engineering of experiences, we are talking about value-based thinking. The changes in games cultures may force us to reconsider what is regarded as "good" in games. Changing the design approach leads to a change in our design values¹.

Design values can be made more explicit by looking at the various existing design solutions. Exposition of the design values can help to understand the real width and essence of the casual games phenomenon and to perceive opportunities for further design solutions and innovations. Next I present the categories of values that I have abstracted from various discussed design solutions.

Acceptability of the contents of a game is important in the process of selecting game products, *accessibility* in the enabling phase while *simplicity* and *flexibility* of design become relevant in gameplay and replay situations. Casual game design targets, for example, selected themes and mechanics that appeal to a wider population and are accepted by the norms, emphasize

¹ This notion of values should not be confused with moral values or value-sensitive design.

accessibility issues on the cognitive and physical levels, simplify the game elements and concentrate on the flexibility of the user experience. In following these values of design, the secondary nature of playing games and the possible differences among the players can be catered for.

3.3.1 Acceptability

Refining the design according to acceptability makes games suitable for larger groups. Digital games have been suffering from the image of an adolescent, sometimes even deviant form of entertainment. Media emphasis on games with excessive violence, sexually explicit language, abuse of substances and destructive activities may drive certain people away from games in general. Other popular game topics, such as zombies and sci-fi worlds may also be uncongenial or irrelevant for some players. Casual games provide spaces with safe and familiar topics, emphasizing positive mechanics, such as nurturing, building, collecting and collaboration instead of killing, destruction or, for example, the survival of the fittest. Titles with violence and explicit language or sexually biased depictions do not fit to the world views or the norms of large groups of people. Furthermore, providing immediate secondary utility for a game, such as mental exercise, learning or social interaction may also enhance the general acceptability of the design and thus lower the threshold to adoption. The price of the product is also potentially relevant: if one spends only a small amount of money, or no money at all, the activity is less binding.

It is notable that acceptability, like many other design values, is relative in nature. Norms differ across social environments and cultures. Moreover, what is regarded as appealing may vary between societies. Thus what is casual and harmless to one may be deviant to others. There is no definite selection of casual themes and mechanics in this sense. Casual game design becomes a selective set of design solutions.

As digital games have become consumer products intended for wider audiences, the importance of the acceptability of the content has already been demonstrated. ESRB² and PEGI³ rating systems categorize games according to their content and the suitability in the form of age recommendations. However, the design principles of acceptability should not cover only the screening of the content but also providing such content that is widely accepted as positive activities or subjects.

Design principles and design solutions are for example:

- Game content matches the norms of the players' social context
- Game avoids offensive topics: The content is free from violence, sexuality, explicit language, religious topics and substance abuse.
- Game uses abstract topics and game mechanics such as puzzles.
- Game uses already accepted and established game designs outside the digital realm, such as solitaire, chess, football etc.

- Games are based thematically on topics with a universal appeal such as gardening, travelling, nature, cooking and other activities that a large population may already have as a common interest.
- Game endorses positive emotions and values
- Game uses mechanics, such as building, collecting, nurturing, exploration and collaboration instead of destruction, killing, fighting or survival.
- Investments of the game will not engage the player excessively and/or will provide a useful function outside the game
- Reduced prices or other business models will lower the financial investments and engagement
- Games include instrumental functions, such as learning, mental exercise, measuring, losing weight, social interaction and physical prizes.

3.3.2 Accessibility

Enhancing the accessibility of the games makes playing possible for people with varying limitations. The differences in the groups of potential players may include variation between skills and knowledge levels, resources such as time, money and attention and other relevant factors. This forces us to look at the adoption phase of the games and promotes lowered thresholds according to the lowest possible nominators. If some players can be expected to lack understanding of common game literacy⁴, all the basic elements should be explained or made as obvious as possible to keep the player interested.

The accessibility of a game is not limited to the cognitive aspects of the adoption of a game product, but also includes the availability and access of a game product in physical senses.

