Game Creation, Monetisation Models, and Ethical Concerns

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between monetisation models, game design and ethical considerations from the perspective of three different small-scale Norwegian game companies. Interviews with game designers and CEOs form the empirical basis of the analysis. The analysis shows that their notion of the market situation differs and that concepts like quality and ethical responsibility vary greatly between the companies. A concern they all share is that the computer game market is becoming increasingly difficult to monetise and that using models like loot boxes seem more relevant now than before.

Keywords
Freemium, premium, indie, F2P, monetisation, ethics, game design

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years we have seen significant changes in how computer games are monetised. Various freemium models have proliferated, and micro transactions are also increasingly incorporated into premium games. Digital distribution on platforms such as smartphones and tablets have resulted in an upsurge of smaller-scale companies and an influx of game titles (Whitson et al. 2018). However, while platforms such as App Store and Google Play have several hundred thousand games for sale, a handful of companies such as Supercell, King, and Tencent control a significant majority of the market share (Kerr 2017). Furthermore, concerns have been raised about whether some of the monetisation models that have evolved in this crowded marked – such as pay-to-win, paywalls, and loot boxes – exploit players economically (Ahla et al. 2014, Griffiths 2018, King and Delfabbro 2019). A related question, which has received less attention, is how these monetisation models influence the way games are designed and what ethical concerns game designers and game producers perceive as their responsibility. Put another way: how do game companies balance artistic ambitions with economical and ethical concerns?

Public concern pertaining to computer games, often labelled as moral panic, is a recurring topic (Kocurek 2012, Karlsen 2015). These concerns often revolve around either violence or addiction, the general ideas being that violent game content may have negative effects on children (Fergusen 2007, Kutner and Olson 2008) and that games may be designed with addictive properties (Karlsen 2013, Enevold et al 2018). Within game studies, potential media effects have generally been regarded as a less imperative topic to explore, and when moral issues or ethics are discussed, the focus is more often

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on how games convey ethical reflection. Since players personally experience the outcome of their actions in-game, computer games with strong narratives are often the object of such studies (Nguyen and Zagal 2016, Sicart 2011). Other strands of research have focused on ethical conduct in player cultures, where, for instance, theft, harassment, sexual abuse and other transgressive behaviours are analysed (Carter 2015, Jørgensen and Karlsen 2018). Ethical questions pertaining to game design have also been discussed, for instance, through the concept *dark game design patterns*, which highlight how game designers may manipulate players through "problematic or unethical design choices" by means such as monetisation models (Zagal et al., 2013, 2) and whether monetisation models like freemium might pose ethical challenges (Neely 2019). A perspective that is less researched, however, is to what extent game designers regard monetisation as an ethical concern and how this affects their design process. The aim with this study is therefore to highlight these topics, with especial attention to small-scale companies where the right monetisation model may be a question of surviving in the market.

METHODS, MATERIAL AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with three CEOs and five game designers from three different small-sized Norwegian game companies that employ 8-15 people. Most of the informants had been involved with monetisation of specific games or responsible for the overall business strategy of the company. The majority had also been working in the industry for more than 10 years, some substantially longer. The interviews were conducted during 2017 and 2018 and lasted between 45 and 70 minutes each. The three main topics of the interview were aesthetic, ethical and economic concerns, and how these aspects were related to design and each other. They were recorded, transcribed and later analysed in NVivo. To ground the interviews in concrete experiences, parts of the interview guides were tailored to account for specific, recently developed games.

The analysis is exploratory and serves as a pilot for a larger study concerning dilemmas in the media and tech industry regarding potentially intrusive design solutions. The companies were chosen for variety and represent different genres of games: premium, indie and freemium games, respectively. The aim with the current study is to gain insight into how CEOs and designers reflect around their own market situation and the relationship between ethical, economic and artistic aspects. The informants and the companies are anonymised in the paper, as their exact identity is not important to the findings. The analysis follows a three-step structure based on the following research topics:

1. How do the informants conceive of the current market situation?
2. How do they balance artistic values with ethical concerns?
3. Are their choices of monetisation models subject to ethical concerns?

Before analysing these topics, I will present the three companies and briefly outline the Norwegian game industry.

