10. Who Creates Microtransactions: The Production Context of Video Game Monetization

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Abstract
Despite a growing academic interest in in-game monetization, much less attention has been paid to the production context of microtransactions. With this chapter, we aim to address this gap by focusing on the roles and responsibilities related to video game monetization. We answer the titular question of this chapter using a mixed methods approach, combining semi-structured interviews, content analysis of job descriptions, and frequency analysis of in-game credits. Results suggest that monetization responsibilities are both being integrated into various existing roles, including game designers or product managers, but also spawn new dedicated roles of monetization specialists. Monetization as a game development task is closely related to data analysis and only inconsistently appears in in-game credits.

Keywords: game industry, monetization, microtransactions, job listings, data analytics, loot boxes

We're doing a free to play game, with essentially loot boxes, after we were bought by EA, and it's not *Titanfall 3*. It's the perfect recipe for a marketing plan to go awry, so why have that – let's just ship the game and let players play.
– Drew McCoy, lead producer of *Apex Legends* (Respawn Entertainment 2019) in an interview for Eurogamer.net (Kent 2019)

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Introduction

Microtransactions have become such a contentious part of video games – even more so in the context of mainstream PC and console games – that developers and publishers employ various discursive strategies in order to reframe the public discussion or divert attention away from these controversial monetization practices. The marketing strategy of *Apex Legends* to publish the game right after its announcement to prevent negative reception of its chosen revenue model – freemium with loot boxes and season passes – is only one of many examples of this deliberate behaviour. Others include Electronic Arts' attempts to redefine loot boxes as *surprise mechanics*, or CD Projekt's offering of free DLC to separate itself from the competition. In mobile games, microtransactions are generally more accepted but even here players complain about aggressive monetization (Heimo et al. 2016), sometimes forcing companies to adjust their pricing strategies or at least publicly commit to them (Švelch 2019). Video game representatives thereby engage in *shadow academy* (Caldwell 2014): a layer of quasi- and pseudo-critical discourses that address the contentious aspects of the industry and problematize scholarly reflection of respective professional practices.

A part of this strategy is the lack of public disclosure about the design of microtransactions and the particular developers who are responsible for it within large and highly specialized video game development teams (see O'Donnell 2014). Existing research on in-game monetization exhibits the same blind spot. Its majority focuses on players' experiences, yet little attention is paid to the work practices and attitudes of developers (cf. Alha et al. 2014), especially the ones who actually create, optimize, and implement in-game monetization. This corresponds with the general state of game research in which the matters of production are arguably understudied compared to other areas such as reception or game content (Kerr 2017). Consequently, monetization as a specific kind of expertise is overlooked by researchers and misunderstood by audiences. A recent controversy (Rivera 2019) surrounding in-game purchases in *Wolfenstein: Youngblood* (MachineGames and Arkane Studios 2019) suggests that players do not distinguish between various roles within game development teams when complaining about microtransactions. In this particular case, a lead level designer was targeted on social media, although his involvement in the game's monetization model is unlikely. *Youngblood's* in-game credits do not help in this regard as they do not list any job titles that could be easily associated with monetization.

While other roles, such as creative directors, artists, or voice actors, receive more recognition in the specialized press, academic writing, and audience discussions, the absence of publicly available information about the production context of monetization is telling and points to a specific self-construction and self-presentation of the video game industry, the so-called para-industry (Caldwell 2014). Professions related to monetization are arguably important to the production and distribution process of games due to the lucrativeness of microtransactions (Hart 2017; Nieborg 2016b; O'Donnell 2017). Although they might be valued internally, their contribution is downplayed in the communication towards external stakeholders. In this chapter, we address this overlooked area by directly focusing on video game monetization professionals and their expertise drawing from nine semi-structured interviews, a content analysis of 100 job listings, and a frequency textual analysis of 72 in-game credits lists.