Some of the equivalent design principles and design solutions of accessibility are:

- Game is mentally or cognitively easily accessible to access. For example, the topic is familiar from another context, such as movies or other media or the mechanics imitate rules from games outside the digital world.
- Concise information is provided in the adoption phase, such as descriptive game title or pictures of the gameplay.
- The design is simplified: players are not required to learn the rules before they start to play.
- Game is physically or materially easy to access. For example, the game is digitally distributed, sold in supermarkets, or preinstalled in a device used for another purpose.
- Bringing games to the environments that players use otherwise, for example, games in social media or movie theaters.

² <http://www.esrb.org/>

³ <http://www.pegi.info/>

⁴ Gamers' shared understanding of game worlds may include, for example, the convention of smashing boxes in order to find relevant aids in the game.

- Low price and micropayments: the game is designed so that at least some parts of the experience are accessible with low investments.
- Content of the game suits the norms of the players' social context.

Some of the limitations are set by the players themselves. No matter how fine the design is, the player may be prepared to pay only a certain amount of money for the experience, to use only a particular time slot, to prefer not to learn anything new and so on. The design of the game service and the game should aim at lowering the access thresholds by easing cognitive and physical requirements.

3.3.3 Simplicity

Simplifying the design enables lighter play experiences. Minimal elements and user interfaces make it easier to get into the game as fast as possible but also maintain the lower cognitive exertion. If the game has more complex features, these can be gradually introduced and some of the activities can be automated or combined with other actions. Particularly important design principles concern the simplification and minimization of the design elements.

Equivalent design principle and design solutions of simplicity are for example:

- Player's cognitive load is alleviated by simplifying the design. For example, the game has stripped-down the number of the game elements and the rules.
- Functions are combined into one activity, for example in one-button interfaces.
- Some of the activities in the game are automated, such as saving

3.3.4 Accessibility

Flexibility in game design enables changing situations. As playing a game can be considered to be a secondary activity, game design needs to be increasingly flexible. Play may happen in parallel with other activities, such as traveling, eating, housework, incoming phonecalls and so on.

To support different players, their play expectations, certain limitations and priorities, the design principles should seek solutions for simple yet flexible design. Such principles and solutions are for example:

- The game supports spatial, temporal and social pervasiveness. For example the player can continue the game on another device or surroundings, pop in and out of the game spontaneously and switch players on the fly.
- Flexible intensity level. For example, allowing a player to direct her/his attention elsewhere at any given time, such as in turn-based games.
- The game can be used for (many) different functions. For instance there are options for user-created content: the player can adjust the functions of the game.
- Options for instrumental functions, for example, sports games or money games.
- The game is error-forgiving: a player can make mistakes without severe punishment and rather than

having to strive for a perfect performance, she/he can decide himself what mistakes are decisive.

4. ANALYSIS OF EXISTING GAME PHENOMENA

Additionally to the content analysis that we made for the previous paper [8], I have played and browsed through a vast number of different casual games between the years 2006 and 2009. The list of games includes more than 20 purchased downloadable games from Big Fish Games⁵ and PlayFirst⁶; over 80 60-minute trials; several Nintendo Wii titles, including *Wii Sports* and *Wii Fit*; free online indie games such as games from Orisinal⁷ and Eyezmaze⁸ and small games on Kongregate and Miniclip; Xbox 360 Live Arcade games; Facebook games such as *Friends for Sale*, *Zombies*, *Packrat* and *TowerBloxx*; over 40 mobile games on Nokia E70 and about 20 iPhone games as well as many games on other portable and handheld devices, such as Sony PSP and Nintendo DS games. Last but not least some hours were devoted to *Microsoft's Minesweeper* and *Spider Solitaire*. The list is long and almost every single title has something to do with the casual realm.

