The Rise and Infiltration of Pac-Man and Street Fighter

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The Rise and Infiltration of *Pac-Man* and *Street Fighter*

by

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Abstract

With the social, cultural, and economic influence of video games, it is important to examine why they have become such popular forms of entertainment. Particularly, why certain franchises have continued to persist among the growing industry. Two notable franchises are *Pac-Man* and *Street Fighter*, which are also most frequently discussed in scholarly texts. I supplement a literature review with an analysis of marketing texts to illuminate a series of shared factors that help explain both games’ popularity despite the apparent dissimilarities of their content. First, my work helps us look across multiple scholarly papers to create a bigger picture of each franchises’ success. Second, my work compares across genres as a way of developing a framework that helps us understand both games success. In my literature review, I found three factors that contributed to the games’ success: The Revolution, elements that brought new revolutions to the video game industry, Gameplay Mechanics, elements within their gameplay that contribute to the players’ experience, and Relatability and Involvement, elements that allow players to become more involved with their gaming environment and elements that are relatable to them. These factors not only help us better understand the successes of both *Pac-Man* and *Street Fighter*, they could also be used in the future to analyze other games, and develop future games.

**Keywords:** video games, arcade games, early video game history, players, popularity, success, Street Fighter, Pac-Man, literature review
1. Introduction

Video games have grown rapidly since the 1970’s (Northfield 31) to become an important global revolution that has greatly influenced many countries’ economic and cultural growth. For example, video games have entered the home as another way family and friends can socially interact by playing together in the living room (Cade and Gates 71). While video games originated from the U.S. (“UNITED STATES” 591), Japan has become a prominent distributor of games with companies such as Nintendo and Sega (deWinter 323). To understand the growth of this global phenomena, we must go to the beginning of the golden age of arcade games, the late 1970s to the mid 1980s, where it all began to blow up (Northfield 31).

Two popular games that developed into notable franchises are the Pac-Man and Street Fighter series. Pac-Man was first released as an arcade game in 1980 in Japan by Namco, and later that same year in the U.S. with Midway as their distributor (“Pac-Man”). In Japan, it was not as well received as their creators had hoped, but in the U.S., it quickly rose to widespread popularity (Honda and Bison 170). Riding off the subsequent “Pac-Man fever” (Newman 4), other distributors released copycat games like K.C. Munchkin! (1981) and Piranha (1981) (Honda and Bison 174, 177). Over the decades following Pac-Man’s initial success, additional games within the franchise such as Ms. Pac-Man (1981) and Pac-Man Championship Edition (2007) were also well-received (Honda and Bison 174, 176). Today, over thirty years since the first release, the Pac-Man series remains known as “the most popular arcade game ever invented” (“Gameplay” 13:10).

A second notable game that debuted in the 1980s was Street Fighter. The original Street Fighter game was released first as an arcade game by Capcom in 1987, and was notable for offering better audiovisuals than the “beat ‘em up” games that came before it (Honda and Bison
However, it had poor controls and only two similar looking characters to choose from (Honda and Bison 230). It was not until the release of *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior* (*1991*), that the franchise began to kick off. This game would ultimately be one of the most popular in the series, but its subsequent sequels, spinoffs, and editions also did relatively well, including *Street Fighter IV* (*2008*) – notable for its release both in the arcade and on the home console, which offered online play (Su 361). These games did not just become popular for a short period of time and fade away within history. Instead, they have become integrated within certain societies. For example, based off the research of Brlek, Ng, Skolnik and Conway, and Su, there is a relatively large and active community for fans of *Street Fighter* both online and offline all over the world. They have become well known to the point that it is probably hard to find someone who does not recognize the *Pac-Man* character (Newman 4), or has not heard of *Street Fighter*.