A Brief History of Video Game Monetization and Microtransactions

Video game development started as a non-commercial endeavour, but turned into an industry in the early 1970s (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter 2003; Van Dreunen 2011). At that time, two major business models were established: 1) coin-op arcade games; and 2) home consoles, both inspired by different sectors of the entertainment industry. Coin-op arcade machines adopted the monetization strategy known, for example, from pinball machines (Kocurek 2012). While the unit price was relatively affordable – around 25 to 50 cents in the US (Hart 2017), thus giving players the opportunity to try the game for a low fee – repeated play could become expensive as there was no hard spending cap. Home consoles, starting with Magnavox Odyssey in 1972, utilized the business model of toys and board games by offering a self-contained product with separately sold add-ons. This monetization strategy is now often referred to as premium. In this case, the initial cost was higher compared to arcade games but allowed for infinite replay. In other words, the consumer became an owner of a game and could play at their own discretion. This one-time fee approach became the norm in the 1990s and laid the foundation for the so-called AAA game industry (Nieborg 2016b). Other forms of monetization, such as subscriptions (Kerr 2017), shareware (Heimo et al. 2016), i.e. offering a limited version of the game for free, after which one could upgrade to the full version, or in-game advertising (Nieborg 2016a), also emerged in this

era. These business models were facilitated by online connectivity, but were mostly limited to certain genres of games, e.g. massively multiplayer online games or browser games.

In the context of the rising costs of video game production in the 2000s and the associated financial risks, the so-called freemium model became a popular and lucrative alternative in part due to lower up-front investments, especially with the emergence of smartphones and the consequent rise of the mobile gaming sector (Hart 2017; Nieborg 2016b). Freemium, also known as free-to-play, is built around microtransactions in the form of in-app purchases, although some games employ in-game advertising as a major source of revenue. The game itself is distributed for free via digital platforms such as the App Store, Google Play, or Steam, which facilitated the freemium model in the first place through their computer network infrastructure. Microtransactions tend to have a relatively low cost compared to the standardized 60 USD price tag for most mainstream blockbuster titles. In this regard, microtransactions resemble coin-op arcade machines as in both cases the unit price is small but can stack up with repeated purchases. However, while arcade games monetize the access to a game, and, by extension, playtime (Kocurek 2012), freemium titles can sell a variety of virtual goods (Nieborg 2015), including prolonged playtime, but also, paradoxically, an acceleration of in-game activities and thus technically a shorter playtime (Evans 2016). The underlying assumption of freemium is that the game can be played for free despite the existence of microtransactions. In fact, the majority of players will never spend any money playing such games (Chew 2016).

With the growing popularity of in-app purchases, their variety has also expanded, in consequence establishing specific monetization techniques and mechanics. These can be classified using multiple criteria (see Lescop and Lescop 2014; Nielsen and Grabarczyk 2018; Švelch 2017), but for the sake of brevity, we highlight only two of these possible distinctions, which are especially relevant due to their salience in the video game vernacular (Švelch 2017). First, microtransactions can either affect gameplay, for example by giving an advantage to the paying user – often referred to as pay-to-win – or only adjust cosmetic aspects of a game, such as skins for player characters. Second, players can either directly purchase specific virtual items of which the value is known up-front or acquire randomized rewards. The latter option primarily relates to the so-called loot boxes, which have become a major form of microtransactions in the 2010s. Their origins can be traced to trading card games (Nielsen and Grabarczyk 2018; Švelch 2020), such as *Magic: The Gathering* (Garfield 1993).

Microtransactions Controversies

Despite the lucrativeness of the freemium business model, many complaints have been lodged against microtransactions by players (Almaguer 2019; Milner 2013; Švelch 2017), industry professionals (Alha et al. 2014; Chew 2016), and other stakeholders, including regulatory and governmental bodies (see King and Delfabbro 2018; Schwiddessen and Karius 2018). While some players willingly invest into in-game purchases for utilitarian, social, and hedonic reasons (Marder et al. 2019; cf. Gainsbury et al. 2016; Hamari 2015), others dismiss them as equivalent to cheating if they provide advantage for paying users (Carter and Björk 2016; Švelch 2017). The possibility of excessive spending due to the repeatable nature of many types of microtransactions raises concerns about ethical monetization (Harviainen, Paavilainen, and Koskinen 2019; Heimo et al. 2016), suggesting that some players, often designated as 'whales,' become targets of exploitative design of certain games with in-app purchases (Chew 2016; Dreier et al. 2017).

Since 2017, the general concerns about microtransactions have been exacerbated by the backlash at loot boxes, which are perceived to share formal characteristics with gambling (Nielsen and Grabarczyk 2018). Matthew E. Perks discusses the details of the recent loot box controversies and the attempts at their regulation in Chapter 11 of this edited collection. Despite the aforementioned criticisms, existing empirical research on developers' attitudes towards in-game monetization (Alha et al. 2014) suggests acceptance or even appreciation of these new business models. However, these findings might be specific for the Finnish video game industry, where the study was carried out, and have not been since supported, partly due to the overall lack of research on production aspects of video game monetization.