Norway is a small country with only 5.4 million inhabitants (Statistics Norway 2020) and a relatively small game industry. It is estimated that there are currently around 100 companies, a number that seems to have stabilised over the last few years (Strauman 2015, Oslo Economics 2018). Most companies have fewer than 10 employees, and small-scale productions for easily available platforms, such as the smartphone, are typical for the industry. The industry is also small from a Nordic perspective. The Finnish game industry, for instance, has more than four times the number of employees and a revenue more than 30 times that of Norwegian companies, despite having nearly

the same number of inhabitants (Oslo Economics 2018). It should be noted, however, that the majority of Finnish revenue stems from the company Supercell, which is larger than any found in Norway.

The largest company in Norway, Funcom, was founded in 1993 and has developed AAA games such as Conan the Barbarian. It is still the largest game developer in Norway and has over the years played an important role for the Norwegian game industry by cultivating game designers and artists, many of which have later started other game companies. The current market is dominated by many start-ups and discontinuations, and most of the companies that existed in 2013 were, for instance, closed down five years later (Jørgensen 2013, Oslo Economics 2018). Economically, most companies are independent of external ownership, while private and state supported funding are important economic sources (Jørgensen 2017). The companies I analyse are typical for the Norwegian market insofar as they are small-scale operations and economically independent.

The indie company

In the computer game industry, *indie* games are typically contrasted to AAA games both in scale, production form and stylistic expression (Simon 2011). According to Garda & Grabarczyk, the concept "indie" implies more than just being independent from various external actors; it also refers to other cultural and social contexts, as well as the "indie mindset" where game developers are driven by more private, artistic and "authentic" ideals, in contrast to the mainstream industry where corporate and managerial demands have more influence on the creative process (2016). According to Jørgensen, it may be tempting to describe Norwegian game development as "'indie'" in general, as many Norwegian companies share several of these characteristics, but this would run counter to the idea of indie being opposed to the mainstream (Jørgensen 2017). The company I have labelled "indie" covers all the criteria described above and ranks artistic freedom as especially important. The company has around 8-10 employees, had published one highly successful title a few years prior to the interviews, and was working on a new game due to launch the following year. Their first title was released as a premium game. The CEO of the company is a veteran of the Norwegian game scene with experience in diverse roles related to computer games.

The freemium game company

Freemium is a monetisation strategy where a product or service is provided free of charge with the possibility of paying for extra content or services (Wilson 2006). For the model to work properly, a huge number of customers is normally needed, since only a small number of them end up paying for added content or services. This makes the monetisation model especially suited for digital distribution due to the marginal costs of selling extra copies. Freemium and free-to-play games such as the browser-game *Neopets* (JumpStart 1999) were popularised in Asia around the year 2000 (Alha et al. 2014). In the West, this era was ushered in by, for instance, the tile-matching game *Bejewelled* (*Popcap* 2001, Juul 2010). While the paying process once represented a bottleneck, digital platforms such *Facebook* and Apple's *App Store* have streamlined the purchasing process, increasing the popularity of the monetisation model (Jacobs and Sihvonen 2011, Nieborg 2015).

The company I refer to as "freemium" has published several casual freemium games for smartphones and received positive reviews but only moderate economic success. At the time of the interview, they were soft launching a smartphone game and were working on two other titles. Their main income is from developing gamification solutions and other creative services for various companies. The staff consists of around

15 people. The CEO and several staff members have more than 20 years' experience in the industry, some with experience working on AAA games.

The premium game company

While game history is rife with pirate copying and free games, premium had been a staple monetisation model since the 1970s until relatively recently (Donovan 2010). Until *App Store* introduced the opportunity for inn-app purchases in 2009, it was a major monetisation model on this platform (Klayman 2019). The company I have labelled "premium" was established more than 15 years before the interviews took place and has published a long range of retail games. They specialise in children's games and known Scandinavian IPs and publish games on several platforms and consoles. At the time of the interview they had recently published a game for smartphones and tablets and were working on two other titles. The company has between 10 and 15 employees. Two of the informants have been in the industry for more than 10 years, while the remaining one has fewer than three years' experience.

VIEWS ON THE CURRENT MARKET SITUATION

Most informants have been part of the game industry for at least a decade and witnessed substantial changes in distributing practices and monetisation models. The CEO of the freemium company has been in the industry for more than 20 years and described a study trip to South Korea around the year 2000 as a crucial moment. There he witnessed how pirate copying had "ruined the market" and in effect prompted the freemium model, "as the only logical thing to do was to give games away for free as nothing can beat free. So, this is a development over more than 15 years where you try to adapt to the fact that people increasingly think that games should be free".

