

Color, Sound and Explosions

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## Abstract

There are three components utilized within the video game industry. These three components are color, sound and effects. All three of these can convey emotions in substantial ways, when they are utilized together they make for a well derived theme. Color is used to create sensations. Color is very useful when conveying a theme at a glance. A great example of this is when analyzing the horror genre. Horror often takes advantage of dark and gloomy colors when creating the theme. This allows for, in this case, fear to be used to have an emotional effect on a consumer. Color can also help establish a brand and can help consumers recognize and apply similar aspects together. Sound is the second component and this could be the best at creating emotion. Music plays a significant part not just in the video game industry but across cultures. It is important to note just how powerful it can be. This is no different when used in video games. Through this research gorges the Halo: Believe trailer will be referenced to. This trailer is able to create an emotion that many developers struggle with creating when marketing their games. It not only creates sadness, fear and a sense of loss but when the trailer is wrapping it ends on what I can only describe as chilling. It is able to generate hype in a way that is rarely seen. This trailer uses the aspect of emotional response with the music they include. Sound is not just music however, as you read you will learn how important sound design is to create immersion. It is also important to note that the voice actors and sounds to effects IE explosions etc. all come together when creating the overall feel and affects the overall investment consumers have towards that product.

Effects or the visuals are seen by many to be the most important aspect and further delving into these components will help show why. These all come together which link to what is the most important part of a game, this being, gameplay. When looking into a game, not only do you notice the colors but you notice how everything looks graphically. Many developers also utilize unique art styles that help elevate the core of the game. Gameplay is essential what you are paying for at the end of the day but of course it also includes all other aspects, story, design, enjoyability ect.

To further this research it was necessary to begin an observation on the platform known as Steam. Steam in many people's eyes is the largest platform in gaming and has astronomical success throughout its years of business. They are able to tap into what "gamers" want from a platform unlike anyone else. Throughout my observations I was able to show Steam and many other companies associated with the company use 4 key categories when marketing. Pre-release marketing, release day marketing, ongoing marketing, and tools and resources outside of Steam. These are all utilized to their full extend on Steam. Steam in the eyes of my respondents is also good at gaining attention and keeping attention on their site page, and platform as a whole. It was even hard to find negatives that people thought of Steam. The reputation alone is enough to keep Steam a float.

Finally, I conducted an interview with three different respondents of different demographics about steam and of the three components highlighted earlier. The first half of my questions focused on unpacking Streams platform, such as positives and negatives of the platform or questioning about sales. the second set of my questions focused on how well color, sound and effects do at marketing a game. There were many great points made by my respondents and I feel these answers helped conclude my finings when looking into this industry as a whole.

## Color, Sound and Explosions Part 1

**Within the video gaming industry how does color sound and effects play into marketing for sales?****Color**

Many marketing divisions use many different concepts at their disposal when reaching out to consumers. An industry that is all about dynamic colors, soulful sound and dazzling effects is the video game industry. It is no secret that since video games became a medium a strong team behind them pushed to have them reach consumers. They use the heart stings of avid fans along with specially designed techniques to allow the broadest audiences to be captured to thus allow the most sales. Color can be described as a sensation. It's a sensation of light and light is energy. Energy can stimulate, excite, evoke emotions, and create feelings of warmth, coolness, comfort or discomfort and can also influence psychological behaviors such as hunger or aggression. Colors are not only used in the video game industry but across the globe in every corner of the world. Why do colors matter in marketing and advertising? A product's color can have the ability to convince us that a product tastes fresher than the same product with a different color. It can even make medication feel more effective (Kramer).

Color plays an important role in the branding of video games and making them instantly recognizable. For example the game portal, people often signify the colors blue and orange to this game as the portals you use in game are those colors. The branding for this game also showcases this idea, as most of the branding is in blue with orange hints or vice versa. In addition to making games recognizable, color can also help convey its intended audiences. For

instance, brighter colors are used more in casual games, while more nuanced colors are used in “core” games.

