Casual Gaming: Crash Course Games #11

Crash Course: Games
https://youtube.com/watch?v=fa-TFvPKpog
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/fa-TFvPKpog

Hi I'm Andre Meadows and this is Crash Course: Games.
So we ended the last episode with more connected consoles and we'll see improved specs and deeper integration in these platforms throughout the next decade. But today, we're going to take a look at the larger cultural shifts that were happening in gaming.

As we've seen, gaming constantly evolves with new technologies, just like *Pokémon*. And over the last decade, there has been an explosion of technologies that have allowed games to infiltrate all areas of our lives. We now have games on our phones, in our schools, basically anywhere we have an internet connection. Many of us walk around with a library of games at out literal finger tips. These games have challenged the industry that spawned them. Players are no longer tied to the table or to the TV to play games. Today, we're going to talk about social and mobile gaming and how they have led to a shift towards casual gaming. So pull up your phone and your tablet, log into your favorite social network, and let's explore what gaming has done to link us all together.

(Intro)

With 1.09 billion daily active users as of March 2016, Facebook and other social networks have become one of the premier places for people to connect with others and just like real life gathering places, these social networks eventually became a shared space for play. Now many games can be called "social", but the social games we're going to be talking about today have a few distinct, though rapidly changing, standards. Currently, social games are games that primarily take place over an online social network, usually accessed via a computer or other device, like the kind of games you find on Facebook. Social games almost always involve users' social contacts as part of gameplay. They require socialization activities like trading and they often don't demand synchronous gameplay.That is, players don't necessarily have to be playing the game at the same time to participate. Typically, these games also don't have a true ending or victory but instead encourage perpetual play. But any game that relies on a network of users to operate can be a social game. So games that have their own smaller, contained networks within apps could be considered social games too, like those on your mobile phone.

Now social games can be mobile games, but not all mobile games are social games. Technically, mobile games are found on phones, tablets, and other mobile devices like smart watches. Usually they are more intricate than social games, but more limited in scope than larger PC or console games. They sometimes use infrared, Wi-Fi, or Bluetooth to connect players and mobile games generally rely on touch screen technology for all major interactions as opposed to controllers used for console games. According to the Entertainment Software Association, as of 2014, roughly 30% of mobile games are social games. Combined, mobile and social games are a form of casual gaming, which refers to the actual duration of gameplay. Unlike console games that typically require up to 50+ hours to complete in sustained multi-hour sessions casual games only require a few minutes of sustained play to finish a mission, collect an item, or tidy up the game space. Sure players play casual games for a much longer total time as they often lack definitive endings, particularly in social games. But often these games are even designed to force smaller bouts of play with timed events, like in *Candy Crush*, when you only get a limited number of times to play before you have to come back and play again. Or in *Smurf Village* you build a house, but you gotta wait for an hour before it's done. Timed events force players to wait to play and come back to play. However, they alternatively encourage the player to continue playing by paying a fee or promoting the game to a friend. We'll get into that in a little bit.

But not all casual games are mobile games. With the introduction of many shorter indie game titles and party games found on consoles like Nintendo Wii, the casual gaming market was showing up more and more in home consoles and the definition of casual gaming starts to get a little blurry. But the point is, casual games have become an integral part of gaming culture. Since 2010, social gaming alone has seen a 71% increase, with an estimated 510 million people playing online. 81 million of those people log in and play at least once a day and 49 million of them play multiple times throughout the day.

And casual games have become one of the fastest growing game genres. As of 2016, mobile and social games held nearly half of the video game market. So how did social games become so popular? Well, Facebook launched in 2004 with no games whatsoever, and it wasn't until 2009 that they began to pop up on the site, and notifications popped up in your inbox. Early games like *Happy Farm*, *Farm Town*, and *Barn Buddy* were heralds for what was to come, and I think you know what game we're gonna talk about next.

Let's go to the Thought Bubble. The company Zynga created a social gaming phenomenon with *FarmVille*. This simple game of raising animals and harvesting crops with the help of your friends rapidly grew to over 10,000,000 players within 6 weeks of its debut, and within a year, that number had risen to 80,000,000 players. *FarmVille* capitalized on its social component by encouraging users to contact their Facebook friends to help as farmhands to complete tasks more quickly, and it also rewarded players with in-game currency for helping out other players. Although this message spamming was exasperating to many non-players, Zynga claims *FarmVille* has led to 752,000 players' first dates, and 280,000 marriage proposals. Time to change your relationship status.