Other factors like online distribution, new platforms like the smartphone and the huge influx of game titles combined with falling production costs had accelerated this process. In his view the tipping point came around the year 2012: "Around 2012 premium disappeared from the market on mobile, at least as a way of earning money". The CEO from the indie company referred to the same period, but from a different viewpoint: "In 2013, when our game was launched, all publishers talked about free-to-play like: 'It has to be free-to-play. It would be madness if you launch a game for 20 dollars'." Despite these warnings, they released the game as premium. Relative to the cost of developing the game, it was a huge success, and several years after the release they still earned money on it and had accumulated a financial buffer. In hindsight they were happy they were not persuaded to alter the payment method "as it would have meant to mangle the game if you were supposed to pay for the next episode or something like that", the CEO explains. They also plan to release their next game as premium.

The CEO from the premium company said they started in retail and explained that the gradual shift from retail to online distribution was their biggest challenge. While online distribution vastly increased the marketplace, they needed to compensate for lower prices: "It's about the volume, right. You need quite a lot of downloads when a game costs 40 kroner versus 400 kroner". Moreover, since many of the IP owners they cooperate with have a primarily Scandinavian audience base, the possibility to expand to other territories is limited.

A common notion, which was mentioned in several interviews, is that creating a good game is no guarantee for success. Standing out in the crowd is difficult even if the games are thoroughly designed, produced and promoted. A designer from the premium company said that the largest and most successful companies are able to keep a huge market share due to their economic muscle: "sure, you can make a 100,000 dollars a

day, but then you would need 90,000 dollars to promote the game first". Lacking this kind of money, they had to rely on other means to gain exposure. The CEO from the indie company explained that,

> If we are on the front on Steam, in the "splash'" we will increase our sales a hundred times. We will sell five games a minute. There are 50,000 people who log on every 10 minutes who are exposed to our game. Of the 100 who think oh, this looks interesting and enter our page, maybe 10 end up buying our game.

Coming in the "splash" and gaining exposure, however, relied on having contacts at Valve and knowing a "gatekeeper" who liked your game that you could contact directly when planning a discount. Incidentally, their contact was currently on holiday, thus they had to postpone their next round of discount.

Another way to increase sales and exposure is to manipulate prizing. Many informants had experience with different entry points and were generally disappointed with how little people were willing to pay for a game. An informant from the premium company in charge of monetisation was annoyed that the parents did not see the value of their games. She told me that:

> I was rather angry after Christmas when I checked our sales and saw how little even some of our really great games had sold. So I thought, OK: I'll do a little experiment. I'll put everything out for "free" for 14 days, without any advertisement, and see what happens. And then, the first three days 15.000 copies of one of our most popular game was downloaded. You see?

Similar experiences resonated through the interviews. A game designer from the freemium company stated that: "even though people say they want the premium experience, their wallet says they don't. People will hardly pay 1 dollar for a premium game because they can get hold of free games elsewhere". The CEO stated that: "If you get 1 per cent of the players to spend anything, it's very, very good". He added that the conversion rate was volatile and that where the game was promoted and by whom could affect the rate of paying players. If the game is featured on App Store, the exposure would grow enormously, but the retention rate would decline rapidly as the share of players that just wanted to download it and see what it was would increase. Recommendations from friends worked much better regarding conversion. Their latest game, which at the point of the interview had more than 1.1 million downloads, was still losing them "a lot" of money.

A general problem in the freemium market is that very few players are willing to pay for content, even in hugely successful games such as *Candy Crush Saga* (King), where allegedly only 3 per cent of players pay for content (Nieborg 2015). Which market you operate in is also important, and the average income of the population in a country will naturally influence the willingness to pay for games. According to the CEO from the freemium company, less than 0.1 per cent of players in the Philippines spent any money on their games. Such countries were therefore selected as test markets to try out game features without risking the loss of any potential income.

Almost all the informants describe the current market situation as increasingly challenging due to freemium models, but their notion of how the market works differs. The informants from the freemium company describe freemium games from an almost deterministic perspective, as the "fittest" model in the evolving game market. Informants from the premium company also regard freemium models as a challenge, but are uncertain how, or if, freemium features should be implemented in their own

games, believing that the retail formula still has its merits. Informants from the indie company, on the other hand, speculate whether freemium models may soon be in decline, as players grow tired of increasingly aggressive monetisation models and prefer the undisturbed, immersive game experience.