For those familiar with the games, it is apparent that *Pac-Man* and *Street Fighter* are very different types of games. *Pac-Man* features a cartoon-y character that that player must navigate through a low-violence maze, eating up pills and running from cartoon ghosts. By contrast, *Street Fighter* embodies violence in a game that centers on two-player hand to hand combat. While these games have been studied extensively as significant cultural works in their own right (e.g. Su and Wade), they are not typically examined alongside each other. Yet, both games can be seen as key works in the 1980s and 1990s arcade scene, and have had lasting influence in the gaming market. In this thesis, I supplement a literature review with an analysis of marketing texts to illuminate a series of shared factors that help explain both games’ popularity despite the apparent dissimilarities of their content. By abstracting up from the specifics of either game, this analysis helps us to better understand the bigger picture reasons for video game success.
The three factors that I will discuss in this thesis are: *The Revolution, Gameplay Mechanics, and Relatability and Involvement*. First, both games’ introductions brought new *revolutions* to the video game industry, such as a maze game with non-violent characters introduced by *Pac-Man* (Honda and Bison 171), and the revival of the American arcades with the combative advancements of the *Street Fighter* series (Kent 446). Second, elements of each game’s *mechanics* involved simple concepts that players can understand yet still be challenged by, such as *Pac-Man*’s cute enemy ghosts (Newman 5), and the large set of sophisticated moves from *Street Fighter II* (Honda and Bison 229). Third, both franchises offer players the opportunity to become more *involved* with their gaming environment and find elements that are *relatable* to them, such as how the *Pac-Man* world reflects our own (Wade 255), and the relationships that are built with *Street Fighter*’s globalized community (e.g. Brlek 62). In this thesis, I analyze how these aspects have contributed to each franchises’ success, considering both the unique characteristics of each game, and those characteristics that may overlap. By understanding how and why these two different games were able to find success, I shed new light on the ways that games find success beyond the specifics of their topic or features, and identify factors that could be used in the development of future games.

2. Discourse Community

First, my work helps us look across multiple scholarly papers to create a bigger picture of each franchises’ success. In my research into the topic of popular games, arcade games, and early video game history, I found that there were not very many games discussed within the field in terms of their popularity. The most prominent discussions revolved around *Pac-Man* and *Street Fighter*. Even then, most of these articles do not necessarily focus primarily on the specific game
features that contributed to their fame, but include it in their discussion of other subjects.
Newman’s article on Pac-Man for example, focuses on the gaming strategies that have evolved throughout the years, and in doing so, also provides background information on the game’s features, such as the ghost patterns that allowed these strategies to work (6). Wade’s article on the other hand, focuses on the cultural and social impacts of Pac-Man, but analyzes the different mechanics within Pac-Man to make his point. The articles I found for Street Fighter focused primarily on the community experience and development (e.g., Brlek, Ng, Skolnik and Conway, and Su), with some other aspects of the game discussed within the context of community. For example, the fact that Street Fighter characters have a wide range of moves allows the community to share different combos that they created (Brlek, 63). In this thesis, I bring together these topics to get a rounded understanding of the influence of these games individually, and show how multiple gaming features have contributed to their success.

Second, my work compares across genres as a way of developing a framework that helps us understand both games’ success. The scholarly discussion on Street Fighter’s success often compared it to other games of its kind, such as Karate Champ (Honda and Bison 225) and The King of Fighters (Ng), while Pac-Man has often been compared to the violence-based, space shooting games that came before it (Honda and Bison 168). In this study, I now compare Pac-Man and Street Fighter together, something that has not been accomplished before. By looking at these two different games in a comparative case study, I will expand upon these previous findings by identifying and categorizing the specific game features that made them unique, as well as the shared features that contributed to their success.
3. Methodology

In this study, I conducted a literature review of scholarly articles and book chapters, and gathered and analyzed early magazines, ads, posters, and videos relating to the two franchises. I pulled out and categorized both the unique and shared features that contributed to each franchises’ success. I sought to explore what type of communities may have developed as a response, how other medias such as T.V., magazines, and news articles portrayed the franchises, and what artifacts came out of their permeation into society and culture. This analysis approach extends the familiar literature review with a kind of discourse analysis sometime used in human-computer interaction and related fields to better understand the social aspects of digital technologies (e.g. Su, Harmon and Mazmanian, Brlek).

After my initial readings of the gathered scholarly articles, I jotted down aspects within each franchise discussed in the articles that stood out to me as having significance in building their notoriety. From my notes, I grouped these features, and categorized them into three main categories: Novelty and Innovation, Gameplay mechanics, and Relatability and Involvement. I then went on to analyze the selected artifacts that I was able to find for each franchise, taking care to see if there were any features that seemed to fall within the three categories that I had initially defined, or if there were new features that were significant enough to form new categories. By looking at the artifacts representing the initial responses to the two games, I saw what game features were talked about and highlighted within both the larger society and their target communities. I then created a list that described what features the artifacts were referring to, and whether they seemed to be contributing factors to the growth of the series.

