

Free-to-Play Games: Professionals' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the free-to-play revenue model from the perspective of game professionals. To court larger player audiences and to address their wide willingness-to-pay spectrum, game developers have increasingly adopted the free-to-play revenue model. However, at the same time, worrying concerns over the revenue model have been voiced, deeming it as exploitative and unethical. We investigated this contrast by conducting an interview study. We employed thematic qualitative text analysis process with the data containing 14 interviews with game professionals about their views on the model. The results show that the free-to-play model is something that developers view favorably while it was felt that the public writing about the games can be negative, even hostile. Relatively few ethical problems were seen that would address the whole model while for instance the combination of children and free-to-play was seen as problematic. Even with some concerns at the moment, the future of the free-to-play games was seen bright.

Keywords

Free-to-play, freemium, game industry, attitudes, ethics, future

INTRODUCTION

Free-to-play (F2P) has become an increasingly popular revenue model for the video games industry. A F2P game can be acquired and played free of charge while players are encouraged to buy virtual goods during game play. Utilized on multiple platforms such as gaming consoles, computers and mobile, F2P has found its way into massively multiplayer online (MMO) games, social network games, multiplayer shooter games, mobile casual games, gambling type of games etc. There are several examples of F2P's success within different domains. For the mobile iOS platform, F2P is the dominant revenue model in the top grossing applications chart (Appshopper, 2014). On PC, Team Fortress 2 (Valve, 2007), which was first launched as a retail game in 2007, was re-launched as a F2P game in 2011, resulting in twelvefold increase in revenue (Miller, 2012). The majority of commercial social network games in Facebook are utilizing F2P as well (Paavilainen et al., 2013).

Proceedings of Nordic DiGRA 2014

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Despite the success, the F2P model has also raised controversy and criticism. Some companies have gained a poor reputation from utilizing F2P (Alexander, 2013). The European Union has recently released a press release to investigate challenges in F2P game marketing (European Commission, 2014). F2P gambling games in social networking sites are feared to attract minors towards real money gambling games (King et al., 2014). Academic researchers have also criticized F2P (e.g. Bogost, 2014) and recent research has shown that certain F2P design choices cause playability problems and poor game experiences (Paavilainen et al., 2013; Paavilainen et al., in press; Zagal et al., 2013).

The controversy and criticism mainly arise from the nature of F2P as game developers need to consider how to monetize the players during gameplay. In some cases, this has resulted in exploitative game design where aggressive monetization strategies aim for short-term profits instead of long-term player engagement.

Due to the novelty of the F2P revenue model and the emergent discussion surrounding the phenomenon, we argue that understanding the game industry's perspective is important for acquiring a holistic view on this topical issue. Therefore in this paper we present an interview study on game industry professionals' perspectives towards F2P. For this study we interviewed 14 Finnish game industry professionals from six different companies. This paper presents and discusses four themes based on the interview data:

1. Game industry professionals' attitudes towards F2P
2. Presumed players' attitudes towards F2P
3. Ethics of F2P design
4. Future of F2P games

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first paper to present such qualitative study and it provides interesting insights for both academics and practitioners.

FREE-TO-PLAY REVENUE MODEL

The F2P revenue model can be seen as a form of a larger freemium business model paradigm (Luton, 2013a; Seufert 2014). Sometimes the terms "free-to-play" and "freemium" are used interchangeably (in the video games context) but for clarity, we will use "free-to-play" and its abbreviation F2P throughout this paper when referring to freemium video games.

Contemporary F2P video games appeared in the late 1990s and early 2000s when popular Asian MMO games such as Neopets (JumpStart, 1999) and MapleStory (Nexon, 2003) used the F2P model to gain revenue by selling virtual goods. In social network services, F2P games started to appear after Facebook was opened for third party application developers in 2007 (Mäyrä, 2011). Facebook games became very popular due to the social network integration and F2P revenue model which together provided a viral distribution channel and easy access to browser games. Games like FarmVille (Zynga, 2009), CityVille (Zynga, 2010) and Candy Crush Saga (King, 2012) have gathered millions of players – and also criticism on their game design (Alexander, 2013). Meanwhile games with downloadable clients have started to utilize the F2P revenue model as well.