ARTISTIC VALUES AND ETHICAL CONCERNS

Focusing more distinctly on their own game developments, the informants described a long range of ethical considerations regarding design and monetisation, especially those from the indie and premium company. Design and game content were addressed in the most detail by informants from the latter. As they develop games for children, excessive use of violence and pornography was out of the question, as well as collecting user data. Their CEO also emphasised the importance of being a professional and responsible actor internally, guaranteeing fair working hours and salaries. Accordingly, their games should hold a high, professional standard regarding "gameplay, graphics, sound, or voice acting". They should preferably also be bug free. Their general emphasis of production quality rather than originality or artistic freedom may have come as a result of making most games from other actors' IPs, such as movies and children's books. In this respect they emphasised their responsibility for conserving Scandinavian culture since, as one informant expressed it, "these cultural expressions will die out if they are not available on the platforms where the kids actually are".

The indie company also had ethical guidelines governing game content, such as no use of speculative violence, and design pertaining to monetisation. They were, for instance, sceptical of games where micro transactions would break the flow and described this as flawed or even abusive. As one of the informants described it: "We sometimes joke about it, comparing it to a concert where you stop playing and say: if you pay we will play the next song as well." The group of people who established the company had early on agreed on a set of "core values" centred around artistic freedom. It included remaining in control over their own IP and ensuring that all creative decisions were made within the development team. One of the informants said that, if they should sometime in the future use a publisher, they would demand full artistic freedom. They also refrained from consulting commissions, as this would tap their creative resources. To remind themselves of these values they had earlier displayed them on the opening screen of their PCs when logging on.

The only company without any explicit ethical guidelines was the freemium company, the reason being that the market situation for casual games on mobile platforms was very tough. As one of the informants expressed it: "We cannot launch an ethical game on the App Store. We cannot. Literally cannot. It’s impossible". The nature of the platform was addressed as an important part of the problem: "To be a good mobile game company? You can get away with it on Steam and PC, but apps? Forget it".

Freemium games have earlier received criticism both from game designers and players for being ethically dubious. Zynga's 'Ville games have, for instance, received criticism for containing shallow and addictive game designs coupled with aggressive monetisation (Lewis 2012, Bogost 2015). Casual games have also been described as potentially problematic because they intentionally make people "waste their time", for instance, through repetitive play mechanics, such as grinding (Zagal et al. 2013, Stenros 2018). In stark contrast to this, the CEO from the freemium company explained that they did not want players to play excessively, as this could cause them to become bored with the game and stop playing: "So you have a different approach than in, for instance, MMOs, by including mechanism that push the player out of the game". Energy or other resources that need to be replenished would be typical examples of this. The CEO explained that four or five play sessions lasting around three minutes each day would

be optimal. This is in line with strategies expressed by more prominent actors in the business, such as King, the developer behind *Candy Crush Saga* who described their game as "bitesize brilliance—the perfect way to spend three minutes of free time" (King Digital Entertainment, 2014, p. 79, in Nieborg 2015). When I asked the CEO about quality, he explained that it was of utmost importance to ensure that the game created a varied and exciting experiment that felt meaningful to play both for short sessions and over time, as this would keep the retention rate up.

The three companies have some overlaps concerning artistic values but on a very general level. That the game should be engaging and meaningful is, for instance, expressed by informants in all three companies. The overall impression, however, is that the three companies accentuate different aspects of artistic value. The premium company mainly emphasises production quality, while the indie company puts more weight on artistic freedom. The freemium company, on the other hand, stresses flow and retention, rendering artistic values almost inseparable from economic success. They describe a market situation where the buyers have all the power and where they try their best to cater to their demands. The buyers do not want "quality" in an artistic sense; they want their worth of money, a notion that also is echoed among informants in the premium company. In stark contrast, informants from the indie company emphasise the need to separate artistic and economic concerns, based on the notion that only a genuinely creative idea would survive in the market.

MONETISATION: GAMING OR GAMBLING?

Most of the informants could describe monetisation models they found abusive or unethical. A typical example was game mechanics that would punish the player by withholding earlier earned content if unwilling to pay, such as the Chinese game *Puzzle Dragon* where you traverse a dungeon and collect cards along the way. If you die while fighting off enemies you will lose your cards – but are given the option to buy them back.