From the research with the artifacts, I decided to create a fourth category, Beyond the Game, to represent the unique properties of the franchises that went beyond the scope of the
actual games. This was because I found that there was a significant importance in the merchandizing of *Pac-Man*, and thought that the *Street Fighter* community would fit well within this new category. However, I found that the *Street Fighter* community played an important role in creating the types of relationships that were created around the *Street Fighter* series. Therefore, I reverted to the original three categories, and decided to integrate the merchandizing of *Pac-Man* into the Novelty and Innovation category. I made this decision as the branding of video games seemed to have been pioneered with the series (“Gameplay” 13:24). I then decided to reorganize some points and rename Novelty and Innovation as The Revolution, to better describe the changes that the *Street Fighter* series brought as advancements rather than new innovations. As a result, I have compiled within this paper concepts from my sources that were major contributors to *Pac-Man* and *Street Fighter’s* success.

4. **An Introduction to the Two Games**

4.1 *Pac-Man*

*Pac-Man* is a relatively simple game. The player only needs to guide Pac-Man, the yellow round character, within a maze in any of the four cardinal directions, eating the white pills and occasional fruit or key offering as they go, while attempting to avoid the colorful ghosts moving about. The player can even attempt to turn the tables and eat the ghosts once they turn navy blue by eating a power-pill, the larger white pills at each corner of the maze. The stage ends once Pac-Man has eaten all the pills or has lost all his lives. The player only gets to move on to the next stage if he still has remaining lives. The pills and other objects such as fruit and keys are converted into points that contribute to the score. So do the ghosts when captured as navy ghosts. The player’s main goal is to go through as many stages as they can and end up with the best high
score in comparison to other players or themselves. The players essentially are able to compete each other through these scores.

With its new genre and now iconic characters, *Pac-Man* contributed to the Golden Age of the Arcades in the early 1980s and brought new audiences to gaming (“Video Game Stars” 74). The new genre it introduced, the maze chaser, was a departure from the violent space shooter games of the time (“Video Game Stars” 74), offering an alternative option for players to enjoy. Through its cute and silly characters, fun maze, and elements that players could subconsciously relate to, it invited non-traditional audiences to gaming. Coupled with its simple yet hard to master gameplay, the series exploded in popularity. Today, *Pac-Man* continues to be an iconic figurehead in both the gaming industry and other medias.

### 4.2 Street Fighter

*Street Fighter* on the other hand, is a completely different game compared to *Pac-Man*. There are two players, either player vs. player or player vs. computer, who fight hand-to-hand using various martial arts techniques until one player runs out of life points, or until the match time ends. Players have the ability to select from multiple playable characters to fight their matches. Each character in the series has their own set of moves and hidden moves that players can execute. By combining different move commands through the controls in rapid succession, players create what are called ‘combo moves.’ With the combination of multi-playable characters and their own move pools, players can come up with seemingly infinite combo moves.

With *Street Fighter II*, the series helped revitalized a shrinking arcade community a decade after the *Pac-Man* era (Kent 446), and made lasting innovations in gameplay mechanics that changed the development of subsequent fighting games. Over time, the series developed a
huge community of players and fans because of its interesting gameplay and intricate combo moves. With the multi-playable characters and the combo moves, its fans had something to come together to talk about. Although its concept is simple, its gameplay has a complexity that transcended that of the fighting games that came before it (Honda and Bison 230). Today, the Street Fighter community continues to come together to enjoy the series.

5. Elements of Success

Based on my review and analysis of the scholarly articles and artifacts I have found, I identified three major categories that help us understand the continued success of Pac-Man and Street Fighter. The design aspects found to be contributors to the franchises’ success fall under: revolutionary aspects, elements that represented important turning points in the video game industry, gameplay mechanics, elements within their gameplay that contribute to the players’ experience, and relatability and involvement, elements that allow players to become more involved with their gaming environment and elements that are relatable to them. In this section, I dive into each category in turn, looking at how it helps explain the popularity of each game.

