

Ok, before jumping in I want to clarify what exactly the term “throttling” means in the context of video games... in contrast to its literal definition, throttling within video games does not mean to choke until death... it means to control how quickly progression is possible often to a very uncomfortably slow rate.

The same term is often used when talking about internet bandwidth. You may be paying for a certain speed... but instead your upload and download speed are throttled to a much slower rate resulting in uncomfortable usage of the internet for various tasks... also, this throttling is very rarely made known to you, and can come and go without warning.

In video games... the practice of throttling is being used more and more... most often, it ends up coasting beneath the radar... but on occasion it can be uncovered, and result in swift backlash against the companies responsible... The primary purpose behind it can vary depending on circumstance but in the majority of situations throttling is used as a funnel to help drive players into the microtransaction shops (present in nearly every game nowadays) to purchase supplementary boosts, or packages in order to compensate for that unseen adjustment to their experience.

The first example I would like to highlight is Destiny 2... The system is no longer active, having been discovered by the community and subsequently turned off by bungie... but it is probably the best example of throttling in recent memory. Basically what occurred... was an unseen adjustment to the experience gains when completing certain activities... Once maximum player level was reached... players would then be earning experience towards bright engrams, which were also sold in the microtransaction shop... so bungie (or activision?... im not 100% sure who was the driver behind the wheel on this decision) but SOMEONE came up with the genius idea to throttle the xp gains, so that players earned LESS bright engrams... and thus, were more likely to purchase them.

The experience shown on screen, the values displayed... were false... behind the scenes the amount of experience was being adjusted heavily to slow down progression and stop players from earning the engrams. Of course when this shady operation was uncovered... there was outrage... and bungie immediately turned it off with some half baked “we are just as unhappy as you!” statements...

In the case of Destiny 2 it was pretty obvious, you would earn a thousand xp for example but your bar would hardly move at all... it was almost comedy at that point and its no surprise players were able to sniff out that something was wrong... but with other games, its not always as obvious.

The next example is call of duty blackops 4... I wont go in depth how they added in microtransactions AFTER the games release window had closed, after the reviews had all come in and after there was no longer a spotlight aimed at the product... I have a very strong feeling

that is what Division 2 will be doing, as well as many other games in the future but i guess we will have to wait and see....

The relationship to throttling comes with their battle pass esque system which also bears similarities to fortnite... Players rank up through a tiered level system to gain access to rewards but it becomes very obvious after a relatively short amount of time that the system incorporates an extremely punishing grind. The funnel is designed to push players into cosmetic purchases because the hundreds, potentially thousands of hours required to otherwise progress through the actual system is so daunting, it becomes unrealistic.

Of course the argument can be made that cosmetic microtransaction systems are fine, as long as they don't affect gameplay... as long as rewards CAN be earned without spending money.... And in the end it's up to the player whether or not they wish to participate... all these arguments have a grain of truth but video games have started to become, with increasing similarity... a vehicle for excessive monetization, where instead of a freestanding product, it is a series of funnels and channels that guide players into a situation where they are more likely to spend additional funds.

Another fantastic example that underscores the thin line between cosmetic only and full blown gameplay altering throttling systems is the well known star wars battlefront 2 fiasco... its an older example now, yes... but my main focus is not the loot boxes themselves, baked into core progression.... My main focus is the arcade mode.

Battlefront 2 was constructed in such a way that every single activity funnelled players into the microtransaction shop... the pay to win loot crates were bad, sure... but not nearly as many players were talking about the time lock on the arcade mode that prevented players from earning more than a certain amount of credits in a given timeframe.

The game throttled a players access to credits, because credits were the alternative to real world funds by which they could purchase the loot boxes... now of course the largest issue was the loot crates themselves... but alongside that was a game constructed from the ground up to funnel players into the store, with a lack of resources to be able to play the game comfortably without spending money.

If throttling were to be turned into a spectrum... Battlefront 2 (in its beta form before outrage forced them to rework the system) would be off to one end as an extreme... but on that spectrum are a myriad of other examples... Assassins creed odyssey is one that comes to mind as a mild to moderate example. A good game, to be sure... but in the microtransaction shop there are earnings boosts and experience augmentations that are even offered as permanent.

Now, it is an open world game and a player can easily progress through the levels without spending any additional money.. However... anyone trying to progress quickly and really only focusing on the main story will find themselves advancing at an uncomfortably slow pace. In the

store, that permanent 50% increased experience boost becomes more and more appealing... and rather than a simple option in a menu to turn on or off... that would let the faster paced players experience the game comfortably for free... it has a price tag. The game is not built solely around funnelling EVERYONE into it, but the system absolutely nudges certain players towards the store by throttling the pacing of the game to make it more appealing.