There are two main reasons for using the F2P model. First, it allows flexible price points for players with different levels of willingness to pay for additional content. Second, it enables a wider range of player segments to access the game. (Paavilainen et al., 2013.) Furthermore, the games-as-service approach enables the developers to iteratively tweak

game mechanics to better address the goals of customer acquisition, retention and monetization. (Hamari & Lehdonvirta, 2010; Hamari & Järvinen, 2011; Hamari, 2011.)

F2P games often feature the double currency model where players can earn soft currency via completing gameplay tasks and buy hard currency with real money. More often than not, the player can convert hard currency to soft currency but not vice versa. In some F2P games, the player might be rewarded with small amounts of hard currency from time to time. While soft currency is used in the game to buy basic items related to gameplay, hard currency gives access to premium content which is often exclusive to paying players only.

METHODS AND DATA

The objective of the study was to acquire rich qualitative data about the attitudes and ethics revolving around the F2P model. To achieve this, game professionals were interviewed.

Six Finnish game companies were selected for the study. The game companies covered mobile games, AAA games and money games (gambling). The game companies were asked to select the interviewees by themselves. Each company was asked to find 2-3 persons to take part in the study. Altogether 14 interviews were conducted by four researchers.

All of the interviewees filled a pre-study survey, which charted background information. The interviewees had game industry experience for an average of about nine years, varying from 1 to 20 years. There were various roles involved: managers, developers, designers, artists and analysts. 10 out of the 14 interviewees had worked on F2P games and all of them were male.

The actual interviews were conducted in person at the companies' own spaces. The interviews took 1 hour 13 minutes on average, varying from 53 to 100 minutes. A couple of the interviews had to be cut short when the interviewee had to proceed to other work duties. The interviews were semi-structured, thematic interviews. They were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The transcribed interviews were analyzed with Atlas.ti software by the research team. We followed a thematic qualitative text analysis process as described by Kuckartz (2014). The findings were categorized into four groups: "Game industry professionals' attitudes", "Presumed players' attitudes", "Ethics" and "The future". The results concerning these themes are presented in the next chapter. Quotations are used as examples of typical thoughts or to outline the variety of opinions. The quotations include information of the informants: the area of the company of the professional, his current position in that company, and if he had work experience with F2P games.

RESULTS

Game Professionals' Attitudes

Game professionals have mixed attitudes towards F2P games. Generally these games were seen in a positive light, but also conflicting and down-right negative aspects arose from the interviews.

The positive attitudes revolved around many aspects. The fact that the games are free to try and play was seen as a great benefit, and playing the games was seen as a fun pastime.

“It’s nice that you can try [the game] and you don’t have to pay anything for that joy yet.” – gambling, game designer, F2P: no

The model was compared to the more traditional model in many occasions, and the pricing of the current purchasable games, 60–70 euros, was viewed as high for a game you do not have the chance to play first. In F2P games you can try the game and then decide if you want to pay for it or not. In that respect it was seen as an even better and fairer model.

Furthermore, paying would not commit the player to continue to pay in the future, but everyone can decide how much they are willing to pay, and at which stage. It was also stated that F2P games have to be good to get people to continue to play them and to pay for them, whereas traditional games could be bad and still get the players’ money.

Similarly, it was noted that F2P games are often developed forward after the launch. Other games make most of their profit right away, and there is not a similar interest to keep evolving them. F2P games have to earn the money after the player has already made the acquisition decision.

When talking about negative issues, aggressive monetization was generally seen as bad or as a sign of a bad game and the way of greedy companies:

“Some of the companies seem to be designing games purely to make money. You can see it immediately when you start the game and it doesn’t really have any content.” – mobile, data scientist, F2P: yes

However, one interviewee did note that at the same time aggressiveness was something that seemed to work at the moment, so you had to be careful not to reject it completely. It was also something that had changed according to the professionals – F2P games had become a bit less aggressive.

Clone games and poor game design were seen as problems. It seems that the F2P model has had a relatively big portion of abuse and bad design, and this was explained at least partly because of the success of the model, drawing copycats and seekers of quick profits; but then again, it was pointed out that same goes for anything else that is as successful.

One of the biggest criticisms was aimed at pay-to-win, which means that the players with the most money to use get unfair advantage over players who do not use money. Paywalls, points that stop the advancement if the player does not pay, were also seen as negative.

