

Report: The Sudden Popularity of the Battle Royale Genre

Battle royale games have risen in popularity in 2017, with titles such as PUBG and Fortnite – consisting of a massive player base as well as garnering a cult following, this report will cover the main aspects of the sudden surge in popularity of battle royale game and how it became so.

The games were completely derived from a Japanese film with a same title as the genre: Battle Royale. Released in 2000, the movie has solidified itself as cult classic with a major following. Based on Koushun Takami's novel of the same name, the film and book ultimately became the genre's defining moment within the gaming industry. In the early 2010s, a Minecraft (Mojang, 2011) mod was created and modelled after a 'Hunger Games' styled gameplay and another in 2013 – Brendan Greene, better known by his pseudonym PlayerUnknown created a Battle Royale mod from a military sim game called ARMA 2 (Bohemia Interactive, 2009), it was then later adapted into a standalone game called PlayerUnknown's Battle Grounds or PUBG for short (PUBG Studios, 2017). The popularity began to suddenly rise with these games – later expanded into other game publishers with their own separate battle royale titles.

PUBG has sold more than million copies within a month and in 10 months, 10 million copies have been sold. It has also broken DOTA 2's record for having the "most concurrent players" as well as being the most streamed game on Twitch. In Addition, PUBG has a "High skill cap", "unpredictable", and has "enough down-time" to be able to interact with their viewers with its "Consistent" hold of viewership for streamers (Akshon Esports, 2019). Coinciding with the Akshon Esports, of the mode's interactivity, it is also stated that it has a very "interactable" game, when compared to streaming Rainbow Six Siege, it will require players hear for sound cues that negate the interactivity with their audience (The Black Hokage, 2018).

After the release of PUBG, Epic games debuted Fortnite (Epic Games, 2017) – another largely popular title of the genre and the most played Battle Royale title at the time. In 2017, Fortnite statistics rose from 1 million players in August to 30 million in December – a significant amount of player count in the space of five months. Over the coming years, it has reached hundreds and millions of players worldwide, as of May 2020 the player count has reached up to 350 million players (Statista 2017). In addition, streaming has provided viewers the service of watching their favourite streamers play the game, the popularity of streamers coincides with Battle Royale games. PUBG had an average viewer of 72 thousand people watching in January 2018 and as for Fortnite the peak of average viewership in July of 2018 had reached up to 200,000. (Statista, 2018). Popular streamers such as Ninja and Dr. Disrespect have contributed to the increase in registered user count.

Fortnite and PUBG are not the only titles that have this game mode available, it has been implemented into other games that shares the same features; with games like Tetris 99 (Arika, 2019), obstacle course games such as Fall Guys (Media Tonic, 2020) as well as racing games – with Forza Horizon 4's battle royale mode: The Eliminator (Playground Games, 2018). Another reason how it rose to popularity is that it appeals to a mass audience, the objective of the genre is simple enough: last man standing wins, it is "much easier to digest" and has "less complexity" to its objective. In addition, he has also said when compared to a MOBA game, "there multiple facets to the objective [of MOBAS]" that it is easier to "digest" Battle Royale objectives. (The Black Hokage, 2018).

As mentioned previously, that the genre appeals to a mass audience. When thinking of Battle Royale games in mind, the theme is usually militaristic, and players are equipped with weaponry based in real life. However, there is a fantasy-based Battle Royale game very popular in the genre – Spellbreak. An article has stated what makes Spellbreak “unique”, is its weapon system, where players can use two magical gauntlets as well as summoning your own spell. This take on customization is different in a way that rather than the normal formula of attaching silencers, sights and scopes on weaponry, players can upgrade their spells with whatever combination to make the combat more unique to play. Casting Spells was found “much more enjoyable” when changing the formula from “swords and Shields” (Venturebeat, 2019). The CEO has also stated that “It’s meant to make you feel like a battlemage” (Seth Sivak, 2019).

It is stated that PUBG has an “intensity” when there are less players to face off against. PUBG has a danger-like element added into the game, which can be addictive to some players. Some may go on to try and “outrank” each other within the game, which makes playing PUBG more addictive to try and rise higher on the leader board (Polygon, 2018). It also has a “psychological appeal” to people when it comes to surviving by collecting items that will help players survive. Another statement they have said is that it has “emotional” value when it comes to stealing the items from players after eliminating them since they are real human players rather than a non-player character or NPC. They have also said the game has “gratifying” victory, due to the “journey being difficult” with “unpredictable” moments which in turn, gets players addicted. (The Infographics Show 2018). Similar quotes from The Infographics Show states that “beating 99 players gives you bragging rights” which “overtakes” Minecraft. Accessibility is part of the game’s many features that impact the genre, the cross-play between consoles and PCs have allowed players to play with each other having to buy a specific gaming system, the game is also free of charge (Polygon, 2018).

