
Intentional Stay

Japanese RPG player's unusual behavior

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Abstract

Keeping the motivation to play is important in game design. Games are made so that the players can play all contents provided. However it is common the players quit before finishing games. Our investigation was focused on “Why players quit playing games”. The experiments were conducted in Japan. We found out an unusual behavior in Role Playing Game (RPG) players. They decided to stop playing a game right before the story of that game ended, because they wanted to remain in the world of the game. We named this behavior “Intentional Stay”. According to the quantitative survey we applied, this behavior was noticed in 13.88% of Japanese game players.

We consider that this behavior depends on emotional bonds that players develop with the game and according to the results of our study, this was so far observed only in Japanese players. There is a concept in Japanese called “Zanshin” which is similar to this behavior. This consists of maintaining a state of consciousness to the action even after it is over. It is also an act of keeping good memories after that. In our analysis it was demonstrated that the Intentional Stay exists due to the aesthetics similar to *Zanshin*. They stop playing to keep mentally the state of playing the game continuously, in order to gain the satisfaction that they will always be with the game.

Keywords: Digital Games, Game Culture, Japanese RPG

1 Introduction

The most popular game genre in Japan is RPG [1]. A lot of progress has been made on the RPG genre in Japan in order to make the narratives enjoyable [2]. Some of the most popular Japanese RPG (JRPG) are Dragon Quest (Dragon Warrior) series and Final Fantasy series [3, 4]. In ordinary JRPGs, the strongest enemy usually is called "Last-Boss" and it appears at the end of the game. It's common that in games of this genre, when players defeat the Last-Boss, the goal of the game is achieved and the story of that game comes to an end.

In 2014, we conducted a qualitative survey about the reasons for abandoning a game. Our main subjects for the research were Japanese people [5]. We found an uncommon behavior on JRPG players intentionally dropping out of a game before fighting the Last-Boss. We named this behavior "Intentional Stay" and confirmed the existence of it from the results we got from the quantitative survey and interviews.

2 Related Work

Research on motivation of game play is common in the computer learning [6, 7]. There are also so many studies related Massively Multiplayer Online games on the motivation create [8, 9]. On the other hand, regarding to drop out from the

game playing, there is only for the changes in lifestyle but no general research [10].

3 Preliminary Research

In 2014, we conducted a qualitative investigation about the causes of dropping out from playing games among Japanese players [5]. 64 reasons were obtained from the analysis of 1553 answers by tag classification and Grounded Theory Approach [11]. The 64 reasons are shown below:

- Change in lifestyle
Players could not continue playing even If they wanted to, due to lifestyle changes such as: relocation, admission, marriage, employment, childbirth and so on.
- Loss of hardware or service
Players stopped playing due to events of force majeure such as: hardware trouble or loss, the end of online service, not covered by update and so on.
- Uncomfortable to play
Players cannot continue playing in a fun way due to feel the gap from their hobbies and diversions.
- Mismatch of the world or narrative
Players lost interest in the game, because they could not

accept the game world or settings such as narrative or character.

- New game system
Players did not continue because they tried to play but could not get used to the new game systems such as: mechanics, dynamics, controller, UI and so on.
- Too Scary
Players lost the courage and could not continue playing, because the content of the game become too scary for them, e.g. Horror games.
- Grotesque
Players felt unpleasant and could not continue playing, due to graphic expressions such as: grotesque, dirty, splatter and so on.
- Dislike
Players felt uncomfortable and stopped playing, due to appearance of the things they dislike in the game, such as certain insects or items.
A typical example of this reason is a cockroach. The screenshot of the cockroach appearance in "Animal Crossing: New Leaf" is shown in Figure 1 [12, 13].



Figure 1. The cockroach appearance in "Animal Crossing: New Leaf", ©Nintendo

- Charging required to progress
Players dropped out from the game, because it is necessary to spend money in order to advance in the game, and they did not consider it was worth it.
- Charging player's advantage
Players lost motivation to continue playing, because paying money or long time playing have an advantage compared to the player's skills improvement process.
- No charging effect
Even if players were charged money, they gave up playing because they could not compete with the high skilled or long term players.
- Selection extortion
Players lost interest in the game due to compulsive choices in the game and they felt their will was ignored, such as selecting character and changing jobs in RPG.
- Contents not enough
Players gradually ceased playing game because they felt that the difficulty is extremely low or the content quantity is not enough.
- Unreasonable production

Players lost interest in the game, because they could not accept unreasonable events such as dying even when playing flawlessly.