### **Sound**

We all have songs that remind us of a certain places or times in our lives. This is because in order to process music, studies show “that we use the same parts of the brain that are also responsible for emotion and memory” (Gilliland). Due to the emotional response music can have on people, the associated memory also tends to be strong. While music and sound on its own can be a powerful tool, it is exceptionally more effective when it is used to highlight and drive a story. You can see this especially in commercials. A great example of sound in commercials is during the Halo 3 announcement trailer titled “believe”. I personally feel that the theme song for this is so iconic it is recognizable throughout gaming culture. “A memorable soundtrack can be as powerful a marketing tool as compelling characters when it comes to the legacy of an intellectual property (IP), and publishers have recognized this” (Duran). Brands utilize sounds to not only share a consumers experience but it can also shape their behavior. Sound can be used to relax people and as mentioned earlier the emotional connection makes a huge impact. In a more general sense, music can also set the tone for a brands personality, as well as to target a specific demographic. This has never been more true within the gaming community. Going back to the halo soundtrack, the most memorable part of the song is the very beginning. It's very simple but also unique. The sound is from one person basically singing an operatic tone and as it builds the song then erupts into an operatic tune. It builds up emotion as it begins and then eventually releases that emotion into an epic ensemble.

### **Effects**

As we have talked about sound and color I feel it is also important to talk about some other ways the video game industry markets to their consumers. Twitch.tv is a platform that was purchased by Amazon in 2014 and now has “over 15 million daily active users” according to Pamela Bump with HubSpot. Twitch allows people to air live streams of their computer or game console screen long with a webcam video of themselves. When it comes to marketing on twitch there are two major options, one is to advertise and the other is to start sponsoring. We all know the typical commercials that come on but sponsoring is a new trend. For years bands have now embraced what is now called influencer marketing on various social platforms. Twitch plays a huge role in this since they have such a large following. Usually when a new game comes out it will be on the front page of Twitch due to all of the influencers on that website playing said game. Some companies pay these influencers to play their games so that they can get their thoughts and feelings about a game out there. Usually fans of these influencers will then want to play that game since their “idol” is playing it.

One of the titans in the video game industry is Rockstar games. This company is behind many popular games including Grand Theft Auto, Red Dead Redemption and Max Payne. The reputation of Rockstar alone is enough to generate hype for their upcoming games, however the developer also amplifies their game announcements by releasing vague teaser images prior to the new game’s announcement. Their most recent example of this is a teaser image of Red Dead Redemption 2, shared on the Rockstar Games social media platforms on the 16th of October, 2016. To describe the post, it is a red picture with their logo in the middle. It doesn’t give away much, but gamers are well aware of how Rockstar make their game announcements and thus, this post also made the front page of the gaming subreddit on Reddit.com within minutes of the

announcement. This tactic of slowly teasing your audience to generate hype isn't something that many companies can utilise, but if you have the reputation for it, it's worth considering.

Color, sound and effects can be great assets when invoking emotions to market a product. These three aspects can make or break a marketing campaign. It takes a great team to bring all three of these tools together to create something memorable. This inturn allows for large companies to generate talk about their product and thus creating sales in the long run.

## Color, Sound and Explosions Observations Part 2

**Observations**

I have decided to observe the online gaming platform known as Steam. Steam has been around for over a century with millions of avid users each year. Steam is considered to be the leading platform for video games on PC and in most cases a one stop shop. The peak as of 11/16/2019 for Steams player base is currently standing at 16,402,988 players online just that day. There are many ways Steam utilizes marketing and many ways they draw in users. One of the things Steam is widely known for are its sales. Steam almost always has a promotion going on. The most well known one being the Steam summer sale which is usually the biggest sale of the year which can include hundreds of games, new and old, for great prices.

As mentioned in part one, reputation can be a major factor in the success of a company. Steam is no exception to this rule. There was recently a major debate about Steam becoming a monopoly due to another company, Epic games, buying the rights to games so that they could sell popular games Steam could not. However, the main fan base thought this whole debate was ridiculous, Steam by no means took a hit from this debate however, it is interesting that even with a small amount of bad press Steams reputation still prevailed.