In general, almost any simple, small or easy game can be categorized as "casual". The most recognizable casual games developer/distributors, such as Popcap Games (with successful puzzle title *Bejeweled*), Playfirst (with popular light strategy game *Diner Dash*) and Big Fish Games (with hidden picture game *Mystery Case Files*) provide downloadable games with 60-minute demos or online versions for trial. This format of casual games is better known as web-downloadables. Even though it can be considered to be one of the dominant formats, various other established forms of casual game entertainment exist. For example, the IGDA Casual Games White Paper 2006 also acknowledges web and community-based games, skill-gaming and advergaming as part of the casual game space. They also list puzzles and card games among most common casual genres. Such popular titles as *Tetris*, *Microsoft's Solitaire* and *Nokia's Snake* are often referred to as examples of casual games. These three games can be deemed to be casual because of their simplicity and abstractness. The two latter games could also be counted as casual space due to their distribution model. Both *Solitaire* and *Snake* are preinstalled games and thus very easily available. The reasons for tagging something as a casual game vary. Even the interface may be one of the designators. For example, games utilizing mimetic interfaces, such as games on Nintendo's Wii are discussed as a significant part of casual games space [7].

The following Table 1 shows that the acknowledged casual games phenomena are "casual" in different ways. These are partial solutions to the so-called "casual revolution" [7] in digital play cultures and manifest different casual games design solutions.

⁵ <http://www.bigfishgames.com>

⁶ <http://www.playfirst.com/>

⁷ <http://www.ferryhalim.com/orisinal/>

⁸ <http://www.eyezmaze.com/>

Table 1. Casual games phenomena.

Casual game phenomenon	Casual game design value(s)	Explanation	Example games or services
Web-downloadables	Accessibility Simplicity, Acceptability	Digital distribution, simple game designs, “mundane” themes, standardized user interfaces, fast and convenient download	Diner Dash, Bejeweled, Mystery Case Files; Big Fish Games, PlayFirst, PopCap Games
Preinstalled games, bundled games	Accessibility	Very low entry for play, as no payment or installation is needed before playing	Microsoft's Solitaire and Minesweeper, Nokia's Snake
Web-based games, browser games	Accessibility, Simplicity	No need for installation, usually free gameplay	Kongregate, Pogo.com
Minigames	Flexibility, Simplicity, Acceptability	Small games can be played in short play sessions, and they usually come with simplified design. Playing minigames does not label the player as gamer	MiniClip, Addicting Games
Mobile games	Flexibility, Accessibility, Acceptability, Simplicity	Mobile games can be played in many surroundings and use device that is mainly purchased for other purposes. Games are usually simple by the design restrictions and games are purchased mainly via the device itself.	Nokia's Snake; N-Gage, iPhone App Store
Advergames	Accessibility, Acceptability	Advergames are delivered there, where the consumer is as byproducts or webgames and they do not require any payment. Do not label player as gamer.	Happiness Factory (Coca-Cola), Pepsi Music Challenge (Pepsi), Taco Fu (Taco Bells)
Skill-gaming	Flexibility, (Acceptability), Simplicity	Game provides utility, usually with simple design. Not always acceptable because of the possible gambling factor.	King.com
Puzzles	Acceptability, Simplicity	Abstract themes are not potentially violating norms, usually with simple design	Tetris, Bejeweled
Card games	Acceptability, Accessibility	Safe and familiar content. Easy to adopt.	Microsoft's Solitaire, Online Poker
Games with mimetic interface	Accessibility	Familiar user interface helps non-gamers to enter into the game experience without needing to learn specific skills for playing digital games.	Wii Sports, Wii Play, Wii Fit, SingStars, Lips

Abstracting the casual game design solutions to the level of design values also helps us to expose the “casual nature” of other digital game designs. Now we can discuss the phenomena which are not normally seen to be part of the casual games space, connected to this larger picture. Table 2 presents an analysis of some related game phenomena in the light of my design value

framework. The selected⁹ phenomena and their corresponding casual features are as follows:

⁹ The list is obviously not exhaustive and merely exemplifies the adaptation of my design value framework.

Table 2. Game phenomena reflecting casual values.