“I have never much liked the thought that we go to this pay-to-win kind of world, where one might not succeed or proceed in the game very well or playing isn’t that much fun if one doesn’t pay small sums of money all the time.” – mobile, artist/AD/project manager, F2P: no

The general view went as far that everything in the game should be possible to be achieved without paying – at least in theory. If everything was achievable through playing, the game was seen as fairer – which in turn could actually make the player to eventually pay more gladly as well.

The negative points were mostly aimed only at a part of the games, and there is an immense difference between the games inside the revenue model. Some professionals were worried

that with the F2P model, the game design is guided to a certain direction, and that games are designed on the basis of how much money they can make instead of creating good games. Others noted that while there are the games and game companies that only have profits in sight, there are also quality games offering fun experiences – for free.

There seems to be a difference between the attitudes of those who work with F2P games and those who have never developed them, and the more negative attitudes mainly came from the latter group. The work with F2P games had sometimes changed the personal attitudes into more positive ones. Not one of the interviewees working with F2P games saw working with these types of games as something unpleasant or negative; on the contrary, working with the F2P model was seen as an interesting challenge.

Business-wise, F2P model was seen as the most optimal choice at the moment, at least on the mobile market. Almost all of the top-grossing games on App Store are currently F2P. The model was even seen almost as the “necessary evil”, as one of the interviewees phrased it. Even the companies not currently at the F2P business had to have considered it in one way or another, and some had plans on entering the business in the near future.

Professionals on Player Attitudes

When talking about what kind of attitudes the game professionals have noticed or presume there to be towards F2P games, it was evident that the attitudes seemed to be fairly negative. It was said that people with negative attitudes do not even touch the games even though they would be free to try.

The professionals saw the discussion as very polarized and in the control of a small loud minority. On the internet opposition was said to be brutal – even a mention of a game being F2P is usually greeted with fierce opposition, even contempt. Sometimes the aggressive opposition and condemning of all F2P games solely on their revenue model was seemed as unjustified, even unfair.

“Every time you see something written about free-to-play games or a new game is published, for example Plants vs. Zombies 2, which was a highly anticipated game, people just go crazy. A lot of hate writing emerges just because of the fact that it’s a free-to-play game.” – mobile, game designer, F2P: yes

The loudest opposition had been noted to come from hardcore or core gamers, who are used to a different kind of models and games. F2P games differ completely from other games, which either cost a certain amount of money or are truly free. It was noted that the gamers are afraid that the “real” games will suffer or disappear because of the ever-growing F2P trend. Curiously, at the same time it was noted that this same core audience is the source of the biggest consumption in F2P games.

It was suspected that one of the reasons for such opposition was simply opposing change. Another speculated reason for the negative attitudes lies in the history of F2P games – early F2P games were aggressive in their monetization and shallow in their gameplay. Zynga’s games were mentioned as something that has had a permanent impact and given a certain type of stigma to the whole F2P industry that still has not faded. Even frustration arose from the fact that it is still the assumption that current games have not changed from that time. Another similar suggested reason was the sheer amount of poorly designed and aggressively monetized games still around.

There seem to be exceptions to the rule, however. According to the game professionals, more hardcore F2P games get much less backlash than casual ones. Why this is was not an easy question to answer. There are a handful of popular hardcore games that are considered good; Team Fortress 2, League of Legends (Riot Games, 2009) and World of Tanks (Wargaming.net, 2010) were mentioned here. At the same time it was noted that this is not a model that everyone can copy, as there is space for only a few games of this magnitude on the market.

“The easy answers [for good F2P games] are Team Fortress 2, League of Legends and World of Tanks. But when you have a dominant position in your field and you have a huge amount of players, it won’t be a problem to make the game profitable. [--] There is such a small amount of games that can do this, so in that sense they are a bit bad alternatives. [--] If everyone would copy this, there would still be a small handful, three games, in the top.” – AAA, head of design, F2P: yes

Not all of the attitudes the professionals had encountered were negative, but positive attitudes did not seem to rise as much as the critique. However, it was obvious to some of the interviewees that there is a big audience out there that enjoys playing these games. F2P games are not the only ones receiving critique, and in one case it was even suspected that the high price of premium games is sometimes even a bigger target for complaining.

The attitudes seem to have changed. It was speculated that nowadays it is more acceptable to pay for virtual goods, and one suggested reason for this was that it has become more commonplace in general to pay for digital content, both in games and in other goods, such as ebooks.

Some game professionals want to fight against the bad reputation of F2P games by showing how good these games can be. The games are getting better all the time, but getting there is not always easy. Some of the professionals mentioned that especially the balance between fun and profit is difficult to find.