Another example to the more moderate side... but this one quite a bit more transparent... is shadow of war. The sequel to shadow of mordor... shadow of war was a very fun game, i enjoyed it a lot... but towards the end of the campaign... there is a very lengthy section called the shadow wars which locks away the final battle and subsequent cutscene behind a series of events which prioritize army strength, and orc captains.

Orc captains, were either converted, one at a time.. Or bought in droves through loot crates in the microtransaction shop. Crates could also be purchased with ingame funds... but the whole shadow wars segments played out as a throttled grind that directed players to either spend money and get through it much quicker... or grind for a longer duration in order to do it free of charge.

Again, on the scale of least to most harmful this particular example is more towards the harmless end mostly due to the prevalence of the ingame currency also used for crate purchases... but make no mistake, this was a system designed to funnel players into the microtransaction shop in order to bump up profits.

Another example can be seen in the original tom clancy's the division... when loot crates were added in... met with a healthy amount of backlash, but they were jammed in anyways... the cypher key rewards were able to be earned in game.. But at a pathetically slow rate. Yes you could earn key fragments.. But To get enough fragments to open even one crate would have taken dozens of hours, maybe more... and only after a supremely negative response was the system changed to offer up more acceptable drop chances and increase the ability for players to earn cypher keys while actively playing, instead of having to purchase them.

These are a just a few examples of throttling in games... systems crafted to guide players into spending more money, and they are often used alongside further tactics like public loot box openings... Fallout 76 is now using a public lootbox animation where other players around get to be acutely aware of someone opening up a box and getting the rewards... Call of Duty world war 2 had a system where players were forced to watch publicly as others around them opened crates and got all the juicy loot... it's a psychological manipulation tool designed to play on emotions and jealousy.

Right alongside that is the idea of showing a killcard, or statsheet on death that displays exactly what items you were defeated by. In the case of an enemy player using tons of high level super powered boosts they got from the microtransaction shop... those boosts would be shown clear as day as they massacred enemy players again and again... at a certain point a defeated

gamer might look to that kill card showing the items they lost against and give in to the deliberately designed temptation. They might think, damn... well.. I would have more fun and maybe win if I had THOSE items... i guess i have to go buy them.

Throttling in games is common... constructing a system that nudges players into the store to purchase various packages that help to overcome intentional discrepancies in a games natural flow... for every example of a system made public, or discovered by reddit etc etc... there are 2 more where players never realized, and a games full lifecycle came and went without the players even knowing they were being manipulated.

This would not be as much of an issue, if it remained constant..... if games were stable, and predictable... the problem of throttling would be largely irrelevant because perhaps there would be certain incentives to purchase microtransactions, but those incentives would not creep further and further into the fabric of what the game even is with every consecutive release... But this issue does not remain constant...

Large game publishers and development companies are absolutely drooling over the mobile market... mobile games have production costs that are a mere fraction of what it takes to develop a triple A title, with relative profits which are through the roof in contrast.... The thing about mobile games though, is they are just one big funnel that tries to force players to either log in every day for months... or just buy what they want from the store and skip all that.

Mobile games also shove advertisements in your face over and over with the goal of spurring players to pay the 2.99 or 1.99 or whatever it is to unlock ad free viewing... most mobile games, in essence, are just vehicles for microtransaction sales... and the process of throttling progression in Triple A titles, or even average PC and console games at large is heading in the very same direction.

At this point gaming communities are on high alert, the deteriorating practices are closely monitored... the main focus is usually on loot boxes, general microtransactions and other more surface level systems... thats where a lot of my own focus lies as well... but beneath the surface you have algorithms adjusting XP gains, story arcs with segments designed to frustrate players into purchasing a remedy and other less noticeable tactics that detract from the artistic value of a game in favor of something more... profitable.

To be clear most of the games I talked about today are either decent games... for the most part, or have improved drastically since the issues presented were exposed. Destiny 2 has come a long way and a lot of issues were fixed because the community demanded better... Battlefront 2 has been reworked and is a decent game now... but that would not have happened without vigilant and vocal players to steer them back on track... shadow of war, and assassins creed odyssey, are very good single player games... they would have been one step better, however, without those pesky throttling systems...

I advocate so strongly against over monetization not because I want to be angry, or like being negative... but because positive change only comes about when players fight to make it so. If the community at large were to shush each other at every turn with ignorant stances like "Just wait and see it will probably be good" or "just relax, they will fix it on their own" ... what is considered normal would trend downward at an ever increasing rate.

Anyway... that's about all for today. Sometimes throttling lurks beneath the surface of a game, other times its right out in the open but I never really see it discussed all that much so I wanted to make a video covering it. As always, if you want to support the channel there are links down below.. We have new esports merch, with custom name, gamertag and number... plus a facebook group, discord server, and gaming forums... but ill wrap it up there and stop rambling.. Thank you for watching... and have a nice night.