Game phenomenon	Casual value(s)	Explanation
Cheap games / used games	Accessibility, Acceptability	Reduced price will lower the threshold of adoption and make the investment more acceptable
Old games	Accessibility	Familiar games already played provide light and inexpensive game experiences
Indie games	Accessibility, Flexibility	Usually cheaper price level, possibilities for games with different kinds of play values
Non-violent games	Acceptability	Removed potentially deviant contents makes the game experience more comfortable for some players
Serious games	Acceptability, Flexibility	Utility of a game provides lowered threshold of adoption and extra motivation for play
Simulations	Acceptability, Flexibility	Simulation game can be used as a tool
Social (media) games	Acceptability, Flexibility, (Accessibility)	Social interaction will provide extra motive for play and is less stigmatizing and generally supports social pervasiveness.. Games on social media platforms, such as Facebook games are played among other online activities.
Pervasive games, ARG's	Flexibility	Support for secondary use, possible physical activities or other instrumental functions
Sand-box games, toys	Flexibility	User defines his/her own play objectives
Family games	Acceptability, Flexibility	The content is screened and can be played with
Games as services, digital distribution	Accessibility	The threshold of purchase is lowered
Game sequels	Accessibility	Familiar content
Licensed games, tie-in games	Accessibility, Acceptability	Content is familiar outside the game world
Episodic games	Accessibility	Games are sequels to each other and are paid in smaller units, supports micropayments

4.1 Is Everything Casual?

Through this examination, it can be easily seen that casual games are a much wider entity than usually realized. Different manifestations and combinations of casual game design values can be further explored and innovated. Even though there may be some casual game design solutions in any game, this does not mean that every game is or should be casual. This emphasizes even further that certain properties of the game do not explain “casuality”.

Some design values, or specific design solutions, may be still better suited to provide hard-core and enthusiastic game experiences. The rich experiences with highly immersive and engaging games require time and dedication. In certain types of games we can explore deviant, unpleasant or controversial topics such as violence, horror, war, sexuality, politically sensitive issues, absurdity or such “other-worldly” issues as fantasy or science fiction, forming thought experiments to understand human culture.

Casual games design values and their possible “hardcore” or “traditional” counterparts seem to form a valence in game design. Where casual games may use mundane and safe topics, hardcore game design may explore topics that are frightening and unknown. In order to create meaningful experiences, hardcore

games have utilized the notions of challenge and complexity, whereas casual games seem to favor simplicity and accessibility. Whether we use games as a secondary or as primary function poses different challenges for designers in the flexibility of the design. There is no need to compare the importance of these two different phenomena. Digital games as we know them in their present form, play a major role in the digital games market and cultures. They bring about experiences that we may never have without them. They continue to touch individuals, give us unique perspectives and help us to broaden our understanding of humanity. Casual games are functional in nature. For example, casual games can give us ways to interact with other people, help us balance our work tasks and problem solving, give us interactive tasks in boring situations and keep our minds alert and active.

Furthermore it is important to understand that gamers and users of games are not divided simplistically into casual or hardcore gamers. We do not judge game experiences by rigid criteria. We as players can appreciate different kinds of game experiences based on values that may conflict each other in a higher level. The space of game design is essentially value pluralistic.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As the digital world becomes part of the everyday lives of more and more people, the variety of functions that games fulfill and the thresholds of use for digital games also become more variable. The rise of casual game industries indicates a transformation in games cultures that embodies this very same development. The direction of the change is not surprising, perhaps even trivial. Such variation in the use of games in the physical world and the tradition of games already exists outside the digital world. In this sense, as I have argued above, the “casual revolution” can be thought of as a mere normalization of digital games cultures. This notion is descriptive rather than prescriptive. I do not wish to state whether or not the direction is desirable, but merely note the transformation on a larger scale.

However, the change in current game design values and approaches needs to take place if one wishes to support such a transformation. Casual games manifest values in design that game designers may not be used to. In three decades, we have already managed to build some pivotal premises for digital game design, even within its versatility. Such centralities are, for example, the notions of challenge, immersion, flow and meaningful actions as well as established themes, mechanics and other aspects of games in digital spaces. Why do games need to be highly challenging? Why do I need to devote my entire attention to the game and become immersed in its world? Why do I need to feel the flow of the game experience? Are science fiction, war and fantasy meaningful topics for everyone? What is really a good game?

