

Why is Fortnite so popular?



INTRODUCTION

Every couple of years a new game appears that shakes the entire gaming world and causes for a shift in popularity and can lead to a new era of dominance for a specific genre or franchise. For example, when Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare was released in November 2007, it was a huge success, winning a plethora of awards, such as the VBX Award for Best Shooter and the Golden Joystick Award for Ultimate Game of the Year. CoD 4 and its subsequent spinoffs ultimately lead to the Call of Duty franchise becoming a household name, and leading to it becoming one of the best-selling game franchises ever. The franchises that Call of Duty is behind in terms of overall sales are Mario, Pokémon and Tetris. Making it arguably the best-selling mature game series of all-time, its only real competitor being the Grand Theft Auto series. As much as people complain about Call of Duty's copy and paste gameplay, it doesn't alter the fact that it is still an absolute behemoth in the gaming world. A testament to the shift caused by, in my opinion, the best Call of Duty game – Modern Warfare.

However, in recent times, there has been a distinct falloff in terms of popularity and hype around the first-person shooter genre as a whole. The natural shift in genre dominance was in limbo – Activision attempted to save it with Call of Duty: WWII, although fairly unsuccessfully. There wasn't a clear successor to the first-person shooter genre, until a game known as PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds surfaced. A 'Battle Royale' style shooter that took the gaming world by storm. Imagine the Hunger Games in video game form, but with guns and vehicles. Players are dropped into a huge world that gradually reduces its playable area through the use of a 'storm', and the players must survive by collecting weapons, armour and then using their skills to be the last-man-standing. Hunger Games. Epic Games has stepped forwards and provided us with a cel-shaded, quirky third-person Battle Royale shooter that is free. And everyone seems to love it. I am going to attempt to explain my thoughts and beliefs surrounding the rising popularity of the Battle Royale genre and why Epic's title is seemingly dominating the gaming scene at the moment. Fortnite does have a co-op component, which is PvE, that is meant to be like "Minecraft meets Left 4 Dead" – according to Tim Sweeney, Epic's founder, however this game mode, known as 'Save the World' has been overshadowed by the 'Battle Royale' mode.

GAMEPLAY

For this essay, I will be focusing on the 'Battle Royale' game mode, as that is the most commonly played of the two and the main reason most players play Fortnite. Not to detract from the PvE section, but it just doesn't have the same appeal, especially since you have to pay for it.

There is no innate narrative in the 'Battle Royale' mode, no quests, no objectives and no real exposition provided. However, the real appeal of Battle Royale is the stories that it allows for the player to create just through playing the game. Most people that you ask will be able to retell a

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legendary tale of how they managed to take on a group of enemies, and successfully defeat them in order to claim “the most clutch victory” ever seen in video game history. It is these little stories that the player can create that presents this addictive quality to the game, many people love the unscripted nature and the way that each match they play brings with it its own unique challenge. And this is what makes the game so popular, it keeps on drawing the player back in. This addictive quality is also created by the fact that the game is 1 vs. 100, the incredibly small odds of you winning are akin to the David vs. Goliath story, and if you don't win then you want to persevere until you do.

This battle royale style of gameplay begins by dropping 100 players, out of a flying bus, into a huge open-world and forcing them to fight to the death until only 1 player remains – this player being the winner. The open-world gradually shrinks, via the use of a storm that damages players outside of the play area. This storm shrinks every couple of minutes, which creates this sense of urgency in the player, it forces them to be decisive and move quickly. The storm is used to constrain the size of the battleground, in order to force the players to be in a smaller area, this is a great way of sustaining the pace of a game, as it stops people from having to look around to find one another, it should be fairly easy to find them. The storm also acts as a ‘camper deterrent’, it is very difficult to stay in one place if the map is constantly shrinking.