Steam and many other companies associated with the company use 4 key categories when marketing. Pre-release marketing, release day marketing, ongoing marketing, and tools and resources outside of Steam. Pre-release marketing begins with tracking your traffic. Steam already has a built in tool that lets developers and publishers track where their games are already appearing on Steam. A bigger question for large companies is “when should you list your game on steam?”. The best time to do this for most publishers is when you have screenshots and a description ready for your game. This allows publishers to begin interacting and engaging with their players. A more common way is by tagging your game. Tags communicate to players what your game is, this could include the genre, theme, style, and mechanics. Having accurate tags, both general and specific will help a publisher reach a wider audience that may not have realized they are interested. When it comes to release day marketing there are a few things publishers should be aware of. Ideally, by the time a publisher reaches the release day for their game, they should have already built up an audience on Steam via “wishlists” and through their developer page. This means that when a publisher hits the “launch” button their audience should be notified. This also means that their game can be shown in new places on the Steam storefront, such as in the new releases and in Streams queue discovery feature. When marketing post launch or just general ongoing marketing it is incredibly important to publish updates to your games page.

Finally, Steam I feel knows its player base well, they are good at keeping in good relations with consumers and developers alike. This is one of the major factors that I believe allows steam to stay so dominant in the gaming industry. They often have updates that are continually adapting to the ever growing market of games. For example, they have an option to have the “hub” into a TV mode which allows for a much better experience which, for a console gamer, would feel more welcoming. Furthermore, Steam recently added a VR hub which allows people with VR headsets to access their hub entirely from the headset itself. Steam is great at continually innovating the game and this is why steams marketing abilities are unmatched.

**Interview questions**

1. Do you like Steam as a platform? why?
2. how long have you used steam?
3. positiv es and negatives of the platform?
4. Does steam do a good job at keeping your attention?
5. If you see a sale on the marketplace how likely are you to click on it and investigate further?
6. how well do you think steam markets its games?
7. Which section of steam do you mostly use to find games?
8. How does the color in the ads and commercials you see on developer pages affect how you view the game?
9. 8 but with sound?
10. 8 but with effects?

11.

Out of

sound, color and effects which one of these do you feel is the most effective?

## Color, Sound and Explosions Observations Part 3

## INTERVIEWEE 1

Female, 21

1. Yes  
she does like it, for the user interface, accessible
2. 2015
3. Positiv  
es: user interface and accessibility, Negatives: update it fast to remove minor fixes so not many
4. Advert  
ising is very solid, get a popup on start up
5. Depen  
ding on the game price 70-80%
6. Lots of  
ads of all kinds of games, trailers it not just images, deals
7. New  
and trending or top selling
8. Color:  
more colors equates to coop games, personally like them. Black and white, spooky does not play scary games, plains, looked like frag movie (gameplay) she'd be interested
9. Sound:  
sound goes hand in hand with visuals, not a fan of just music, a big fan compose their own music

10. Visually, better the graphics the more willing you are to buy it, like side scrollers expect to be cheaper.

Gameplay over visually effects for trailers

11. Effects, details, designs, visual learner, get more out of the visuals.

## INTERVIEWEE 2

Male, 30-35

1. Yes, easy simple to use interface, regularly supported with updates, convenient because everyone uses it

2. 2012

3. Negative: hates the new update the library looks visually appealing in the library section

4. No throws too much at you can't focus on single aspects, just try to sell you as much as possible

5. Depends, developer sale looks at if he knows it, random ones doesn't click, only if he has had prior interest

6. Does it well, recommended they put smaller games on it.

7. Top  
selling and specials
8. Vibran  
t colors always get attention, atmosphere depends on games depends how they present it, less interested if just plain colors, breath of the wild art style, regular shooters are brown
9. Sound  
design in general has a huge effect, explosion does it fizzle or boom, original soundtracks if it fits the atmosphere, themes of the game it will drive the game and enhance it. Doom soundtrack good example.
10. Cinem  
atic trailers don't work for him example MOBA, better gameplay, better idea of what you will actually buy.
11. Effects  
, ties directly into gameplay.