One way to help with attitudes is simply to take care of customers. Some of the companies put great efforts on customer support, such as being present on forums and answering questions. The players value that their questions and problems are taken care of. Changing the attitudes for other than the players of the game was seen as substantially harder process, and maybe not even such a useful battle to fight.

Ethical issues

When discussing the ethics of F2P games, the model as such was not seen as unethical, but individual games and game companies might have acted unethically. This again, was defended by the success of the model, drawing all kinds of fortune-seekers:

“Every time this kind of gold rush phenomenon is born – that “now someone made millions with free-to-play games, let’s go and do those since there is easy money” – some go overboard.” – mobile, product lead, F2P: yes

Some game professionals saw F2P games as ethical as games with a more traditional model. In some cases it was considered to be more unethical to make a bad game, advertise it well and sell it with 60 euros than to ask money within a game when you do not even have to pay if you decide not to.

It was stated in several occasions that making money with games does not differ from any other industry in some sense, and it might even feel weird that games are under such surveillance when other consumption is not. However, the games do have their characteristic features that makes marketing and maximizing profits in games feel bad in some, perhaps hardly explainable way:

“Of course business is based on maximizing profits and everybody does market research and analyzes consumer behavior. I don’t know, when it comes to the game market it just feels so... devious.” – mobile, designer/producer, F2P: yes

Milking the paying players as much as possible even if they were willing to do so was seen as morally questionable. In a perfect world, the paying would be divided more equally than concentrating on small minority of big spenders:

“I’d rather take a little bit of money from everyone than a lot of money from a small group of people. That would be kind of a rule of thumb in some sense if you could design a game in a perfect world. But at the moment no such revenue model has been found where you could take a little bit from everyone. Rather it goes fast to the point where you are trying to get as much as you can from a small amount of people so it would cover for the rest who don’t pay for the game.” – AAA, business development manager, F2P: yes

Some professionals compared F2P games to other hobbies. Paying for playing might be cheaper than a night at a bar with friends. F2P games were also compared to other forms of media. Game professionals pondered if games have ethical sides any better than for example the film industry.

However, it was noted that the combination of children and F2P is ethically problematic. The concepts of money might not yet be clear to children. This causes a problem in designing games for such an audience and it causes even a bigger problem for the parents whose device the child is using. Some notions were given about the parents’ responsibility and keeping the passwords safe, so a child could not buy anything without a permission.

It was also noted that at least some of the games are already clearly marketed to adults, and the games can even have age restrictions in their user conditions. To help with for instance parents who let children play F2P games, in-app purchases can be prevented from the settings and some games even remind the users of this possibility. If some product is bought multiple times within short amount of time, one interviewee mentioned that in some cases their game asks for additional confirmation for the purchase for example in the form of a password.

Another case that evoked discussion was spending large amounts of money. It was pondered if spending thousands of euros on a game made the game or the model more unethical. In the end, this issue divided the professionals. Some agreed that spending more than you can afford might be problematic, while others pointed out that amounts are always subjective; what is a big amount for someone could be pocket money for someone else:

“When a player uses tens of thousands of euros in a game, it sounds to me quite odd and unethical, but you have to see it from that person’s point of view. Maybe it’s nothing to him, everything is relative. In my opinion, the ethical question lies in the situation where someone who has a tendency for gambling is used against

his will because he has this tendency.” – AAA, business development manager, F2P: yes

Getting people addicted to a game and paying against their own will was also brought up, but then again, addictive gameplay could also be seen as a positive quality. If the game is addictive, it must be good. On the other hand, using some people’s addictive tendency was seen as unethical. Those who worked with money games or gambling did not see their work as unethical. Because gambling is regulated by authorities, for them it was ethical enough if they just followed the rules set by regulators. Compared to other game companies, gambling companies have more explicit boundaries to guide their development processes. External rules are not necessarily just annoying, but can lead to creative results.