Convergence of Monetization Practices

While premium and freemium originated as two distinct monetization models, their convergence can be observed from the early 2010s (Milner 2013). Initially, developers and publishers of premium games experimented with various forms of paid expansions. Due to the rise of digital distribution platforms (Kerr 2017; O'Donnell 2017), these add-ons have been transformed into the so-called downloadable content (DLC; Nieborg 2014). Traditionally, DLC does not support repeated purchases as it monetizes relatively persistent additions to the main game such as new levels, quests, equipment, characters, etc. (Nieborg 2014; Švelch 2017). Still, even in this form, which arguably

adhered to the established norms of the premium business model, DLC and especially the day one DLC, which is available for purchase already on launch, was criticized by players for resembling monetization of mobile games (Milner 2013). Despite the initial wave of audience complaints and resistance, premium games later adopted repeatable microtransactions as well, thus effectively establishing hybrid monetization models such as 'paymium, sub-freemium, [or] free-paymium' (Lescop and Lescop 2014, 107). The terminology is still in flux (Chew 2016) and players and journalists regularly introduce neologisms to mock these business models, such as 'fee to pay' (Sterling 2015). Yet, microtransactions in their various forms have become the norm across video game genres and platforms (Milner 2013; Švelch 2017). Purely premium monetization is currently being abandoned by many big budget titles, which seek additional revenue via microtransactions. As a result, it can be hypothesized that monetization expertise turns into a more universal skill applicable across many sectors of video game production.

Development Implications: Monetization Professionals in Context

Although a game's business model has always influenced game design in a more or less obvious way (Alves and Roque 2007; Nieborg 2014; Prax 2013), microtransactions, especially in the freemium realm, are particularly closely tied to gameplay. As the core game loop needs to be 'monetizable,' early game ideas can be discarded on the basis of the monetization model, and freemium game design can therefore even be considered a 'design lens of its own' (Järvinen 2012). According to Aphra Kerr (2017), the particular 'platform production logic' is characterized by a continuous flow of user data and the role of indirect revenues by e.g. microtransactions. As such, monetization can play a significant part in a game production process. As indicated above, there is a great variety of possible monetization techniques, i.e. ways to connect microtransactions to gameplay – with some more controversial than others – which makes designing monetization a delicate endeavour.

But whose responsibility is it to perform this task, that is, to design and implement monetization? Traditionally, video games are created by the triad of game design, game art, and programming (O'Donnell 2014; Tschang 2005; Van Roessel and Katzenbach 2020; Whitson, Simon, and Parker 2018), and often the project is managed by a producer. In larger productions, the main disciplines can be divided into sub-disciplines and specialized roles, such

as level design or 3D art. More recently, partly due to the abovementioned developments regarding business models and the emergence of games as service (Stenros and Sotamaa 2009; Švelch 2019; Whitson 2019), additional roles have appeared, such as community managers and data analysts (Kerr 2017). The exact team composition and task division vary depending on the size of the project and the game's genre. Moreover, as the industry's practices are still in flux, development studios use different job titles to designate the various responsibilities needed in video game production. This rather unstable situation, combined with the industry's awareness of the controversial status of microtransactions, makes the question of who designs monetization interesting yet complicated. Is there, for example, a dedicated person with specialized expertise and a corresponding job description, or is the task rather divided amongst other disciplines? If the latter is the case: does it concern the traditional core disciplines or are other roles involved? And what skills should a game professional concerned with monetization design possess?

Methodology

In order to answer these questions, we designed a mixed methods approach, consisting of three parts: 1) semi-structured exploratory interviews; 2) content analysis of job listings; and 3) frequency analysis of in-game credits. The first part focused on video game professionals' reflection of monetization expertise and its role in video game production. The second part, which was inspired by previous research into the job requirements of community managers (Kerr and Kelleher 2015), explored how monetization expertise as a job task and skill requirement is communicated towards a very particular audience of potential employees. The last part dealt with how monetization-related roles are presented to players via in-game credits. Combined, these approaches aim to compensate for the existence of *shadow academy* (Caldwell 2014) by data triangulation in three specific contexts, which arguably highlight different aspects of in-game monetization.