All three informants from the premium company explained that their choice of using a premium model was mainly due to having children as a target audience. Their experience was also that parents are sceptical towards micro transactions in games and are worried their children, and in effect themselves, can be exploited economically by hidden costs. They therefore do not use energy systems where energy can be bought for money or "hard currency", even in casual games where this is a common monetisation model. One of the game designers explains that, if he had developed a game where the target costumer was 35+ "I would have implemented daily bonuses and premium currency and the like", suspecting this would increase revenue.

Pay-walls, which have caused controversies elsewhere, were, on the other hand, described as a good solution. If they should experiment with a new monetisation form, this was one they thought would be acceptable for their audience. The employee in charge of monetisation used Mario Run as an example: "you play perhaps 20% of the game for free and pay for the rest. I think that is something parents might understand and is easy to communicate to the market".

A solution that divided the informants was the use of "gambling mechanics", like loot boxes. Loot boxes contain random virtual items that are unknown to the player until after purchase. The opening sequence often builds suspense with visual and auditive effects resembling that of a slot machine. Most of the informants described loot boxes as a way of maximising profit. As one game designer from the freemium company explained:

> The reason they are so common and used is because they hide true cost. If you take a skin and you put it in the shop and you adjust the price until you find the maximum price point. Ten dollars. If you take that same skin and you put it in a loot box you'll find that people are willing to pay many times the same amount for the same skin. Many many. They'll pay 50 dollars for the skin instead. If you put that in the store the skin in the store for 50 dollars then they would never buy it.

The loot box controversy that erupted after the launch of Star Wars: Battlefield II in 2017 led to a world-spanning public debate whether loot boxes were exploitative or even "predatory" (King et al. 2018). This also prompted a large number of academic papers about whether loot boxes were analogous to gambling and hence psychologically harmful (Griffiths 2018, Drummond and Dauer 2018). One strand of the academic debate concerned whether it was possible to separate a harmful from harmless loot box design. King and Delfabbro, for instance, launched the concept "socially responsible game mechanics" where they proposed various measures that could be employed to render loot boxes less abusive, such as creating larger transparency and accuracy of game design, better consumer information and increased industry accountability, all measures pointing directly back to the industry (2018). An attempt to create a demarcation line between acceptable and non-acceptable loot boxes was also a topic during the interviews.

A game designer in the indie company regarded loot boxes as a negative and potentially abusive design form but agreed that some types were acceptable. "I don't think it's unethical to let people pay for cosmetic things, sort of. I think it's cool and I also think that the what makes it difficult if it had been an open store with set prizes. It would be much less popular, I think". He was more concerned that loot boxes were not integral to the game play: "For instance in Heartstone where opening a card deck looks beautifully, right. It's really juicy to open a legendary there. But while the feeling of getting a legendary is great, I have never though that, oh, I want so badly to open cards in Heartstone."

For many of the informants, their view on gambling mechanics had gradually changed over time. All three informants from the freemium company had experience with productions of AAA games and more serious content. Entering a more casual part of the game industry had forced them to transgress what they had earlier regarded as an ethical boundary between gambling and gaming mechanics. One game designer explained that,

> Loot boxes was something we initially were not eager to use. We had a "what you pay is what you get" approach, but then, when you look at the marked, what works and what people actually are earning money on ... over time we have sort of crossed that line.

Their initial reluctance was mainly due to the potential risk of causing adverse psychological effects: "our inner qualms of using loot boxes was because people are getting addicted to gambling, right". This indicates that creating addictive games would be unethical. One of the criticisms raised against freemium games is that a small minority of players develop a compulsive relationship to the game and start spending an excessive amount of money in order to gain access to exclusive content or cut down on levelling time. These so-called "whales" are few in number but account for a substantial part of the income. They are therefore often carefully tended to by game and gambling providers (Schüll 2014). Tending to whales, or concerns for their wellbeing, was, however, not of great concern to the freemium company in this current

study as they had almost no whales. "It hasn't really concerned us. We have rather been concerned about how we can make people spend money on the game in the first place". A notion all the informants shared was a clear idea that monetisation models could influence game design negatively if not executed properly. The extent to which freemium models could be deemed *unethical* varied, however, and the most sceptical were those less inclined to use them, that is, the informants from the indie company. Informants from the freemium company had no ethical restrictions and any claims that loot boxes or other gambling mechanics were unethical were dismissed, the reason being that the vast majority of players were unlikely to spend excessive time or money on their games. It should be emphasized that the way the informants use the term "ethical" here is in an everyday context and not according to more formal definitions of the term. The way I explored it in the interviews was by asking the informants to explain what it meant by way of examples. However, as I will argue, also informants that deny having any ethical responsibility could be described an representing an ethical position when analysed in formal philosophical terms. To briefly illustrate this point, I will provide a rough outline of different ethical frameworks that are relevant.