## INTERVIEWEE 3

Male, 22

1. Yes,  
user interface is easy to explore. Organized platform, shop is good, uses purchase history finding games you may like. Friending system is simple.
2. 3  
years-4 years

3. No  
negatives never had any issues, maybe video call quality maybe but still pretty good
4. Yes  
gives you ads on start up keeps you in the know, lets you know when big games come out.
5. Always  
s check sales see what the prices sometimes you can get classic games for very low prices.
6. Big  
titles get advertised well 75%, don't do it with all of their games though
7. Use  
the home library
8. More  
into subtle colors example new star wars with balkc and grey with highlights. Usually if he knows he wants it, he will get it. Does not go to buy just based on pictures, no rainbows
9. Very  
important, star wars again, crucial in the franchise, sound effects play a huge role in immusion. Not having orginal voice actors, if it sounds dumb it probably is dumb
10. Have  
to be on point nowadays, back in the day no. it is expected today. Unless it's styled to be 8 bit, won't be more involved, didn't think this until he played on PC.
11. Sound,  
semi decent everything else if the sound is great it is always possible. Can deal with semi decent color and effects but if it sounds bad its a no go.





## Summary

During my interviewing process I chose to call particular Steam users. I chose a female who was 21, a male who was between 30-35, and a male that was 22. During the process I did add some more info when asking questions in the attempts of getting more information. For example, when asking the color sound and effect questions I gave examples of each.

Beginning with question one addressing each question respectively. From my findings Steam has done a fantastic job at creating a user interface, each respondent that I asked the first question to all responded the same. When asked about the negatives of the platform many of my respondents struggled to name some. The only negative mentioned was due to a new update that had been released and is changeable. I found this aspect of the interview to be interesting as I would have to agree with the respondents as I do feel that steam is so good about keeping the interface fresh and accessible for all. For question four there were some mixed feelings regarding this. For a majority everyone felt that steam did do a good job but it was more so based on prices rather than layouts. I feel as mentioned in Part 2 Steam focuses a lot on sales so I feel as long as Steam has a sale going on customers will be inclined to be attentive. This brings me to question five. Again, all respondents had mentioned they check sales when they are on as I feel most people would do. Steam almost always has a sale and a thing that I left out of part 2 was a pop up ad that appears on startup. All respondents came to the consensus that bigger titles get advertised better and from a business perspective steam is probably getting paid for it. This is why the interviewees acknowledged that while yes smaller titles get noticed it is no where near the extent at which big titles do.

For the second half of the interview I focused on items that would address the main theme of my project. This section I intended to address how my respondents would address within the video

gaming industry how does color sound and effects play into marketing for sales. Firstly for color, respondent one felt that the more colorful a game was, made her want to play with friends. If a game was dark and gloomy she felt that it added a horror atmosphere to the game. However, when looking at a game ad she often wanted to see gameplay first. Respondent two mentioned that vibrant colors always were able to grab his attention. Color equates to the atmosphere of a game and like respondent one he mentions that if a game is plain it makes it less interesting. He mentioned a game called *Zelda Breath of the Wild* which is a game on the Nintendo Switch which has a very vibrant and unique art style. He compared this aspect of a game to the “regular shooters” many people play and had mentioned they always look “brown” or in my eyes boring. Respondent three had a more unique feeling towards color compared to the first two people. He stated that he preferred subtle colors, he gave the example of the new *Star Wars Jedi fallen order* which came out last week. He went on to say that the cover for that game he likes a lot as the overall theme of the cover is black and grey but with bright vivid colors on important objects, such as the light saber. He didn't feel that color played a major role in his buying agenda and also said that he tends to not buy games solely based on pictures and that he hated bright rainbow (lots of colors) on ads.

