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Video Games: Industry, Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation

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Since the formal establishment of Game Studies in 2001, the academic landscape has built a robust foundation for understanding video games as a complex medium of communication and cultural expression. While early research focused on defining the medium and its core processes of consumption and reception, the modern era faces a shifting paradigm. The maturation of the industry, rapid technological advancement, and a diversifying global player base have necessitated a pivot toward more specialized areas of inquiry. Consequently, both academia and the industry are now converging on the study of areas such as entrepreneurship, authorship, and innovation within the "indie" (independent) video game sector.

Entrepreneurship has been a cornerstone of gaming since its inception, often driven by small teams or solo developers with singular visions. Today, the democratization of development tools, digital distribution, and crowdfunding has made game creation more accessible than ever. However, this ease of entry creates a paradox: as the market becomes saturated, developers face unprecedented competition and "discoverability" crises. Consequently, researchers are tasked with analysing success and failure cases to establish best practices for a new generation of creators.

Also a key theme within this debate is the distinction between indie and mainstream (AAA) games. Indie games are generally characterized by financial and creative autonomy, whereas AAA titles are often tethered to market-driven formulas due to high production costs and risk aversion. This distinction led to the emergence of "Indie Game Studies", which views gaming through the lens of cultural industries (Moreno, 2003; Parker, 2013; Pérez Rufí, 2015).

Within this framework, the concept of the "auteur" —borrowed from film theory— has become a significant point of debate. In cinema, an auteur is a director whose personal style and thematic concerns are so distinctive that they are considered the "author" of the work. Applying this to video games is complex due to the inherently collaborative nature of development. However, scholars continue to investigate whether a "recognizable style" can be attributed to specific creators, particularly in indie spaces where individual influence is more pronounced (Baecque, 2003).

Creative and original approaches to mechanics and narrative design are also a defining feature of indie games (Chiapello, 2022). Unlike mainstream games that often rely on established tropes, indie projects frequently experiment with cultural and social dimensions, pushing the boundaries of what games can represent in both form and content (Anthropy, 2012; Sandovar, 2017; Juul, 2019; Ruffino, 2020). Interestingly, even when indie games utilize "retro" styles or resurface old design formulas, researchers like Tosca (2023) argue that these repetitions offer unique creative opportunities and distinct meanings rather than mere nostalgia.

Recent academic milestones, such as the *Loading…* special issue *Indie, Eh? Some Kind of Game Studies* and the *Symposium on Research in the Indie Game Industry* (I3V), signal a deepening commitment to this sub-field. These forums explore diverse topics ranging from player communities and narrative design to localization and accessibility. This scholarly momentum, exemplified by recent analyses of specific ecosystems like the Spanish and Catalan indie scene, underscores that indie games are no longer a peripheral interest but a primary site for understanding the future of innovation and authorship in digital media (Vilasís-Pamos *et al*., 2024).

Tripodos' 59th Monograph, *Video games: Industry, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation*, aims to contribute to existing research on the state of the video game industry and to establish best practices and innovative proposals that drive success within the four key areas of entrepreneurship, authorship, creativity and innovation. While this issue places a special emphasis on the indie sector (given its strong intersection with these four areas), the included works encompass different perspectives to the topics at hand, enriching the breadth of content and methodologies covered, which include animation and authorship, technology and design, industry and micro-entrepreneurship, mechanics and monetisation, globalisation and the indie scene, VR and innovation, identity and the periphery, analysed through methodologies such as aesthetic analysis, semi-structured interviews, case studies and social media analysis, qualitative and quantitative analysis, comparative analysis, textual analysis and autoethnography, within a diverse geographical perspective that addresses both the global landscape and more peripheral areas of the video game industry.

This Monograph contains a total of seven articles. The article "Cuphead as playable animation: Authorship, aesthetics, and visual language in the indie video game", by Elisabet Fonts, analyses *Cuphead* as a prime example of aesthetic authorship, where traditional frame-by-frame animation is an inseparable expressive system rather than mere decoration. By merging animation studies

and game theory, the article demonstrates how the creators' creative direction reinterprets early cartoon language, creating an "auteur game" defined by its unique visual identity, sound, and interactive rhythm.

The study "Beyond mechanics: An actor-network perspective on narrative design in indie video games", by Safak Topcu and Metin Çavu□, reveals that indie game narratives emerge from a complex socio-technical network rather than a single author. Analysing practitioner interviews and GDC talks, researchers identified thirteen key "actors". The findings highlight how the interplay between players, genre, technology, and budget fundamentally shapes storytelling, proving that narratives are products of creative, technical, and commercial forces.

How content creators leverage games for micro-entrepreneurship is examined in "Creativity at play: Content-creators and micro-entrepreneurship in *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*", by Cátia Ferreira, Carla Ganito and Soraia Gonçalves. Through interviews and qualitative analysis, it explores how in-game tools and platform economies enable creative labor, including digital design and fan merchandise. The findings reveal games as ecosystems where participatory culture, monetization, and expressive engagement intersect.

The research titled "Designing for monetization: A taxonomy of dark patterns in top-grossing GaaS video games", by Sergio Gutiérrez-Manjón, Salvador Gómez-García and Gema Bonales-Damiel, analyses 2024's top free-to-play games, identifying aggressive dark design patterns used for monetization. Mobile titles exhibit the most predatory tactics, including opaque currencies and gambling-like mechanics. These findings highlight ethical risks regarding compulsive spending and emphasize the urgent need for stronger digital literacy, regulatory frameworks, and research into user self-regulation.

As analysis of Chilean indie games (2014-2024) is performed by José Agustín Donoso-Munita and Pablo Quiñonero-Pertusa in "Peripheral games: Chilean glocalization and the independent video game scene" reveals a significant trend toward "globalization." Despite high rates of original IP creation, the vast majority of titles prioritize international norms over local themes. By aligning with global media tropes, Chilean developers often favour market-driven standardization over the expression of distinct regional or national identities.

The work by Michael Walter "Immersive indies: On immersive strategies in independent games for virtual reality (VR)", argues that indie developers lead VR innovation due to a lack of mainstream pressure. Using the Player Immersive Experience (PIE) model and autoethnography, the study shows how implementing full virtual bodies and free movement enhances player agency and immersion, establishing new conventions in this emerging medium.

Finally, in "End of memories: Coming-of-age, love, loss, and friendship. Ludonarrative writing in indie games about Asia-Pacific", Alberto Porta-Pérez examines how Indonesian, Japanese, and Filipino indie titles use magical realism and diverse mechanics to explore adolescent identity crises. By analysing games like "A space for the unbound", researchers highlight how regional identities and distinct artistic styles shape narratives of social alienation and personal growth.

This collection underscores video games as vital drivers of creative and technical evolution, reshaping authorship and immersion in contemporary media. Ultimately, these studies bridge theory and practice, providing essential frameworks for navigating the industry's diverse and rapidly expanding future.

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