In 2016–17, we conducted nine semi-structured exploratory interviews with game professionals working for Germany-based game studios,[1] which

1 The potential impact of the local specifics of the German video game industry (see Van Roessel and Katzenbach 2020) should be relatively negligible, also due to the fact that interviewees were of different nationalities.

we transcribed and coded using MaxQDA. The interviewees were all working on free-to-play titles and included two game designers, two producers, a product lead, a head of games, a studio game design director, a creative director, and a freelance monetization consultant. In the chapter, we refer to our informants with pseudonyms. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted about 90 minutes each. Additionally, we analysed 100 job descriptions that mentioned the term 'monetization' (or 'Monetarisierung' in German). We searched job posting aggregators Gamasutra, Games Jobs Germany, Glassdoor, and Indeed and looked through job offers from the major international video game companies: 2K Games; Activision Blizzard; Electronic Arts; Epic Games; Ubisoft; and Zenimax. We collected these job postings between October 2018 and July 2019. The sample included positions located in nine different countries (out of which 67 were in the US, followed by thirteen in Germany) and offered by 41 companies (the most frequent employer was Electronic Arts with 22 listings, followed by Activision Blizzard and Ubisoft with eight job offers each).

We then conducted a content analysis (Krippendorff 2004) with a job description as a coding unit. The final coding was preceded by a pilot analysis with ten units and two rounds of intercoder reliability tests, both times on a randomly selected sample of 50 units (50 per cent of the whole corpus). We iterated on the operationalization of individual variables to improve the reliability scores and we eventually dropped three variables out of the original sixteen due to unsatisfactory agreement rates. In this chapter, we focus on a subset of ten variables (see Table 10.1). The listed scores reached acceptable values for this type of exploratory, mixed-methods research (Krippendorff 2004); particularly the main variable – game development role – exhibited a highly reliable Kripendorff's alpha. All the coding was carried out by the two authors and distributed equally among them. The coder bias was in this case justified by the coders' knowledge of the complex realities of video game production (see O'Donnell 2014).

In the last step, we searched in-game credits of both bestselling AAA games and top grossing freemium titles for roles related to monetization. The sample of AAA games was partly based on Amazon's best-selling games lists for 2018 and 2019 and included fifteen mainstream games that featured microtransactions. For the freemium games, we drew from data about the top grossing titles on Google Play in the European region. To account for potential seasonal changes and other possible outliers (e.g. expansion schedules and content drops, which might influence revenue), we looked at the top 50 games at two separate points in time three months apart from each other (November 2018 and February 2019). This process yielded 57 unique

Table 10.1: Overview of the content analysis variables

Variable	Type	Categories	Krippendorff's Alpha
Game development role	nominal	13	0.896
Level of required or recommended degree	ordinal	3	0.906
Degree type (first mentioned)	nominal	7	0.738
Degree type (second mentioned)	nominal	7	0.762
Degree type (third mentioned)	nominal	7	0.795
Skill requirement: analytical mindset	nominal	2	0.702
Skill requirement: data analysis	nominal	2	0.861
Skill requirement: game design	nominal	2	0.742
Skill requirement: market knowledge	nominal	2	0.788
Skill requirement: management	nominal	2	0.769

titles, showing that many of the analysed games experience a relatively long-term success. Notably, none of the games dropped below the top 100 grossing games on Google Play. In total, we analysed 72 in-game credits lists.

Results: Monetization as a Role and a Task

Integration versus Specialization

Based on our content analysis, monetization responsibilities are handled by a relatively wide range of video game development professions, both established general roles and emerging ones. This is necessitated not only by freemium monetization, but also by data-driven design (Kerr 2017; Whitson 2019) and the games as service paradigm (Stenros and Sotamaa 2009; Švelch 2019; Whitson 2019). The keyword monetization appeared in job descriptions of eight different roles (in descending order): producer (31); designer (24); data analyst (14); monetization specialist (13); business and marketing professions (8); live ops (6); programmer (3); and user researcher (1). Even though the corpus of job postings is not fully representative and the extent to which the positions focus on monetization differs from brief mentions to main tasks, monetization-related duties seem to be integrated into other roles besides the dedicated specialists in this area. Notably, however, from the core triad of design, art, and programming, mainly design was represented. These findings resonate with how our interview respondents saw monetization as a core part of video game design, especially in the context of freemium games. Theresa (pseudonym, female, 40s), a CEO of a small company told us: 'what [...] was always important is that not only one person has knowledge

of what the monetization is about, but that everyone in the game design team and the producer and me understood how the monetization in our game works.'

The job listings data suggests that monetization experts as a specific role more often appear in larger studios, such as Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, or Goodgame Studios, which is to be expected due to a higher degree of job specialization in these companies. Smaller teams sometimes hire an external monetization consultant. This was, for example, the case with Theresa, who hired a freelancer to help out with the monetization model of their game project:

> [...] so we had [...] this double loop for the game and the second I had the vision, I brought a monetization expert on board, on a freelance basis, but on a regular basis. So, it was very important for me that we have monetization expertise on board from day one.