- High difficulty
Players could not go forward due to high difficulty.
- Strong boss-enemy
Players dropped out because they reached their limit, such as not being able to defeat a strong boss, could not complete the difficult quest and so on.
- Solo play in multiplayer game
It is impossible to play alone, because it is a premise to play with multiplayer.
- Not enough description
Players gave up to continue playing, because there is not enough explanation, about what to do.
- Information not enough
Players did not continue playing because the information for procedure was not provided and they easily got lost while playing.
- Erroneous selection in game
Players leave the game without play again when there was an error in the important selection during the game.
- Could not finish
Players gave up to continue playing because they were not able to accomplish an important task and they could not recover.
- Bug
Players could not go forward due to a bug or an error of the program.
- Level difference compared to others
Players dropped out from the game, because they compared themselves with other players' power, and felt they could not win.
- Shocking event
It was difficult for players to continue playing due to the shocking event such as death of an important character, knowing a shocking fact and so on.
A typical example of this reason is death of Aerith Gainsborough in "Final Fantasy VII" [14]. She was a heroine player character loved by players, and her sudden death in the early part of the story affected many players. The screenshot of the scene of Aerith's death is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The scene of Aerith's death ©Square-Enix

- Give up against boss evolution
Players gave up to continue playing, because the defeated boss was immediately evolving after resurrection and killed them.
- Unexpected contents
Players lost interest in the game, because the game content was different from their prior expectations.
- Fatigue
Players did not continue playing by their fatigue such as falling asleep during play.
- Physical limit
Players could not continue playing due to physical limitations such as: pain, cramp, myalgia, tenosynovitis and so on.
- Simple task continuous
Players could not continue playing because they felt boredom due to monotonous play.
- Reach personal goal
Players dropped out from the game, because they achieved their own goal.
- Resignation
Players dropped out from the game because they felt the limit of their own abilities.
- Insight into future playing
Players lost interest in the game because they were gained insight into the future development of the game story.
- Spoiler
Players lost motivation to continue playing due to "spoilers".
- Look satisfaction to somebody's playing
Players lost interest in playing game because they felt satisfied with external information of the game such as: play movies, magazines, net news, and so on.
- Long playing time
Players left the game because they played for too long.
- Time management required
Players dropped out because they suffered from time consuming tasks such as they had to play every few hours for stamina gain.
- Bad UI
Players gave up to continue playing because they felt stress that the UI was not easy to understand or to operate.
- Bad operation feeling
Players gave up to continue playing because they could not operate as they want.
- Progress slowly
Players lost motivation to continue playing because the progress of the game is too slow.
- Low occurrence of required elements
Players could not continue playing without a required item or event, because these probability of occurrence were too low.
- Luck only
Players gave up to continue playing, because they had bad luck but could go forward only due to good luck.
- Irrational matching

Players dropped out from the game because they felt the matching of opponent was not appropriate for example strong matchup or the same continuously.

- Earnest opponents
Players felt uncomfortable and stopped playing, because there were the earnest groups or the unspoken rules in multiplayer games.
- Troublesome relationships
Players felt unpleasant human relations or dialogue, and could not continue playing in such as online multiplayer games.
- Community
Players gradually ceased playing game because they could not adapt well to existing communities.
- Online depopulation
Players could not continue playing because there were not any other players even though it was a network game.
- Friends dropped out
Players lost motivation to continue playing because the friend who they were playing with, left the game.
- Complicated mechanics
Players could not go forward because the game mechanics were too complicated to understand.
- Complicated dynamics
Players could not control and gave up to continue playing because the game dynamics were too complicated to operate.
- Unrealistic AI
Players left the game because they could not accept the behavior of NPC controlled by unrealistic AI.
- Unreasonable setting of parameters
Players left the game because they could not accept the unreasonable setting of parameters such as: hit points, power, speed, armor class and so on.
- Repetition
Players lost motivation to continue playing because the repetition of same procedure was needed in every play.
- Start over
Players lost motivation to restart playing because they had to start over if fails, including the return to save point.
- Hardware installation
Players did not restart because they felt bother to prepare for example: hardware installation, controller connection, system update and so on.
- Excessive work
Players gave up to continue playing because the excessive work that was needed to go forward.
- Blank
Players did not restart if they suspended playing for reasons not related to the game and time passed.
- Burnout
Players left the game because their passion for playing burned out and they did not need to continue.
- **Intentional stay before the last boss**
Players stopped to continue playing because they did not want to leave the game. If the scenario of the game

progressed to the end, also the game was over and they should leave the game world.