5.1 The Revolution

Both Pac-Man and Street Fighter represent important turning points in the video game industry. They have properties that differentiates them from the games that have come before them, including properties that are either new to the period of their releases, or were significant advancements to existing qualities found in earlier games. Pac-Man was a pioneer for a new genre of video games, promoted non-violent qualities that went against the trending space-shooter games of the 1980s, contributed to an increased interest in video games among new
audiences – groups that had not previously been big ‘gamers,’ and generated a widely successful merchandizing platform. *Street Fighter* on the other hand, helped bring players back to the traditional arcade with its combative nature, and improved the model of fighting games with its increased character selection and move pool. Because of both of their initiatives, a plethora of games within their genre were able to come to fruit, with a few closely following their gameplay model with only some minor deviations.

5.1.1 *Pac-Man: Expanding the Scope of the Video Game Industry*

*Pac-Man* pioneered a new genre of games in three ways: first, it did not revolve around violent or militaristic aspects, instead focusing on cute and silly characters; second, it was one of the first maze chasing game to hit the market (Honda and Bison 170); and third, it capitalized on merchandizing to extend the popularity of the game beyond the usual arcade crowd.

Prior to the release of *Pac-Man*, shooting games such as *Space Invaders* (1978) were dominating the arcades (Kent 143), and their mantra was, “Shoot anything that comes your way” (“Gameplay” 12:56). Iwatani, the creator of *Pac-Man*, noticed this stagnant trend of violent shooting games, and saw how male oriented the arcades were. Therefore, he wanted to create a different game; a non-violent and non-militaristic game, that was able to invite the elusive female audience to the arcades (Kent 140). The result was *Pac-Man*, a cute and casual game that was essentially a colorful game of tag. There was no shooting involved, no explosions, and no killing. The characters simply disappeared or dissolved away momentarily if they were caught by each other. The bright characters were “the opposite of doom and gloom” (“Gameplay” 14:01).

The *Pac-Man* characters’ laid-back attitudes cultivated both in their cartoony depiction and in the antics they participated in, adds to the gameplay experience. In shooter games such as
*Space Invaders* or *Galaxian* (1980), the player controlled a non-descript spaceship weaving through space and fighting other enemy aircraft. With the introduction of *Pac-Man*, Iwatani created a cute, silly, and abstract character that the player takes on, doing their best to avoid the equally cute, silly, and colorful enemies. These enemies take the form of ghosts and even have their own goofy names and associated human-like characteristics: Blinky (or Shadow, the red ghost), Pinky (or Speedy, the pink ghost), Inky (or Bashful, the blue ghost), and Clyde (or Pokey, the orange ghost). According to Kent, Iwatani purposefully made the characters cute so that it would attract more women to the arcades (141). Beyond their influence on the gameplay itself, these characters also offered players moments of comic relief in between each game with “cutscenes,” short skits meant to provide brief entertainment (Honda and Bison 172). For example, in one *Pac-Man* cutscene (“Pac-Intermissions” 0:00), Blinky stars in a skit where he closely chases behind Pac-Man, shadowing him off the scene. He then quickly comes running back through the scene all scared and blue, as a now oversized Pac-Man chases after him. This cutscene depicts the power dynamics between the characters, and explains the effects of the power-pills in a humorous way. Other cutscenes also provide humorous background stories showing the characters’ relationships, like how Ms. Pac-Man and Pac-Man met (“Pac-Intermissions 0:36), making them seem human-like and relatable. The depiction of the characters visually, their names, their attributes (like Shadow and Bashful), and the way these combined not only in the gameplay, but also in the cutscenes, created a lighter mood for players to enjoy.

In addition to these aspects of *Pac-Man*’s style, the game also pioneered the maze genre, which became a new model for other games. *Pac-Man* was not actually the only maze game released in 1980. Namco had also concurrently released *Rally-X*, a race car maze game which industry specialists favored over *Pac-Man*, believing that it would be the best-seller, but to their
surprise, *Pac-Man* was the one to gain the most favor among consumers (Kent 142). Following the success of *Pac-Man*, other companies released more maze games following *Pac-Man*'s model.\(^1\) Over the decades, the *Pac-Man* series also saw further releases on multiple platforms.\(^2\)

As Wolf writes, the success of *Pac-Man* in breaking through the fixed video game industry “inspired game designers to innovate” (“Video Game Stars” 74), going beyond what had already been seen and done.