As we may possess a vast tacit understanding of the values of hardcore game design and core game design, bringing about casual game experiences may be difficult without an explicit change in design approaches. In this article I presented four casual game design values: acceptability, accessibility, simplicity and flexibility. Existing casual game design solutions seems to follow these values and new solutions may be easier to develop with the help of this explication. The framework of casual game design values is designed to open up the perspective in game design in order to further innovate casual game products and services.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of Game Research Lab at the University of Tampere for valuable comments and input to this line of work. Special thanks to Jesper Juul, Mia Consalvo and Alex Thayer for reading and commenting this paper.

7. REFERENCES

- [1] Adams, E., (2007). 50 Greatest Game Design Innovations. Edge Online. Retrieved 8th January 2009 from <http://www.edge-online.com/features/50-greatest-game-design-innovations>
- [2] Callahan, J., (2008). “World of Warcraft surpasses 11 million subscribers” Retrieved 6th June 2009 from <http://news.bigdownload.com/2008/10/28/world-of-warcraft-surpasses-11-million-subscribers/>
- [3] Casual Games Association, (2008). Casual Games Market Report 2007. Retrieved December 2008 from <http://www.casualconnect.org/newscontent/11-2007/casualgamesmarketreport2007.html>
- [4] Hillis, S., (2007). Men also avid players of casual video games: study. *Reuters*. 29th October 2007. Retrieved 6th June 2009 from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/technologyNews/idUSN2654861820071029>
- [5] Hinkle, D., (2009). “Latest Nintendo financial report sees predictable, record growth.” Retrieved 6th June 2009 from <http://www.joystiq.com/2009/01/29/latest-nintendo-financial-report-sees-predictable-record-growth/>
- [6] Ivan, T., (2009). “Eve Online Surpasses 300,000 Subscribers” Retrieved 6th June from <http://www.edge-online.com/news/eve-online-surpasses-300000-subscribers>
- [7] Juul, J. (2009). *Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 2009. (In press).
- [8] Kuitinen, J., Kultima, A., Niemelä, J. & Paavilainen, J. (2007). Casual Games Discussion. Proceedings of the 2007 conference on Future Play, 2007. Digitally available at: portal.acm.org/http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1328202.1328221
- [9] Lawson, B., (2006). *How Designers Think. The design process demystified*. Fourth Edition. Architectural Press.
- [10] Maragos, N., (2006). Study Shows Casual Games May Improve Mental Acuity. *Gamasutra*. Retrieved January 2009 from http://www.gamasutra.com/php-bin/news_index.php?story=8636
- [11] Pargman, D., & Jacobsson, P., (2006): “The Magic is Gone: A Critical Examination of the Gaming Situation.” In *Gaming Realities. A Challenge for Digital Culture* (pp. 15-22). Athens, Fourmos Centre for the Digital Culture.
- [12] PR Newswire, (2008). “Casual' Video Games Bring Relief and Enjoyment to Children with ADHD” PR Newswire 2008. Retrieved 8th January 2009 from <http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS85199+16-Jul-2008+PRN20080716>
- [13] Research and Markets, (2008). “Casual Gaming - Games for Everyone”. 2008. Retrieved on December 2008 from http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/659480/casual_gaming_games_for_everyone
- [14] Robbins, B. & Wallace, M. (Eds.) (2006). *IGDA 2006 Casual Games White Paper*. Retrieved December 5th, 2008, from http://www.igda.org/casual/IGDA_CasualGames_Whitepaper_2006.pdf
- [15] Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E., (2003). *Rules of Play*. MIT Press
- [16] USA TODAY, (2004). Survey: Video gamers getting older, heading online. *USA Today*, 5th December 2004. Retrieved 6th June from: <http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2004-05-12-gamer-demographic>