Gaming, augmented and virtual reality

Online gaming and eSports are growing rapidly, especially but not exclusively among younger people. While competition and prize money are a driver for some, most find the social and community aspects the most important factors. Increasingly immersive games are anticipated, but how virtual worlds will develop is unknown.

What we're seeing

Rapid growth in online games

More than three quarters of those under 40 play online and videogames, and watch others playing too. Socialising and a sense of belonging, as well as potential income, are important aspects of the growth in online gaming.[1]

Nearly half of gamers are female, and ethnic diversity is also increasing, helping move gaming away from "white male games for white male gamers." [2]

Teenagers often now place a higher priority on being alone or spending time online, rather than hanging out with friends or family.[3]

Big money being invested

The gaming industry is, unsurprisingly, bullish about growth and revenue potential, especially for eSports. Prize money for some eSports is getting closer to some pro-sports salaries, and the barrier to entry is lower.[4]

Gamer health in the spotlight

The physical and mental health of online gamers, particularly eSports, is starting to be recognised.[5] Wellness programs are being introduced.[6]

Concerns about the digital world cutting off young children and other family members also remain.[7]

Gambling & integrity issues

eSport gambling is booming.[8] However, concerns about match-fixing and use of performance enhancing drugs are rising, there is scepticism that the commission overseeing these issues is not adequately resourced.[9]

Kiwis' enthusiastic amateurs, at the moment

Three quarters of kiwis play online games.[10] However, New Zealand's eSports sector may be about a decade behind Asia and North America.[11]

Where's the next Pokémon Go?

Despite the success of Pokémon Go, subsequent augmented reality games haven't done as well. Less ambitious games are being developed, focussed on making activities like walking more fun.[12]

AR and VR possibly closer to mainstream

Google is teasing new AR glasses. These will have a more limited use than the originals.[13] AR goggles for skiing may also be released soon.[14] Demand for these types of devices remains to be seen.

Better headsets, software, and VR games are leading to more uptake, both at home and at emerging VR venues.[15, 16]

Welcome to the "metaverse"

A more fully immersive future (AKA "metaverse") is being widely promoted. But there is a lot of confusion about what it is and could be. More hype than reality at this stage, but certainly something to watch.[17]

Potential implications

Create
- **New social connections and communities being created**
- **Creation of new jobs and careers, and revenue sources**

Relate
- **Sense of identity becoming more linked to online communities**
- **Potential declines in real world experiences**

Consume
- **Consumption patterns increasingly mediated through online channels**

Degrade
- **Mental and physical health can be harmed by too much time online**
- **Distinction between virtual and real world increasingly blurred**

Connect
- **Connections to off-line family and friends can be weakened**
- **Increasing potential for greater inclusivity**

Define
- **Identity defined more by who/what you'd like to be than what you are**

More information (links)

[1] Younger generations more likely to play online and video games
[2] Era of white male games for white male gamers is ending
[3] Gen Z gamers
[4] eSports vs pro-sports
[5] Top gamers have similar mental health pressures as athletes
[6] eSports player wellness program
[7] Technology threatens child development
[8] eSports gambling is set for a major shake-up
[9] Critics fear eSport watchdog can't do its job
[10] Most New Zealanders are gamers, actually
[11] eSports industry in NZ hasn't even started
[12] AR games have mixed success
[13] Google teases its next generation smart glasses
[14] RideOn ski googles
[15] The 51 best VR games
[16] VR club's social immersive gaming
[17] What is the Metaverse?