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Pac-Man began showing up everywhere; on products far outside the scope of video games such as roller skates, cereal bowls, and lunch boxes (Figure 1). He had his own Saturday Morning cartoon, and became a subject for hit songs ("Gameplay" 13:35) In 1982, the list of existing Pac-Man licenses included products such as: stationary, toys, home hardware (e.g. mugs, air fresheners, ash-trays, bedsheets and pillowcases, and kitchenware), clothes, cigarette lighters, food, and more ("Pacman Licenses"). These Pac-Man products became integrated into the family lifestyle, where both young and old can enjoy them, implied by the range of products seen in Figure 1, including everything from Pac-Man toys to Pac-Man cigarette lighters. By making other products that target specific audiences, Pac-Man merchandising made the original games themselves more widely known and appealing to a greater audience. Today, merchandising continues to keep the franchise relevant and embedded into new generations. Appealing to younger kids allowed Pac-Man to survive each generation of youth. Furthermore, board and card games propose that multiple people play together. Among family or friends, it becomes a socialization device that connects everyone, inviting more people to this inner circle, and effectively spreading the Pac-Man fever around.

Through its non-violent and silly attitude, new maze genre, and merchandizing tactics that went beyond the arcade and across generations, Pac-Man was not only able to revolutionize the gaming industry, but persist within it to this day.

5.1.2 Street Fighter: Contributing to the Advancement of Fighting Games

Although the Street Fighter series did not introduce a new genre of video games, it did contribute to the advancement of the genre and a revival of the arcade (Kent 446). At the time of Street Fighter’s release, other fighting games such as Karate Champ (1984), a martial arts
combat game, already existed in the arcades (Honda and Bison 225). The first *Street Fighter* game was released in 1987, and did not stand out much from these existing games (Honda and Bison 229). However, 7 years later, *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior (1991)*, would successfully penetrate the market and revive the fading American arcade industry (Kent 446). There was enough interest that arcade owners were confident in installing that many cabinets. According to Kent, “arcade owners bought multiple *Street Fighter II* machines and set them up in rows, the way they used to set up *Pac-Man* machines a decade earlier” (446). The game became known for attracting long lines of people waiting their turn to play (Honda and Bison 222). Although *Street Fighter II* did not initiate a new gaming genre like *Pac-Man*, it was nonetheless revolutionary within the fighter genre in two important ways: its leverage of the physical environment of the arcade and its cast of characters with their associated combo moves.

First, *Street Fighter II*’s “competitive nature…made it uniquely suited to the arcade” (Honda and Bison 223). One of the reasons why *Street Fighter II* helped revive the arcades, was because of the experience of fighting in an enclosed space next to an opponent at one of the cabinets (Honda and Bison 223). Compared to later home console and online versions of the *Street Fighter* series, the experience of playing *Street Fighter II* during its heyday would have been more raw, more thrilling, and there would have been a large audience of other players watching you play, either cheering for you or trying to bring you down (Su 364). There is a unique experience in playing in the arcades that cannot be fully experienced elsewhere. The series essentially helped contribute to the second wave of enthusiasm for the arcades since the boom of the golden age of the arcade.
Second, Street Fighter II improved dramatically over Street Fighter I and other fighting games in terms of the large variety of characters with unique fighting combos to choose from and the improved graphics used to display them (Honda and Bison 229-230). In Karate Champ, there was only a fighter in white and an opponent in red with attention more clearly given to the fighting and sparing aspect rather than the avatars (“Karate Champ”). Street Fighter II however,
focused on offering players a more tailored experience with a range of new characters and character-specific combo moves. I will return to the combo moves in the next section, but the characters themselves formed a key foundation for this innovative game mechanic. In the first *Street Fighter* game, there were only two characters to choose from, Ryu and Ken (Honda and Bison 229) (Figure 4), but in *Street Fighter II*, there were eight characters to choose from (Honda and Bison 229) (Figure 2), re-introducing the original characters as well as adding new ones with an even larger set of move combos (Kent 446). With a larger cast of characters to choose from in *Street Fighter II* (Figure 2), players were not limited to the same faces every time they played, bringing variety and choice to the experience. In combination with the variety of moves from the different characters and the diverse use of the console, *Street Fighter II* was able to distinguish itself. Players could now enjoy figuring out each fighters’ special and hidden moves, come up with cool combo moves, and pick out their favorite character. By giving players the ability to do more within the game as well as challenging them to “learn how to play well” (Honda and Bison 235), Capcom gave players the opportunity to better appreciate the genre and enjoy conquering their games. By *Street Fighter IV*, there were well over fifteen to twenty-five characters to play with depending on the gaming console (“*Street Fighter IV*”).³