We focused on this reason in the research. A typical example of this case is in the major Japanese RPG such as: Final Fantasy series, The Legend of Zelda series, Pokémon series and so on.

- Do other tasks before ending
Players stopped playing before the end of main story in order to execute the unfinished side quests, but did not restart.
- Bad influence on real life
Players left the game with their will, because there were bad influence on real life such as the impact on their family, job, school, health and so on.
- Many notification
Players felt uncomfortable and stopped playing because automatic message of SNS or stamina-based games were too many.
- Wasteful spending
Players lost motivation to continue playing when they felt it is a wasteful spending of time or money.
- Shame
Players left the game when they felt ashamed by their own mental growth or the presence of partners.
- 3D motion sickness
Players gave up to continue playing when they felt discomfort caused due to visually motion sickness in such as 3D content.

3 Method

We analyzed the "Intentional Stay" on players based on a quantitative investigation of elements clarified by 2014's survey and the interview comments.

The investigation was conducted in the form of questionnaire using internet. We used a method in which players had to check a list of reasons for stop playing games.

4 Result

The investigation was conducted in 2015 in Japan. We explained about the investigation and called people using Twitter, Facebook and game news websites. 2,464 people responded and participated in the survey. Most of the participants of our survey were people that play games regularly. Details about the respondents can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Details about the respondents

Age	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	Unknown	
under 19	63	33	1	97
20-29	489	281	6	776
30-39	588	255	18	861
40-49	561	95	17	673
50 over	30	22	1	53
Unknown	1	3	0	4
Total	1,732	689	43	2,464

Table 2 shows the classification by reason of the percentage of respondents who abandoned games that they were playing. Data is sorted in descending order by percentage.

Table 2 Percentage of players that abandoned a game they were playing classified by reasons

Reason	Dropped
Blank	60.55%
Change in lifestyle	55.24%
Simple task continuous	51.14%
Uncomfortable to play	38.80%
Contents not enough	34.98%
High difficulty	34.05%
Charging required to progress	33.85%
Fatigue	31.53%
Loss of hardware or service	30.40%
Repetition	30.40%
Strong boss-enemy	29.55%
Earnest opponents	29.10%
Reach personal goal	28.00%
Time management required	25.16%
Charging player's advantage	24.19%
Level difference compared to others	23.34%
Mismatch of the world or narrative	23.13%
Not enough description	23.01%
Long playing time	22.81%
Wasteful spending	22.73%
Bad influence on real life	21.75%
Solo play in multiplayer game	20.98%
Troublesome relationships	20.78%
Resignation	19.56%
Hardware installation	19.52%
Burnout	19.40%
Bug	18.71%
Bad operation feeling	18.67%
Excessive work	18.34%
Low occurrence of required elements	17.74%
Many notification	17.37%
3D motion sickness	17.05%
Physical limit	16.72%
Erroneous selection in game	16.48%
No charging effect	16.27%
Look satisfaction to somebody's playing	15.38%
Could not finish	14.89%
Luck only	14.37%
New game system	13.92%
Intentional stay before the last boss	13.88%
Progress slowly	13.27%
Friends dropped out	13.27%
Complicated dynamics	13.19%
Information not enough	12.01%
Start over	11.16%
Too Scary	11.00%
Bad UI	11.00%
Unreasonable production	10.88%

Reason	Dropped
Insight into future playing	10.11%
Unexpected contents	9.82%
Community	9.33%
Unreasonable setting of parameters	9.05%
Online depopulation	8.56%
Complicated mechanics	8.52%
Irrational matching	8.16%
Unrealistic AI	6.98%
Do other tasks before ending	5.88%
Grotesque	5.48%
Dislike	4.79%
Selection extortion	4.38%
Shame	3.90%
Spoiler	3.61%
Shocking event	2.88%
Give up against boss evolution	2.19%

The result that we obtained from our results is 13.88%, if we compare this results with the statistical significance (5%), 13.88% is a significant result. It is demonstrated that our assumption of the existence of Intentional Stay is correct. Sample comments given by players are shown below:

- “I did not want to finish because I love the world so much”: The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess [15].
- “It is Mottainai¹ to play more”: The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D [18], Final Fantasy Series [4].
- “If I defeat the Last-Boss, the story will end”: The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker [19].
- “The fact that the game will end makes me feel lonely”: Final Fantasy VIII [20], Pokémon X and Y [21].
- “It’s a pity to think about lose a friend whom I went through a lot of things together” (by “friend” they mean the NPC): Final Fantasy VIII [20].
- “I no longer feel the need to defeat the Last-Boss”: Final Fantasy IX [22].
- “I want to remain immersed in the world of the game”: Final Fantasy VIII [20].
- “I do not want to defeat the Last-Boss”: Pokémon Diamond and Pearl [23].
- “I chose to drop out because I enjoyed the development of the story”: Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 [24].
- “I don't want to end the story”: Tokyo Twilight Ghost Hunters [25].

We interviewed 20 non-Japanese people, in order to ascertain

¹ Mottainai: The word “Mottainai” is quite frequently used in Japanese language. Basically, it denotes a wide range of emotions, first of all, regret of wasting something which is still useful. According to Koujien, an authoritative Japanese dictionary, “Mottainai” means “squandering something, not making use of its value” [16]. This is a sort of regret, that something was not used properly, according to its intrinsic value. This word refers not only to things, but also non-material objects like time, relationships, feelings, efforts, career and other. By saying “Mottainai” Japanese people want to express their regret and disagreement on wasting of some “potentiality” [17].

about the uniqueness of the Intentional Stay phenomenon in Japanese players. Interviewees were Chinese, Korean, Malaysian, Indonesian, Swedish, Venezuelan, British, French, German, Canadian, and American. 18 people did not understand the reason for the Intentional Stay to exist, and we received the following comments:

- It is more reasonable to defeat the Last-Boss and finish the game.
- I can’t believe that not to defeating the Last-Boss is interesting.

2 people could understand the Intentional Stay. One of them is a German researcher of Japanese culture, and another is a French journalist that introduced Japanese pop culture to France. Both of them are good at Japanese, and have a lot of knowledge of Japanese culture. The following comments were received:

- I have not done the Intentional Stay.
- I can understand that Japanese do the Intentional Stay for their aesthetics.
- I thought that only Japanese do the Intentional Stay.

5 Discussion

After analyzing the obtained results, we consider that the main reason for the Intentional Stay to exist, is the engagement to the game narratives and characters. Specific objectives are shown as follows:

- Escape from the sense of loss or loneliness caused by the end of the game.
- Avoid fighting to kill with respect to the opponent.
- It’s Mottainai to finish the game.

All of these are reasons that aim to stay in the game world. In other words, players stop the progress and drop out from the game, in order to remain in the game world. This is an inconsistent concept of stopping the game to keep “the state of continuing the game”. However, we consider that this is a way of enjoying the game through satisfaction generated by quitting the game.

There is “Zanshin” as a similar concept in Japan [26, 27, 28]. A literal translation of *Zanshin* is “remaining mind”. This is maintaining a state of consciousness to the action even after it is over. For example in the Japanese art of archery, *Zanshin* means keeping the pose and concentrating the consciousness on the arrow after shooting.

It is also an act of keeping good memories after a date with a beloved person. For example in the Japanese art of tea ceremony, *Zanshin* means that the guests were recalled the host’s procedure for making tea, or the host was recalled the relationship between host and guests in the ceremony.

The main characteristics of JRPGs are narrative with few choices. “Shen Mu [29]” was an open world game with many narrative options but it was not a hit in Japan. On the other hand, Japanese players accepted non RPG “Shadow of the Colossus [30]” based on impressive narratives with few

choices. *Shadow of the Colossus* has almost no expression using text, and it presents sensory narrative expression by artistic world view and special dynamics.

Narrative gives fragmentary episodes to the players, and each player builds a story depending on his/her own experience. We thought that Japanese can build deep narratives by fewer episodes, because they are accustomed to a narrative style similar to Kabuki's narrative [31]. When players nearly reach the end of the game, they already have their own story constructed and more episodes on that story are not necessary. Also, the episode given afterwards does not always improve the story that they already built. Therefore, we considered it could be more satisfying if they stopped playing the game.

6 Conclusion

The existence of an unusual behavior that we named "Intentional Stay" was observed in Japanese JRPG players. This behavior consists of players abandoning a game right before they finish the game. They decide to stop playing. However, in spite of the fact that they no longer physically play the game, those players still feel that they keep playing and they are part of the game world.

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