Reliving and Reinventing Childhood Video Games: A First Look into Collocated Social Speedrunning

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WHAT IS GDQ? Games Done Quick (GDQ) is a series of video game charity events held every year, one in the early January, Awesome Games Done Quick (AGDQ), and one in late June, Summer Games Done Quick (SGDQ). In its 11 year history, GDQ has raised over 16.5 million dollars, currently the largest fundraising event for Doctors Without Borders and the Prevent Cancer Foundation in the world. Attendance at these events averages around 2000 people, taking roles as attendees, staff, volunteers and runners [4].

SPEEDRUNNING Speedrunning is the recurring act of completing a game with the sole intent of finishing either the complete game, or specific levels as quickly as possible [13]. This is achieved by exploiting glitches and unintended strategies in the game. Speedrunning can be done individually, collectively, or between multiple runners as a social event.

RELATED LITERATURE Speedrunning has been studied in computer science and engineering for novel ways to apply image processing [12], algorithmic complexity analysis [7], and hardware serial interface manipulation [8]. Speedrunning has also been used as a case study to examine expressive [2] and transformative [5] gameplay. Studies have also examined how social communities redefine "cheating" [1] and how speedrunning acts as a "museum of accidents" showcasing the gaming community’s discoveries of glitches [11].

Video gaming has also been studied in terms of interpersonal dynamics between solo and collocated console gameplay [15] and how video gaming acts as a digital hearth, a gathering place, for individuals of varying ages, expertise, and backgrounds [16]. Social, instrumental, and financial support from viewers of online video game live streams has been studied to better understand the dynamics of social support between viewer and streamer [17].

METHODS This study interviewed 18 individuals using semi-structured interviews [9] who were involved with Summer Games Done Quick 2018. Participants were runners, attendees, hosts, online viewers, or a combination of these. These interviews were transcribed and coded using a grounded theory approach [18].

Field observations [10] were also taken through watching Summer Games Done Quick 2018’s video archives on YouTube. Observation notes were also coded using the same grounded theory approach [18].

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION For the attendees of GDQ, GDQ is more of a social event than it is a charity event. Our informants, who are attendees of GDQ, shared sentiments of how they are motivated to attend GDQ to meet up with friends and how GDQ acts as a meeting place for the speedrunning community.

The occurrence of people physically gathering around a digital medium is not new. Amy VoLda discusses the idea of the gaming console acting as a digital hearth, how the game console acts as a shared central social space [15]. Borrowing this concept, we argue that GDQ acts as a digital hearth for the community of speedrunners to gather and share social experiences together. Speedrunners gather around GDQ to relive the gameplay experience, nostalgic games by participating in speedrunning, the reinvocation of gameplay. This has solidified GDQ’s identity as a digital hearth for nostalgic games and novel gameplay. By viewing GDQ as a digital hearth, we can better understand the success of GDQ in raising money for charity by considering the charity success as a byproduct of speedrunning communities gathering around a digital hearth.

We can further expand on VoLda’s idea of a digital hearth by proposing GDQ also acts as a virtual hearth by streaming its event online on Twitch. Through live streaming, it extends the gathering participants beyond runners to viewers and fans of speedrunning. More research looking directly at online viewers needs to be conducted in order to better define and iterate on the idea of a virtual hearth.

Our work takes a first look at Games Done Quick events as a social phenomenon and focuses on the experience of its participants through semi-structured interviews. Due to what we learned from our informants on their experiences, GDQ is viewed more as a social event than a charity event by attendees. Furthermore, by considering GDQ as a digital hearth, and conceptualizing GDQ as a viral hearth, we opine that the success of GDQ as a charity event is a byproduct of GDQ acting as a central social event for the speedrunning community.