In philosophy, there are many ways to categorized different ethical schools and theories. One of the distinctions often used is between deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics (Shafer-Landau 2013). Deontology comprises theories generally claiming that humans should oblige to fundamental rules or principles, such as not committing murder. Virtue ethics is a broad term for theories that emphasize the role of a person's character. A virtuous person should strive for acting virtuous in all situations of life and not simply follow rules or try to maximize gains. The term utilitarianism, on the other hand, comprises theories that state that the aim with every action in life should be to maximize the positive effect for the greatest amount of people, regardless whether the action align with certain rules or virtues. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

When analysing the interviews in light of these frameworks, the indie company could be interpreted as representing a deontological view. In their view, they have obligations both to themselves as developers—to follow their artistic values—and their customers––not to allow elements peripheral to the game interfere negatively with the game experience. These ideas are even explicitly formulated as rules or guidelines by members of the company.

Despite the fact that informants from the freemium company explicitly deny ethical responsibilities, they could be said to advocate utilitarianism. The aim to maximise the positive effect for the greatest amount of people would in this case be to utilise a monetisation model that benefits players and developers on equal terms. In their view, manipulating a few players to spend an excessive amount of money would be a marginal concern in light of the positive outcome that the majority would experience.

The premium company is more complicated to categorise as they express statements that can be placed both within deontology and virtue ethics. Seen from a deontological perspective, they emphasize general standards and principles, such as always striving for high production quality. Furthermore, they always refrain from using micro transaction to avoid exploiting children. However, they also express a certain pragmatism, in the sense that they envision a future where freemium models could be used. I a sense, that would be able to change their "rules" if they find a "virtuous" way to do it. The positions of the three companies can be illustrated as in the following table:

Company type	Freemium	Premium	Indie
Claiming ethical responsibility	No	Yes	Yes
Most important aspect of design	Retention rate, flow, loyalty	Production value, preserving culture	Artistic value, originality, immersion
Ethical view	Utilitarianism	Deontology/virtue ethics	Deontology

Table 1: Ethical viewpoints of the three companies

It should be noted that this categorization omits certain differences between informants within each type of company, but is done in order to illustrate the theoretical point that their ethical reasoning can be sorted into widely different ethical frameworks if looked at formally. This also implies that using the term "ethical" perhaps should be operationalized more carefully when "game ethics" or "design ethics" are analysed, than what it is usually done.

CONCLUSION

In this paper eight individuals from three different Norwegian mid-sized game companies have been interviewed about their view on the market and their own monetisation practices linked to ethical and artistic concerns. The interviews show that there are several differences concerning how the informants conceive of the market situation, and that these are largely in line with whichever sector of the game market they target. While all the informants have ambitions to create high quality games, their descriptions of quality differ. The freemium companies predominantly conceptualise quality through terms like retention rate, time-on-device and number of users, interpreting this as confirmation that their games create flow and loyal users. Informants from the premium company, on the other hand, highlight production quality and gameplay, while the indie company more often refers to traditional artistic concepts such as originality, depth and narrative immersion.

Concerning ethics, their view of responsibilities differs, most distinctly between the freemium company and the two others. Informants from the freemium company downplay ethical responsibilities, with reference to the huge amount of existing free or low-price games. They describe the market situation as highly beneficial for the players and equally unfavourable for developers. Despite having more than one million downloads of their latest game, they have no "whales" or excessively high spenders and when describing the intentions behind their own game design, there is little evidence of "dark" intentions. Overall, we see the contours of two different notions of the power relations between the player and developer. While the premium company and indie company state that ethical considerations form the basis of their design, and express ethical concerns about players in general, the freemium developers deny any ethical obligations. They openly state that they need to manipulate players through game design, albeit just enough to persuade them to pay something rather than keep playing for free.

An overall reflection that can be taken from this study is that game designers' ethical reflections as related to monetisation models are influenced by several contextual aspects, such as what game genre they work in, their view of the player or market, and

the overall idea of responsibility that a game designer has in the first place. Furthermore, it shows the important of unpacking what "ethical" means to game designers and producers, as it may, or may not, align with ethical concepts in a more formal sense. This has only briefly been discussed in this paper but is a topic that arguably warrant more in-depth exploration.

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