The game professionals do come across some conflicting development solutions. It was hypothesized that in some companies managers could order to put something in the game that the developer would feel uncomfortable with. However, none of the interviewees had been in this situation. Sometimes there had been situations where doing something specific could have brought more profit, but going for the bigger immediate profit would have been a bad decision in the longer run, so it had not been implemented. In one occasion, an interviewee described a situation where he might have implemented an unwise feature if not of the team’s notions:

“Sometimes even I have had slightly contradictory ideas but then someone from the team yelps that no, this is not good. And then I have realized that it’s true, this is without a doubt a bit bad, and then we haven’t executed it.” – mobile, game designer, F2P: yes

When thinking about the solutions to the problem points in ethics, there were many suggestions on how F2P games can be designed in a responsible way. One way is to make it more evident and visible that even though the game is free, it includes voluntary in-app purchases. The game should also state clearly what the player is paying for and what he/she is getting in return. The decision to pay or refuse to pay is then player’s to make.

Restrictions were also suggested as one solution. It was noted that none of the F2P games seem to have any customizable limits for using money, whereas for instance in the gambling world this is usually possible. One suggestion was to catch unusual spending and contact the player if deemed necessary. This kind of player behavior detection and information feedback to players combined with individually binding limit setting is common in responsible gambling policies, especially in online environments. Gambling companies have dealt with similar issues for a long time than what F2P companies are dealing right now. Some of the solutions from responsible gambling policies could be utilized to F2P gaming in order to protect vulnerable groups, whether they are children or adults with gaming addiction.

Future

One way to change the earlier mentioned negative player attitudes is simply time; the belief that attitudes towards F2P games will change to more positive is strong among game professionals. As playing in general will become even more accepted as a hobby and as a part of everyday life, F2P games continue to become more ordinary and commonplace as well. The professionals seem to believe that this happens through “natural” evolution without the need for external regulation.

The professionals agreed that F2P is not going away; they have secured their place in the game industry. At the same time it was believed, or at least hoped, that F2P would not take over the world either and purchasable games would have their place as well:

“Someone might be afraid that all games will turn to the free-to-play model and then there won’t be any big RPGs. But I don’t believe that, I think there will be always buyers and makers for them.” – mobile, data scientist, F2P: yes

There were worries that as people are now used to playing games for free, is there any road back and are the new generations even more unwilling to pay for their games in the future.

The quality of F2P games was believed to get better as players learn not to stick with the bad games. The problems were believed to decrease; it was believed that the most aggressive monetization and worst ethical problems will be in the margin of the phenomenon. The game mechanics for F2P games were expected to become more varied. Game professionals were eager to see for instance how games with strong narratives could use the F2P revenue model without ruining the game experience.

It was believed that these are just the first steps for F2P games. The channels through which these games can be played will become broader and new revenue models will be invented. The less successful models will slowly disappear while the profitable models will stick around. Not just the revenue model, but the whole business model was expected to slowly evolve.

The platforms have had a major role and will have that in the future as well. There was a notion that the way the App Store works currently favors F2P model more than for example free demos with upgradable full games. If the platforms change, the industry is greatly influenced as well.

One hope for the future was that the threshold to pay money inside the game would decrease. This would bring the conversion rate of F2P games to a healthier level. The ways to pay and different purchase options were expected to increase. Franchises and brands were expected to continue to have more significance in the future, and in-game purchases might not be as crucial for the game’s revenue as at the moment.

One hope for the future among the professionals was the diversity of F2P games. At the moment only the F2P game hits make money. Most F2P games are targeted for the masses and the hit games and their mechanics are currently copied aggressively. Game professionals were hoping that in the future the less known F2P games could survive.

“I think we’re in the beginning of this process of growing up, and some have succeeded. And then everybody is copying it. [--] But I think in the future when the situation is more stabilized and the customer base is wider, then we are brave enough to try a bit more exceptional things also.” – mobile, data scientist, F2P: yes

DISCUSSION

The interviewed game professionals had relatively positive attitudes towards F2P games. This is the case even though not all the interviewees are involved in the F2P model in their work. While some professionals had some conflicting or suspicious attitudes, the most negative views discussed within the game professional community elsewhere (Saltsman,

2011) did not emerge from this data. However, the conflicting attitudes suggest that there is something in these games that makes them problematic from some viewpoints.

The mainly positive attitudes of the professionals already in the F2P industry could be explained by the threat of cognitive dissonance. According to Leon Festinger (1956), people aim for internal consistency. Why would you work with F2P games if it was unpleasant or unethical? This psychological distress can be relieved by changing your negative attitude into positive. This could also in part explain the defensive stances the professionals took against critique.

