

Videogames and the data analytic imaginary

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores videogames' data analytic 'imaginaries' – understood, after Beer (2018), as how the nascent videogame data analytics industry conveys the possibilities of analytics to users, particularly through marketing rhetoric. As part of a wider project about the relationship between data and the use of videogame technologies, this paper aims to understand the projection of promises upon data as a key step in understanding data's incorporation into the quotidian practices and processes of using videogame technologies. This paper draws upon analysis of 40 data analytics tools in order to explore how data analytics are envisioned by the industry.

Keywords

data, data analytics, imaginaries, videogames

INTRODUCTION

An industry of videogame specific 'data analytics' tools, which capture and present 'big data' (about aspects of both their use and development) have come to proliferate in recent years. While research is beginning to examine how such technologies are implicated in users' everyday practices (e.g. Egliston, 2019; Whitson, 2019) we lack sustained analyses of i) how the data analytics industry envisions such technologies, particularly through their marketing rhetoric, and ii) how such visions may shape how everyday users think about, feel and engage videogames.

This research is motivated by the sociologist David Beer's recent intervention into 'data analytics imaginaries' (2018) – with imaginaries in this context referring to how human encounters with the world are configured, partially, in relation to cultural/material configurations of meaning. As Beer puts it "the allure and seductive envisioning of the possibilities of data is a key facilitator for the adoption, incorporation and spread of data-led processes. These visions might be seen to be part of the broader imaginary upon which organisational practice is based" (2018, 467). This research is also inspired by the mobilisation of the concept of imaginaries in game studies research – most notably around the relationship between games culture and the games press (see Kirkpatrick, 2015).

This paper emerges from a wider, ongoing project exploring how commercially available data analytics tools shape the practices and processes of game use and game production. This paper uses a sample of 40 analytics tools to look at how data analytics are being framed by the industry. Crucially, the claim in this paper is not that visions of the power of data analytics will necessarily be played out in the realities of data use (as I have argued elsewhere, there are often gaps between marketing visions of the software their actual use, see Egliston 2019). Rather, it is to

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say that these visions may feed into the ways that people think, feel and act about videogames and analytics. This paper discusses the dominant discourses that emerged from analysis of my sample. These are 1) data as facilitating surveillance of the self and others, 2) data as insightful, 3) data as predictive, smart or dynamic, 4) data as offering insight through scope and scale, and 5) data as operating at 'real time' speed.

BIO

Ben Egliston researches and teaches about new media and digital culture, with a specific focus on games. He currently works as a sessional lecturer at the University of Sydney in the Department of Media and Communications, where he completed his doctorate. His current research is focused on user experience in games. He has published on topics such as e-sports, data analytics, AI, and livestreaming for a range of academic and general interest publications. His recent academic work appears in journals such as 'New Media and Society' and 'Media, Culture and Society'.

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