Secondly, there is sound. Respondent one had mentioned that she felt that sound and the visuals (effects) went hand in hand together. She admitted that when watching a trailer or an ad for a game if there is just a song playing that, that aspect doesn't hold a great deal of attention.

However, when a game developer composes their own original music she is a huge fan of that, examples given were, *Destiny 2*, and *Halo*. Respondent two had some different feelings regarding sound. He mentioned that sound design in general has a huge effect in games. He gave the example of an explosion, no one wants to hear an explosion that just “fizzles” away but

rather that you really want to hear it go “boom”. Respondent two also agreed with the first respondent in regards to original composed music, he said that it can help boost the atmosphere as long as it fits well with the game. Along with atmosphere sound can help drive the theme of a game, an example of this is the newly done remake of Doom which has a heavy metal based soundtrack which helps guide the games theme which in turn, can enhance it. Finally, respondent three felt it was very important and used the Star Wars game as an example. For a franchise like Star Wars it is crucial for great sound design. He felt that sound played a huge role in the immersion aspects of games and that games that don't follow suit with “original voice actors” can take away from that immersion.

Finally, effects. Respondent one felt that the visuals were everything. She mentioned that if the graphics were great she would be more inclined to buy it. This also goes for games that have less graphical aspects such as side scroller games, and she mentioned that games such as these should be cheaper. Although, she mentioned that the gameplay was more important than visual effects for trailers. Respondent two was highly focused on gameplay over anything else. He gave a great example of games such as Elder Scrolls Online which use these cinematic trailers which show no gameplay, although they are visually stunning it doesn't convert well when seeing real gameplay. He went on to say that gameplay allows you to get a better idea of what you are actually buying. Respondent three pointed out that games nowadays always have to be considerably visually appealing to be successful. He gave the exception to some games that are specifically styled such as 8-bit games. He was someone that didn't care originally about how a game or ads looked until he started playing games on his PC. Finally, the final question which addressed their feelings on which aspect was the most effective. Respondent one felt that the effects, details, designs were the most effective and she felt this was due to her being a visual

learner. Respondent two voted effects due to them connecting directly into gameplay. Lastly, respondent three voted sound. They went on to say that most games can pass with semi-decent visuals and colors as long as the sound is great it is always possible.

## Color, Sound and Explosions Observations Part 4

**Market Implications**

From my findings firstly, beginning with Steam and then talking about color sound and effects respectively. One of the major aspects that came to the surface after interviewing my respondents was that Steam highly lacks negatives. Many of my respondents struggled to give examples of negatives for Steam. The implications that this brings up is that Steam is clearly doing something right when observing their player base. They are able to implement and adapt updates that allow for an interactive and convenient experience. One of the major aspects, if not the most major, are Steam sales. All of my respondents acknowledged that they do partake in looking at sales and do tend to look at what is trending. From a marketing perspective Steam must continue this trend to stay relevant in the sense, in this ever growing market. There are so many gaming platforms that Steam must continue to compete with and right now I personally feel that Steam is at the forefront of this competition.

Color in the eyes of my respondents seemed to be third when it came to importance. Although saying that I do feel all of the aspects do need to come together to create a stellar game experience. A big part of this that respondent two brought to fruition was the art style and direction. I feel games that have a unique art style are definitely more noticed, examples of this are, Zelda Breath of the Wild, the Borderlands series and even Bioshock to name a few. The games are highly known and I feel stand out broadly due to their art direction. For the most part I feel that my respondents acknowledged that colors seem to invoke the most assumptions, you can see this when respondent one mentions seeing vivid colors makes them think cooperative or dark colors evoke fear. The marketing implications of this show that color may be essential specifically in the first commercial release. Colors must be on point when releasing the first

poster or pictures of a game to allow for the most recognition. I feel as the developer starts releasing trailers then color begins to go down the list of importance.

Sound in the eyes of my repondants is the second most important on the tier list. Sound as described by my respondents seemed to be able to create the greatest amount of immusion.