Games are typically designed to be entertaining and fun experiences. F2P games are in a difficult position in this respect, as they need to persuade the player to pay money during game play, even though it would be possible to continue playing for free. Therefore many games deliberately add hindrances or decelerators that can then be skipped with money. These kinds of intentional negative effects for the players are called “dark patterns” (Zagal et al. 2013). Bringing this type of thinking inside games, a form of entertainment, may feel wrong, as one of the interviewees said.

The ethics of having to purchase an expensive game without the option to try it first was questioned multiple times by the game professionals. It was noted that therefore poor games can still make money on the retail side, whereas in F2P the games have to be good to bring revenue. However, purchasing a retail game is rarely done without any knowledge of the game. Word-of-mouth, reviews and demos are important factors when buying a retail game (Callagher, 2011). Furthermore, second-hand sales and discounts push the price lower. On the other hand, being able to acquire the game for free does not guarantee that “poor” games would not acquire revenue (Blumental, 2013).

While aggressive monetization, paywalls and pay-to-win are the usual faults of the model and used as arguments against it, it seems that the game professionals we interviewed, including the F2P developers themselves, agree with these features being negative and try to avoid them in their own games. Instead of characteristics of F2P, it can be speculated that these are the marks of bad (or past) F2P games.

Nonetheless, these marks keep influencing the audience’s views on the F2P games. The interviewees have encountered really negative player attitudes towards the model. It seems at least from the perspective of the professionals that a lot of people still think about FarmVille and Zynga when someone mentions F2P. As the games have developed a lot since the early days, it is understandable that polarized opinions can feel unfair.

Professionals saw relatively few ethical problems with the model compared to how much it has been under discussion concerning the F2P model elsewhere (Saltsman, 2011). There were, however, a couple of points that caused some pondering.

The combination of children and F2P games was seen as a clear problem, which has been brought up by other professionals as well (Engelbrecht Fisher, 2013). In some cases the responsibility of the parents was called for. There have been several cases where a child has used substantial amounts of money without their parents knowing (Curtis, 2013; Martinson, 2013), so the problem is real and should be remedied in one way or another. While games have their share of the responsibility, the platforms are also a center of the problem. Recently, Apple has been forced to offer refunds in cases where the child has

used money without their parents' consent and also forced to change the way the purchases are made on the platform (Federal Trade Commission, 2014).

The second problem point was the high spenders. Is it a problem that someone spends thousands of dollars on one F2P game? This was a question that had no final answer. It was presumed that the situation differs, namely if the spender can afford the loss of money, and if he/she is suffering from addiction or something that is making him/her spend the money. The high spenders, or the "whales", is an issue that has not been yet sufficiently researched. Recently Nicolas Ducheneaut and Nick Yee introduced the results of their study, where they found that whales did not usually make impulse purchases, but rather made rational, long-term decisions with their investments (Sinclair 2014).

The gambling industry has previously dealt with similar issues than F2P today. Responsible gambling policies, programs and tools have been developed to protect vulnerable groups and to provide information to all players (Blaszczynski et al., 2011). Many practices, such as pre-set spending limits, player behavior detection and information providing tools, could be implemented to F2P games technical difficulties. Responsible gaming policies could work even as competitive advantage between F2P companies in player acquisition (Gainsbury et al., 2013).

When discussing the future, the views were positive. The F2P industry was seen to be getting broader, better, and more versatile, but still leaving room for the more traditional revenue models. This view is not unshared, as similar views of the future has been forecasted before as well (Luton, 2013b). The future of F2P games seems bright.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has investigated the F2P revenue model within the game industry from the perspective of game professionals. We interviewed 14 game professionals from six Finnish game companies about their attitudes towards F2P, presumed players' attitudes, ethics concerning the model and the future of F2P games.

The professionals' attitudes did vary, but generally the F2P model was seen in a positive light. In contrast, when it comes to perceived player attitudes, they were seen as quite negative, sometimes unfairly so. Still, there is a big, silent audience which obviously likes to play these games. F2P games were seen in some ways as ethical as other games and other forms of media, even though they had some characteristic weaker points.

The future of the F2P games seems rather good, both for the developers and the players, as it was believed that both games and attitudes are getting better. However, while the belief in better, more versatile and ethically less dubious games was strong, getting there might not be easy. The F2P developers are in a tight spot: balancing between a fun game and getting revenue and increasing the conversion rate are tough problems to battle with. There are some other clouds in the sky; if the new generations of players get used to free games, will this be the only way to make games in the future?

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