Other teams decided to delegate these duties to designers and other staff, showing a need to make do with the existing resources. Aaron (male, 30s) producer at a small mobile game company described how they handled monetization:

> Q: Does the designer have special skills, also in monetization, or experience?
>
> A: I think if you work on free-to-play then yes, you should have. I know that [...] in big companies there are monetization designers and other types, but [...] we're a small company so everybody needs to be able to encompass the whole role [game design including monetization design], otherwise it doesn't make any sense.

Although monetization experts seem to be in high demand as their skillset is well regarded and deemed important already in the early stages of game production, we observed tensions regarding the degree of specialization and integration of monetization expertise. As mentioned, monetization-related tasks are added to the workloads of existing professions, sometimes out of convenience or due to budgetary restrictions. Previous research has already shown that indie studios in particular require that their developers take care of a number of different responsibilities from game design, business development, and public relations (Whitson, Simon, and Parker 2018) to data analysis (Whitson 2019).

Besides these practical reasons, integration is also motivated by the belief that monetization is a core aspect of many, especially freemium, games and as such it should be considered early on in the development process. By making sure that game designers understand monetization models and best practices, and are able to implement them, project leaders are trying to increase the chance that the game as a whole will be profitable and that the monetization model and gameplay are well balanced. Michael (male, 30s), a studio game design director at a large mobile game developer, who previously worked with monetization specialists but not in his current job, said:

> Personally, from a design philosophy for me, I'd like the monetization to be thought of as integrate[d into] the gameplay experience. I find it that when the role is segmented from the regular game designers then it tends to be tagged on, so like the designers design the game and then the monetization people add the monetization on top. I don't think that's the right way to make games.

Adding monetization tasks to the portfolio of game designers is one way to pursue the agenda of integration as also supported by the results of our content analysis. Out of the 100 analysed job descriptions that included the keyword monetization, we identified 24 as game designer positions. Another option is to assign monetization to roles with general management and mediator responsibilities, such as producers (31), who by default operate across different departments, or to so-called creole professions (O'Donnell 2014), which emerge at the interfaces between established video game development disciplines. Live ops (6) is an example of the latter, as their job of supplying post-release content is often directly tied to the game's monetization model but also combines producer and game design qualifications.

Analytical Skills and Market Knowledge

What is shared across the majority of the 100 analysed monetization-related roles is an emphasis on analytical thinking (78 per cent). The more specific data analysis proficiency is less common but still highly represented in our corpus (67 per cent). These results echo previous observations about the emergence of data analysis as a core skill in video game production (Kerr 2017; Whitson 2019). Monetization is a highly metrics-driven discipline as it is directly related to business performance. This is also why general data

(and business) analyst positions include monetization as one of their areas of interest. Even game designers dealing with monetization are expected to possess an analytical mindset (75 per cent, 18 out of 24). Our interviews supported these findings. For example, Peter (male, 50s), the freelance monetization consultant, said that 'designers, specifically in the free-to-play space, need an analytical mind as well.'

Another frequently required skill is market knowledge (62 per cent) – the understanding of current trends and best practices. Game development, especially in the mobile sector, is generally characterized by a high level of imitation (Van Roessel and Katzenbach 2020) and it is safe to assume that this extends to monetization models and their implementation. Therefore, game developers with monetization responsibilities are expected to have a thorough knowledge of other successful games and their monetization models, so that they do not need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to designing and implementing microtransactions. Notably, market knowledge is less frequently expected of data analysts (36 per cent, 5 out of 14), perhaps because the required academic qualifications are deemed sufficient in this regard or due to the fact that the people assigning analytical tasks (and not the analysts themselves) should be the ones knowledgeable about competition. The two other skills that we coded appeared relatively rarely on the level of the whole corpus: game design in 33 per cent and management in 19 per cent.