There is different team modes that define how many people can work together as a unit – solo, duo or team (4 players). Depending on which team setting you select decides on what type of game you will play, for example if you are in a team – with 3 friends, then your team will face-off against 24 other teams, and the last team standing wins. The choice that Epic has given the player allows for their experience to not only be enriched, but prolonged. If you suck at the game, and never really get any kills and never make it to the latter stages of the match, then you might want to quit, purely because you aren't enjoying losing. However, if you then start playing duo or team matches, then you are: a) more likely to enjoy yourself, and b) more likely to want to play more as you are having an enjoyable experience with your friends. This co-operative gameplay appeals to most players, as in many cases playing with friends enhances your experience and allows for you to not only enjoy the game, but the company of your buddies. Furthermore, the different team matches all have leaderboards, so if two people make a good team, then they may want to see how far they can climb up the weekly leaderboard, again enhancing and prolonging your gameplay experience.

The combat in this game is challenging and to an extent can feel somewhat unfair, you can easily be killed in a small amount of shots, and if you get sniped it is the most infuriating thing, you have no clue that you were being watched, and bang – just like that, you're dead and have to start all over again. I believe that the difficulty of the combat creates this sense of constant tension and really allows for the player to feel on-edge at all times, even before they start the game. Furthermore, there is a great variety of guns available to the player that can appeal to wide array of players, there is: sniper rifles, for the camping scum; assault rifles, multipurpose fairly effective in all situations at any range really; submachine guns, high fire rate, used to mow down enemies quickly, in a bullet hell frenzy, however, they only really effective at short ranges; pistols, close quarters pretty bland, not hugely effective unless you have a legendary or epic version, however they are extremely common and there is always plenty of ammo scattered around. We also have access to rocket launchers, these deal insane amounts of damage, however they have fairly poor accuracy, and ammo is scarce, you would be lucky to get more than a shot or two if you find one of these; and my personal favourite shotguns, can kill an enemy in one or two shots, highly effective at close range, and that's not even the best thing, the sound design for shotguns is incredible, when fired they release this almighty bang, that not only makes the player feel badass and have a real sense of power, but it also scares the hell out of opponents. If you are just walking along, minding your own business and hear one of these go off, you will more than likely jump out of your seat and scream in terror. This huge arsenal that the game offers allows for many different play styles to be feasible in Fortnite, and

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when you're playing in a team, you can plan and specialize to make a highly effective, well-oiled unit of destruction, that could conquer pretty much any lobby.

Arguably, the main distinguishing aspect of gameplay that Fortnite brings to the table to set itself apart from other 'Battle Royale' style games is its building element. Players can harvest resources with a pickaxe and use these in real time during the game to enable players to fortify their positions or to gain a height advantage over other players so that they can get the drop on them.

Furthermore, this unique aspect of gameplay allows for each game to be different, but also adds a new element of skill into the mix. Advanced players, must be good at building, it is a necessity for being a good Fortnite player, and in some cases can actually be more important than the gunplay itself. It is almost impossible to win a game of Fortnite without building to aid you. That is why I believe that the building in Fortnite adds to the skill required to play the game, advanced players enjoy this element as it can be used to their advantage to have the edge over less experienced players, and new players like this element because it is completely new to the genre.

IT'S FREE

Despite this game being in a niche market, that only a handful of games have attempted to conquer – namely PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds and Ark: Survival of the Fittest. It still has a great appeal. I believe this may be due to its challenging team based combat that challenges the norms that a standard modern military shooter has created when it comes to shooters – especially since Fortnite relies more on planning and decision-making rather than mindlessly running around a tight, confined map shooting anything that moves, Fortnite requires you to be smarted than this and actually weigh-up the risks and rewards of taking on a certain situation – your health does not naturally regenerate, and you don't respawn.