FarmVille's success helped launch the popularity of social games, and companies were quick to mimic it, with games like *Mafia Wars*, *CityVille*, and *Island Paradise*. These games helped popularize the free to play model that was introduced in the MMOs in the late 90s. Free to play games don't cost anything to get the software and play, they relied on ads for revenue, and often used in-game currency that could be purchased through, yeah, that's right, micro-transactions. Players tend to spend more money over time with micro-transactions than with subscription fees. The majority of players never spend anything at all, the vast majority of revenue for social games comes from die-hard players, sometimes referred to, hopefully affectionately, as whales. But the rest of the players do have value, as their numbers are used to set ad-rates for in-game advertising. Thanks, Thought Bubble.

So games like *FarmVille* were, of course, profitable, but they also provided a social component unlike many other games at the time. Social games encourage shared interaction to complete challenges, chat windows for communication, and of course, real opponents or teammates for less predictable and more engaging gameplay. Social games are also composed of a player's community of friends, and tend to have much simpler gaming mechanics, which encourage much broader participation. That's why your grandma keeps sending you those *FarmVille* requests.

While social games are getting popular on Facebook, mobile games are getting popular on iPhones and Androids. Nearly 85% of the mobile app market revenue in 2015 was from games. That's about 35 billion dollars, and these mobile games carried many social gaming principles with them. For example, in 2009, a feathered flock of angered avians descended from their perches onto the world of gaming. One of the most popular games in the mobile genre, Rovio's *Angry Birds*, became another modern gaming phenomenon. *Angry Birds* was an instant hit. As of 2015, there were over 3 billion downloads of some version or special edition of *Angry Birds* across all known platforms. The mobile tie-ins, the toys, board games, *Star Wars*, *Transformers*, a feature film, and multiple

theme parks, *Angry Birds* have become a mainstay in popular culture, and this was no accident.

Rovio claims that through many previously failed mobile games, it had learned that people needed to be able to play the game right away and in short bursts. Players wanted a game that they could easily pick up and put down. Basically what now defines a casual game. *Angry Birds* also offered the free to play model we talked about with social games, and it allowed players the opportunity to unlock extra features for a price, again with the micro-transactions. And interestingly, in 2012, Rovio released *Angry Birds* on Facebook, integrating more social components within the game, such as in-game purchases and the ability for players to compete in tournaments among friends, further muddying the line between social and mobile gaming.

So games like *FarmVille*, *Candy Crush*, and *Panda Pop* - I haven't even heard of *Panda Pop* - have become integral parts of many players' daily lives, but why are these games so popular? Of course, there is the social component of playing games with friends, also the simple mechanics that encourage much broader adoption, and mobile games do tap into some psychological principles found in addictions. These short games allow for succinct, positive feedback for the player. An easy win makes us feel great and urges us to repeat the action. A loss, in particularly a game that looks like a easy win, makes us feel angry and urges us to repeat the action.

This was evident in games like *Flappy Bird*. If you remember in February 2014, the creator of *Flappy Bird* removed his app from the Apple and Android stores, because he thought the game was too addictive, and then people made clones of it, and I'm still addicted. According to Mark Griffiths, the director of the International Gaming Research Unit in Nottingham Trent University, mobile games are in many ways like slot machines. If they become predictable, they become boring, but if they are random but still possible to win, they encourage persistence of play, and there's a lot more that we can say about the psychology of why we play games, we'll get into that in a future episode.

So as you can see, gaming continues to follow us through our latest technologies, and with the introduction of casual gaming through mobile and social games, more and more people are playing games, and gaming itself as a genre is getting harder to define. It's no longer limited to just arcades, consoles, and computers, gaming is now everywhere we go, making it part of our regular social interaction and prevalent in our daily lives. But as you PC gamers know, casual gaming isn't the only place were communities were forming around games.

Next week, we're gonna talk about MMORPGs and the communities that have formed around these players, and with that, I'll let you get back to your game of *Candy Crush* or *Monster Legends* or *Crossy Road*. Thanks for watching, see you next time. Ooh, 500 gems for $4.99. Purchase. Don't judge me.

Stan: CrashCourse Games is filmed in the Chad and Stacey Emigholz Studio in Indianapolis, Indiana, and it's made with the help of all these nice people. If you'd like to keep CrashCourse free for everyone forever, you can support the series at Patreon, a crowdfunding platform that allows you to support the content you love. Speaking of Patreon, we'd like to thank all of our patrons in general, and would like to specifically thank our high chancellor of knowledge, Morgan Lizop, and our vice principal, Michael Hunt. Thank you for your support.