Based on the required skills (i.e. analytical mindset and market knowledge) as well as the fact that game design itself is less frequently required, it can be argued that monetization is less of a creative discipline but rather a task depending on optimization, testing, and perpetual tweaking. As such, it rewards rigorous methodology, as evidenced by the number of related types of university degrees recommended or required in the job listings. On the subsample of 66 positions that required a university degree of any level (Bachelor, Master, or PhD), the most frequent were STEM degrees, such as computer science or statistics (42 per cent, 28 out of 66), followed by finance and economics (30%, 20 out of 66) and business school education (21 per cent, 14 out of 66). Game development-specific degrees appeared only in 14 per cent of the cases (9 out of 66). Among all the 8 roles from the corpus, university education was most prominently required for data analysts (93 per cent, 13 out of 14).[2] Game designers and monetization specialists were on the opposite side of the spectrum, requiring a degree in 50 per cent (12 out of

2 All programmer and user researcher job listings required a university degree or listed it among recommendations, however due to the small size of these subsamples (3 and 1, respectively) these results are inconclusive and thus excluded from this comparison.

24) and 54% (7 out of 14), respectively. The emphasis on formal education for data analysts was also noted by Michael, when asked about the department of analytics at his company: 'Those are people much smarter than I am. I've never been with so many people with PhDs in the same room actually.'

Selective Disclosure

Based on our content analysis, the controversial status of monetization does not seem to affect the job descriptions. In fact, the wide range of jobs that in some way deal with monetization suggests that, from a professional perspective, this is an accepted part of the game development process (see Alha et al. 2014). This relatively open admission of the role of monetization is likely possible due to specific targeting of these job listings as they are not meant for players and fans but are instead distributed via special channels, which general audiences do not normally frequent. Furthermore, a job description should be accurate if it is supposed to attract suitable candidates. In the one-to-one interviews, our respondents also talked openly about the role of monetization expertise in video game production and emphasized its importance throughout the process, especially in freemium game development.

On the contrary, the analysis of in-game credits shows that only 2 out of the 57 (4 per cent) of freemium games provide any information about roles directly related to monetization expertise. Such a low number is largely caused by the general absence of any in-game credits in the analysed freemium games; only 19 per cent (11 out of 57) feature some form of in-game credits. In contrast, all premium games from the sample include detailed in-game credits, with roughly half (47 per cent, 7 out of 15) also listing roles related to monetization. While there might be many more people involved in monetization implementation and optimization, the analysis of in-game credits is limited by the job titles and as was evident from the content analysis, a wide range of professions can engage in these tasks beyond monetization specialists. Nonetheless, the information about the developers responsible does not seem to be kept secret in premium games, although some companies do not list roles dedicated specifically to monetization.

Discussion

Despite our efforts at data triangulation, this empirical analysis can still only present a limited snapshot of monetization as a game development

task and role. Due to the focus on jobs related to monetization, we cannot comment on their proportion within video game production as a whole. Although at its core an exploratory study, this chapter presents the first systematic analysis of the production context of monetization, encompassing both freemium and premium games,[3] which are often treated separately despite employing similar monetization strategies. In this sense, our findings suggest that monetization expertise is equally sought for by mobile and AAA studios.

From a methodological perspective, this chapter attempts to enrich the tool set of production studies by providing a mixed methods framework for studying particular professional roles and tasks. While all the three types of empirical data have been previously used in research of video game production, including job listings (Kerr and Kelleher 2015) and in-game credits (Bailey, Miyata, and Yoshida 2019), combined they offer a potential solution to the problem of shadow academy. This is particularly relevant for any exploration of a controversial issue such as video game monetization, but it can also provide valuable insights into less exposed aspects of video game production.

Conclusion

Despite the ongoing scholarly interest in video game monetization, this issue has been critically approached nearly exclusively from the perspective of players (cf. Alha et al. 2014). This chapter takes a different approach and highlights the production context of monetization. By taking a closer look at a specific video game production task, this chapter adds to the production studies literature about particular professions. Our findings show that monetization-related duties are both handled by specialists but also integrated into existing and emerging video game development professions. The latter approach is partly motivated by practical reasons, especially in smaller studios, which cannot afford to employ a full time monetization expert, but also by the need to design games with monetization in mind from the early stages to make sure that the result is a viable commercial product. As such, monetization responsibilities find their way into job descriptions of game designers and producers among others. Monetization itself is often understood as a data-driven discipline and requires either

3 This applies primarily to the analysis of job listings and in-game credits. The interviews focused only on the freemium sector.

a more general analytical mindset or specific data analysis proficiency. Despite being considered an important part of the production process by developers, monetization is downplayed in communication towards general audiences, especially in freemium games, which in general obscure the production context by not providing in-game credits. Future research but also game development educational programmes can benefit from these findings, by acknowledging the integrated nature of monetization both when looking at the game design implications of microtransactions and player attitudes and behaviours.

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