However, it may also be due to the fact that the 'Battle Royale' mode is completely free. You have to pay for the 'Save the World' mode, however you can download the game without paying a single penny and still have access to the more popular of the two modes: 'Battle Royale'. This game being free allows for players to try it without making a serious commitment to having to play it, if you spend money on a game you will want to get your moneys-worth. This, in turn greatly increases the amount of players, as some people will be more likely to "try it" or "give it a go", immediately, the players can become enthralled in the competitive gameplay, driving them to play more. This is arguably the main reason behind its overwhelming popularity. As of December 2017, Fortnite had hit 30 million players, and a peak of 1.3 million concurrent players. Fortnite also has a distinct lack of competition in terms of the battle royale style games, PUBG is only on Xbox, meaning that the PS4 market is completely open, and ARK: Survival of the Fittest has been delayed more times than I care to keep count of . Furthermore, because this type of game is relatively new to the scene, many people don't want to put down a large chunk of money when they are unsure if they will really like it. So, if they try Fortnite before PUBG, and find out they like it, then they will stick with Fortnite, because they've already got it, and if they don't like this type of game then they haven't lost any money in the process of finding out.

ART STYLE

Fortnite has a cel-shaded art style that gives it a cartoony appeal. This, in turn, appeals to more casual players and allows for more people to be attracted, as sometimes rather grim and dismal colour palettes can have a negative effect on an audience as it isn't as visually appealing. Also, if a more realistic aesthetic was used, it may appear to be a PUBG clone to anyone who hasn't played Fortnite. Reducing its overall appeal. Furthermore, the cel-shaded art style creates this cartoon-like feel and aesthetic, completely different to any other game of this genre, making it unique.

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As you can see by the above images, both PUBG and ARK have a heavy emphasis on photo-realistic graphics, with very detailed textures and almost life-like shadows. These combined add an almost gritty feel to the game and an overall darker aesthetic – this is more likely to appeal to a more mature audience as it provides a greater sense of escapism, arguably what a more mature audience is looking for. Furthermore, the more detailed textures allow for the player to become fully immersed into the game world and feel as if they are the character they are controlling. This is further supported by the first-person perspective used in ARK. Now, I'm not saying that cel-shaded graphics don't provide this sort of connection between player and the character they are controlling; however, it is much easier to become immersed in a world that has a similar aesthetic to that of our own. However, this gritty atmosphere may not be that appealing to more casual players, so Fortnite, with its brighter and more vivid aesthetic – that is almost cartoon like may appeal to a younger or more casual audience.

As you can see in the third image, Fortnite is full of vibrant colours and tones, a prime example of this being the weapon hot bar. Dependent on the weapons you have, whether they be rare, common, legendary, epic etc. the background changes to fit the weapons rarity. Another prime example of the opposing aesthetics is present in the PUBG and Fortnite minimaps. The PUBG minimap is almost devoid of colour, epitomising the gritty design. Whereas, the Fortnite minimap is completely the opposite, it is full of colours, it appears to be more of a bird's eye view than just a topographical display of the world that the player is in.

UPDATES

Due to Fortnite's rapid ascendance to the top of the charts, Epic Game must do all that they can to keep in fresh to not only hold the attention of old players, but also draw in new gamers to feed the hype train. The easiest way of doing this is for Epic to keep on updating Fortnite and adding new items, as well as game modes. Fortnite follows a season-based rotation of items. For example, during season 1 you can earn certain items, such as skins, then the loot changes in each subsequent rotation. Fortnite also allows for a 'Battle Pass' to be purchased for each season, which allows for the premium items to be gained through playing the game. A new Battle Pass is released each season due to the rotation of items, this in turn provides funds for the developers to constantly improve the game.

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Updates so far have included many new additions to the game, ranging from weapons, to skins and even new locations on the map for players to land in and loot. This constant stream of new content allows for players to always feel as if they are striving to achieve something and to aim towards getting a specific weapon, or skin: providing the motivation and incentive needed for players to continue playing Fortnite.

Conclusion

To conclude, Epic Games have managed to break into and seemingly dominate a genre that is rapidly rising in popularity with their game, Fortnite. They have managed to establish themselves as the 'top dog' in the 'Battle Royale' genre through their art style that appeals to almost everybody, unique gameplay elements – building and constant flow of updates and new game modes that keep the game feeling fresh.