With the success of *Street Fighter II*, other fighting games began to follow in its footsteps (Honda and Bison 231).⁴ Midway’s *Mortal Kombat* (1992) also adopted the use of multi-playable characters with special moves in its inspiration from *Street Fighter II*, but was notably notorious for its extremely gruesome and violent graphics (Honda and Bison 231). Additionally, much like *Pac-Man*, the *Street Fighter* series spawned a multi-year franchise including other

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³ These counts do not include boss characters, or other playable characters added and left out in other releases.
⁴ For example, SNK released *Fatal Fury: King of Fighters* (1991), *Art of Fighting* (1992), and *Samurai Showdown* (1993) (Honda and Bison 231).
*Street Fighter II* versions,\(^5\) and other *Street Fighter* editions to the family.\(^6\) Thus, the release of *Street Fighter II* set off a second revolution in the arcade industry a decade after the Golden Age in which *Pac-Man* thrived in. A focus on character avatar design, character-specific moves that required work to master, and the immersion of real time combat would continue influencing the fighting games which would succeed *Street Fighter II*.

### 5.2 Gameplay mechanics

In addition to being important turning points in video game development, with *Pac-Man* expanding the scope of the arcade and video game industry in both content and audience, and *Street Fighter* improving upon existing content and reviving the arcades, there are distinctive features within the games that are attractive and relevant to their initial successes. For *Pac-Man*, its core concepts would be the characters and maze that contributed to the simple and cute yet hard to master gameplay. In the case of *Street Fighter*, its choices in characters and their associated hidden and combo moves contributed to the complex gameplay that enthralled its fans. These gameplay mechanics are the core aspects of the two games, and made them distinct among the other games of their time.

#### 5.2.1 *Pac-Man*: A Simple and Cute Game to Learn, but Hard to Master

*Pac-Man* is a relatively simple game to learn and play. There is nothing inherently complex about the rules/strategy of the game, which allowed for a greater audience, as young or old, new or experienced, could just jump in and enjoy playing the game without having to do

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much. Although the game is simple to learn, it does not mean it is easy to play. As the player progresses each level, the game gets more challenging as the ghosts start moving faster. Three aspects of Pac-Man’s game mechanics make it easy to learn but hard to master: the ghosts, Pac-Man himself, and the maze in which they are all trapped.

First, the ghosts that Pac-Man must flee are an important factor to the game. While an easy game to learn, Pac-Man is still “difficult to master (Wade 249)”. It is not as complex as say, the Street Fighter series, with the variety of combo and hidden moves players can devise and utilize, but players can still get caught by the ghosts and eventually meet their end. To go as far as they can in the game, players need to avoid the ghosts as best as they can: these enemy characters form the “core challenge to the player” (Newman 5). Despite the ghost’s silly nature as discussed previously, they still offer a motive for players to move Pac-Man as quickly as he can, and as smartly as he can. Without them, there would be no need for players to get frantic and frenzied as they play the game, which would take away from its attraction: without some level of thrill, purpose, or motive, the game would fall flat. Notably, with the first version of Pac-Man, there was one thing that truly invested players could do to get a higher score: they could memorize the set patterns and paths followed by each of the ghosts (Honda and Bison 171). By paying attention to the characteristics of the ghosts, players could easily determine their plans of action in the original Pac-Man. Later releases such as Ms. Pac-Man (1981) did not have predictable ghosts, but were much more randomized, taking away this opportunity for players to “cheat” the system by memorizing ghost patterns (Kent 173).

