[Newsletter] Entry #7 - Audience Analysis
Tomas Franzese

Audience analysis of *Helldivers 2* reveals some critical things that all live service games can learn from. As a live service game, *Helldivers 2* needs to cultivate a passionate and involved audience to stay relevant. I've previously discussed how the game does just that through gameplay systems like Major Orders. You feel like part of a community, both in-game and online, when you frequently play and engage with *Helldivers 2*. This has both positive and negative results.

That deep level of engagement initially allowed *Helldivers 2* to become popular. Shortly after its release, gameplay clips of its bombastic action went viral across platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Reddit. Players hadn't experienced anything like its overwhelming sense of action before and likened the experience of playing *Helldivers 2* to a real-life war. One of the planets, Malevelon Creek, was nicknamed "Space Vietnam," and clips of it would frequently appear on the official *Helldivers 2* Reddit. When players lost control of the planet after failing a Major Order, there was a sense of loss in the community, resulting in online posts and other messages sharing feelings of sadness, rage, and vengeance (Yin-Poole).

When a game can engage its audience on such a deep level that players create in-jokes like "Space Vietnam," it typically indicates success. And live service games need passionate communities to survive. If people aren't logging on to a live service every day to play and occasionally spend money, then its chances of success are significantly less likely. Through gameplay, *Helldivers 2* instilled a sense of dedication in players. In turn, players shared that energy online, which brought more people into the game and strengthened its community's foundation. Had *Helldivers 2* not been able to do that, it likely wouldn't have been nearly as successful as it ended up being. Because *Helldivers 2* embraces its community and encourages

passion, it continues to resonate with players to this day. It even proved popular enough that Sony believes there is enough of an interested audience to make a movie based on the game (Prescott).

That approach does come with its caveats, though. Players are willing to turn on their favorite live service video games in an instant if the developers do something that players do not like. Helldivers 2 experienced that for the first time just a couple of months after its release. For context, *Helldivers 2* on PC did not require a PlayStation Network account to play when it was initially released. In May 2024, Arrowhead Game Studios took to Steam to explain that an upcoming update would make that a requirement (Sony Interactive Entertainment). This angered the PC community, which does not typically like forms of DRM in their games and didn't like the fact that this added restriction would make the game unplayable in countries that the PlayStation Network doesn't support currently. In response, players showed their anger through various online forums. More importantly, over 20,000 players negatively reviewed the game on Steam, using a tactic called review bombing, to show their frustration (Park). This proved to be an effective tactic, and Sony and Arrowhead Game Studios eventually apologized and reversed course on the decision (Parrish).

This serves as an example of how a community can work together to actively get developers to change something they don't like about a game. That said, it shows how vitriolic and negative online discourse around video games can get when a community is angry. Even the most popular live service games, like *Helldivers 2*, aren't immune to this. While nothing has been as bad as that May PlayStation Network snafu, *Helldivers 2* has been review-bombed since (Woods). Live service developers must understand that they are developing a living piece of

media and that opinions on that piece of media can change over time. While a passionate community is required for success in the live service space, developers will also experience the full brunt of that passion turning into anger if something goes wrong with the game. In that way, dedicated communities are both one of the best things and one of the worst things about live service video games.

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