Immusion is the feeling that makes it feel like you are physically in that world. Many people describe to be highly immused in VR games as you are physically moving you body to and see every in this virtual world. Sound is able to drive this aspect home. As respondents two and three mentioned, bad sound design can take you out of an experience. Yet, great sound design can evoke emotion and drive a story and theme. Sound design can help create atmospheric tension in scenes that can drive out emotions. A theme within my interviews were that people do love original composed music. I feel the original sound tracks in most cases do drive the most aspect when done right. If you think about it they developers must compose songs that specifically fit into the game so I feel this aspect is what brings out the best in original music in video games. A great example of this is The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim. Watching the initial release trailer for this game was at the time personally so exciting to see a spectacular game with great original sounds and music, I feel the song alone for this game generated hype around this game. Finally, respondent three mentioned original voice actors. This aspect goes hand in hand with what I said earlier. For instance, you wouldn't want to be playing a Star Wars game and come across Darth Vader and suddenly he starts talking and he's voiced by Gilbert Gottfried. This would in my opinion completely take you out of the experience and not because Gilbert would be a band voice actor but because it's not who we know as Darth Vader. I feel it is important to stick to traditions and while having fun with sound design is good but being serious with sound design is just as important. The marketing implications that this leaves us with is, People respect and hope

for original composed soundtracks in games, People feel sound design needs to be highly flush for a game to be successful, when you hear a sound you should feel it.

Effects in the eyes of my respondents were the most important, voted the best by respondent one and two. I feel that as long as a game can look visually appealing that would be enough to get sales. It is extremely important that these visuals transfer to gameplay though. As mentioned by respondent two, gameplay is the most important, since that is what you are actually paying for in a sense, I agree with this. To illustrate this idea, a recent game that came out by Kojima, called Death Stranding. This game was highly anticipated for a while. This game has a stellar soundtrack with original music, Visually and graphicly amazing yet, gameplay is lack luster. Many people described this as a movie with hour intervals of walking. Although, the story was great many people felt that the core gameplay was the worst part and this is where the game fell short. Developers should want all aspects of their game to be enjoyable. If Death Stranding had fun, interactive and unique mechanics, this game would absolutely deserve game of the year. However, a game needs to have gameplay to be a game in my eyes. The marketing implications for effects are make sure core gameplay is fun, interactive, and makes players want more.

### **Recommendation #1** (Steam)

Continue to focus on customer experience. Having an overall flush platform is key to this which is something your company has become masters at. I feel you can continue to grow as long as you continue to take in user feedback.

### **Recommendation #2** (Steam)

Sales are your biggest marketing attribute. All of my respondents and myself all look into sales when they are on. I feel it is important to continue to push these sales as this is what keeps user



retention with your store. Having a sale banner and the initial pop up ads help communicate these sales to your users in an efficient and effective way.

**Recommendation #3** (Developers)

In regards to color, it is significantly important that the colors that you use in your games not only follow the theme of your game but that they fit with your initial marketing trailers and posters. It is also important to note and to take into consideration that colors have a direct impact on the initial view of your game. For example, my first respondent mentioned that vivid colors give off a coop feel as well as dark colors give off a horror feel. Colors drive a theme.

**Recommendation #4** (Developers)

In regards to sound, some things to keep in mind when designing and composing each sound. Many people including myself appreciate self composed soundtracks, I feel that this can in most cases generate more hype around your game. Furthermore, if you are a developer of a well known franchise it is important to stay true to past projects I.E. voice actors, sounds of iconic objects, and areas within games.

**Recommendation #5** (Developers)

In regards to effects and visuals, my respondents voted that this was the most significant aspect when it came to buying a game. Keeping this idea in mind when creating a game is essential. I would recommend to make sure that visuals are appealing for an audience of course but also to fit the art style and sound. I feel it is important that all color sound, and effects are all cohesive. The combination of these come together to create an immersive compelling experience.

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