

What's My Method? A Game Show on Games

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Abstract

What's My Method? is the game show that asks the question, "How do you user-test games?" The goal of this session is to highlight important differences between user research methods for games and productivity software in an instructive and engaging format. Emotion measurement scenarios are presented to the contestants and audience as questions in a fictional game show. Three games researchers "compete" to propose the best methodology to research thorny questions from real games. The audience acts as the judge, deciding how many points to award contestants for their answers.

Categories and subject descriptors: K.8.0 [Personal Computing] General---Games; H.5.1 [Information Interfaces And Presentation]: Multimedia Information Systems---Evaluation/methodology; H.5.2 [Information Interfaces And Presentation]: User Interfaces---Graphical user interfaces (GUI).

General Terms: Experimentation, Measurement.

Keywords: Usability Methods, Fun, Games, Hedonics, Playability.

INTRODUCTION

It is clear that evaluating game enjoyment requires special goals, measures, and methods. Game developers require more systematic and reliable methods to collect and analyze game characteristics than product sales, press reviews, and market surveys. Effective methods must be observable, salient to the player, relevant to the player's experience of fun, apply to a wide variety of game genres and hardware platforms, and be adjustable by the game designer. Emerging research suggests that enjoyment can also be a differentiator for productivity applications. A more complete understanding of how to increase fun in games will also aid research on enjoyment of productivity software.

Games and Productivity Offer Similar Interaction

Games and productivity software share many traits. Game tasks are supported through features. Games have common GUI elements, such as menus, dialogs, control

cursors, and text entry. It is reasonable to expect that user's perceptual, cognitive and memory limits also effect game performance. Game challenges require clear and consistent feedback. The exact relationship between these factors and enjoyment remains to be studied in detail.

Games and Productivity Offer Different Experiences

User centered design methods apply to certain aspects of games, but it is important to recognize that games support a different kind of experience than information or productivity software. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Productivity and Games have different goals.

Productivity	Games
Task completion	Entertainment
Eliminate errors	Fun to beat obstacles
External reward	Intrinsic reward
Outcome-based rewards	Process is its own reward
Assumes technology needs to be humanized	Assumes humans need to be challenged
Intuitive	New things to learn
Reduce workload	Increase workload

Satisfaction from task completion is a different quality than "having fun." Measures of game quality focus more on positive emotional responses than on negative ones. Unlike productivity, offering a certain outcome and complexity well within user skills makes a game boring not satisfying. Gameplay requires goals that are difficult rather than easy to achieve. Making something as simple as possible removes the very things that characterize a game experience. In short a 100% success rate eliminates most of the aspects that make a game fun. [1]

It is clear that educational and commercial electronic games can benefit from user feedback. Traditional usability measures such as discount iterative testing, time on task, error tracking, heuristics, and satisfaction surveys have already improved the user experience of games. [2] However, usability methods do not improve the quality of all aspects of the player's game experience such as arousal. [3] As the focus of HCI shifts from "Interface Design" toward "User Experience," more accurate taxonomies for internal experiences and methods to measure them are being developed. In turn the application of these

tools will allow us to create more deeply enjoyable player experiences.

GAME SHOW STRUCTURE

Presentation Format

What's My Method? is a trivia-style game show where contestants respond to multi-media posed questions and the audience votes. The show has a host and three contestants. Contestants compete in one speed round and two essay rounds. Each question will make an important point about game testing methods.

In the essay rounds each contestant answers one question individually. Each essay question is posed by a brief video clip of real people interacting with a game or entertainment product in a lab or field setting. The audience scores each contestant's answer by a simple show of hands. In the speed round contestants compete against one another to answer as many multiple choice questions as they can. The contestant with the most points wins a "Fabulous Prize".

Themes

Games must be usable. Like productivity applications, games require mastery of features to achieve an objective. This theme highlights how traditional measures of efficiency and effectiveness, satisfaction surveys, and heuristic evaluations apply to games.

Games must be challenging. Contrary to common usability conventions, games create enjoyment via by challenging the user; often taxing the user's memory and performance limits. This theme asks contestants to identify test methods to improve challenge, strategy, and problem solving.

Games Must Be Fun. Satisfaction may come from accomplishing a difficult task, but enjoyment may also be derived from pure aesthetics or sidesplitting humor. This theme covers the methods required to measure fun.

Methods

Traditional qualitative measures such as heuristics, time on task, error rates, and satisfaction surveys are vital in any evaluation intended to improve a design.

Biometric methods infer emotional states through empirical measures of biological phenomena such as arousal, control pressure, and Galvanic Skin Response.

Qualitative measures collect players' emotional and cognitive responses to games through direct laboratory and field observation with methods such as think aloud, facial gestures, body language, and user journals.

PARTICIPANTS

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Show Hosts

Master of Ceremonies: Jun Kim, Usability Engineer at Microsoft Game Studios (junkim@microsoft.com). Mystery Guest: Steve Cornett, Masters Student, Indiana University (steve@stevecornett.com). Score Keeper: Bill Fulton, Founder and Manager of the User-testing Group at Microsoft Game Studios (billfu@microsoft.com).

Contestants

Traditional Usability Methods: Heather Desurvire, Principal of Behavioristics, Inc. (heather33@attbi.com). Biometric Methods: Jonathan Sykes, Head of the eMotion Laboratory at Glasgow Caledonian University (jon.sykes@gcal.ac.uk). Qualitative Methods: Nicole Lazzaro, President and Founder of XEODesign®, Inc. (nlazzaro@xeodesign.com)

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