As PUBG became a popular entry in the genre, it did have some problems, which makes it for players difficult to play, with the bugs, cheating and other elements, players have migrated to other titles – specifically Fortnite. With a user-friendly interface and colourful design, Fortnite was the better alternative without having to pay for the game. The game is simple enough for simple players – similar to The Black Hokage and Akshon Esports quotes that the game is very easy to digest and play as a simple player. This easy to play nature of the game mode is also stated by Polygon that Fortnite has “simple interfaces”, which makes it easy for beginners to play (The Black Hokage, 2018) “Akshon Esports 2019”

Polygon have said also shared the same sentiment with Akshon Esports when it comes to “sharing” within the game mode. Although the Polygon referred to Fortnite and Akshon Esports to PUBG, the same concept applies that both games have “share-able” moments, where the player can have memorable experiences when playing the game and they would go on to share their experiences to their social circle that play their chosen games – friends and/or family (Polygon, 2018) “Akshon Esports, 2019”.

They have also stated that Fortnite has a “smart design”, from “satisfying loot drops” to “cleverly designed weapons”. One statement in particular is that the game “almost like a hunt”, giving the player a to make tactical decisions when it comes to eliminating other players. The game, as said by Polygon once again, is that the game is “cartoonishly pretty and welcoming” which coincides with an article from HP with its visual appeal wherein the “character designs are visually appealing to gamers of all ages” (Daniel Horowitz, 2019). The Infographics Show also has stated that the Fortnite releases more new content. Being a free game and Fortnite giving out free content every new season, can contribute to the rising number of players for Battle Royale games (Polygon, 2018).

Another major entry into the Battle Royale genre is Call of Duty: Warzone (Activision, 2020). Call of Duty (CoD) is one of largest first-person shooter franchises in the gaming industry and being the first ever free CoD in the market in addition to the CoD brand recognition, downloads has skyrocketed in record levels. Virgin Media, an internet service provider, has a record-breaking number of downloads of the game itself, signifying the amount of people play the game – in December 2020, more than 85 million worldwide play the game. COVID was one of the contributing factors that helped the rise in player count. Not being able to exit homes, people will flock to forms of entertainment, from movies, shows and in this case, video games (Tech Digest, 2021).

Apex Legends (Respawn Entertainment, 2018) is another entry into the genre. This game differs from most Battle Royale titles – gameplay is somewhat different to that of PUBG where may have to wait for another player to come across in order them to eliminate, whereas Apex Legends, it is “designed to make you move constantly”. Traversing is different as well compared to the other games, wall running and climbing it is a much faster paced game. Much like another popular game (Albeit NOT a Battle Royale game) Overwatch (Blizzard Entertainment 2016), Apex Legends have specialist characters that have their own set of unique abilities, whereas the other titles previously mentioned does not, has still managed to make it “straightforward”. The game has innovated the genre when it comes to core gameplay, which most players want – to not be playing the same game all the time (Game Voyagers, 2019).

Apex Legends, Warzone, PUBG and Fortnite all have one thing common: Trends. A user from Quora has said Ninja, as mentioned previously – a popular Twitch Streamer, has paved a path in the rise of popularity of Fortnite. People who have followed him and watch his streams may know that he has played with a well-known Hip Hop artist Drake (Xavier Capella, 2018). This broke the record of the most viewed Twitch stream in 2018 that amassed more than “600,000 viewers” (Kotaku, 2018). this in turn made Fortnite one of the most trending games of all the time. Another user from Quora has also said that “it is hard to feel bad” about losing a match. This refers to the less competitive nature of the game, although it is somewhat competitive, when compared to other players, they would not feel penalised for losing a game (Christopher Abrahams, 2018).

In conclusion, the correlation between Battle Royale games and their sudden rise in popularity are fairly straightforward, people are looking for fresh take of the average shooter game. Wherein the players feel as if they’re playing a whole new game with a different perspective albeit keeping the shooter element intact. And lastly, Battle Royale games are very accessible to players, new or experienced which makes it one of the easiest games to play, and in addition the genre can be made for anyone who has a preference to specific mediums – whether it’s from puzzles to racing games, it keeps options very much open to all game types.

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