Second, Pac-Man has his own features in the gameplay that help keep players’ interest. One such trait is Pac-Man’s speed; or his ability to move faster than the ghosts (Wade 252). If he were to move slower than the ghosts, then the game would end very fast, so why even bother
trying? According to Wade, if he were to move at the same pace as the ghosts, then he would still be at a disadvantage like the players of other maze chase games Rally-X and Radar Rat Race (1981) who move at the same paces (252). Therefore, Pac-Man’s speed is an important trait, as it distinguishes Pac-Man from other maze chase games, gives hope to players, and keeps the game going. Another trait of Pac-Man is that he can reverse his fate for small periods of time (Figure 3). Whenever he eats a power pill, Pac-Man becomes invincible against the ghosts, and instead of needing to run away, he can turn around and chase after the ghosts. As Wade states, the haunted therefore, has now become the haunter (250). This trait is exciting as instead of being frantic and frenzied from trying to avoid the ghosts, players can now become the bad guy and enact their playful revenge on those scaredy-cat ghosts. It continues to keep players absorbed in the game, and provides a wonderful plot twist where players can finally feel in charge of their situation. After all, Pac-Man is the star of the show, so he must have some attractive qualities.
Figure 3: This is a back cover of a 1980 flyer for Pac-Man released by Midway in the United States. The ad explains the different important structures of the game, as well as how to get higher scores by making use of the counterattacks and fruit targets. Pac-Man is the protagonist, the ghosts are the enemies, and the maze is their playing field. Retrieved from Classic Gaming.

Finally, another key contributing factor towards the allure of Pac-Man would be the maze. As previously established, Pac-Man introduced a new genre of video games, the maze chaser. The maze is an integral part in establishing the new genre, as well as making Pac-Man
incredibly successful. Without the maze, it would just be Pac-Man, the ghosts, and the pills, in an open field without any obstacles hindering all the ghost from attacking Pac-Man, or on the occasion, hindering Pac-Man from attacking the ghosts (Figure 3). Much like how there is no point to the game without any ghosts, there is no point to an obstacle-less field where Pac-Man would never be able to catch a break. The maze also obstructs each adversary from trying to get away from each other. The maze not only controls the direction of movement, it constrains choice and strategy requirements, while offering selected opportunities to choose a new direction at certain forks in the road. This authority of direction allows players to either follow the flow and continue in a forward movement, or pause, think, and make the choice to break the flow and turn into some random alley. Or perhaps they are not thinking and will randomly jerk the console consciously or unconsciously!

Together, these three aspects of the game mechanics – the ghosts, Pac-Man himself, and the maze – combined to create a unique game that was easy to learn, attractive to new gamers, but still challenging enough to keep people coming back.

5.2.2 Street Fighter: A Simple Concept, but Complex Gameplay

In contrast to Pac-Man, Street Fighter is a far more complex game. The concept and general idea of the game are easy to understand. The part that is more complex, yet one of the most attractive part of the game, is that players can come up with a variety of different move combos that deal various amounts of damage to the opposition. Coming up with different move combinations challenges players to act smarter, think more about what they are doing and how that would benefit them, and gives more value to their playing ability. Unless they are just randomly smashing buttons, it is a valued skill for players who can execute many different,
difficult, and effective moves. These players are deemed ‘masters’ of the game, receiving recognition for their skills and inventions within the Street Fighter community (Brlek 63).

Figure 4: The back side of an original North American arcade advertisement for Street Fighter. It depicts the two playable characters Ryu and Ken, the A.I. oppositions, the different playing environments, and how to use the arcade console and pads to create different types of combinations of moves. Retrieved from CAPCOM:Shadaloo C.R.I..
The core concept of *Street Fighter’s* combative nature are the combo moves. Many advertisements for the *Street Fighter* series often depicted what sort of basic moves can be executed with the game pads (Figure 4). The fact that the use of the controls and what they could execute were an important focus of these ads, reveals the importance of players’ knowledge of proper console use. In Figure 4, the largest text on the page are about striking the pads with your fist and the pneumatic controls, which further accentuates the importance of the controls in the players’ experiences and the gameplay, that is not as significant with *Pac-Man*. Although the controls do play an important role in playing *Pac-Man*, it does not have the same complex functionality and use as it does with *Street Fighter* and its combo moves.

It was only by becoming experts that players could enjoy beating and winning against other players. With this understanding of what types of specific moves the console can execute with a specific maneuver, players can then combine those movements to create the ultimate combo moves. They can figure out and creatively come up with their own techniques and strategies for fighting. There was no right way to play, and no specific instructions on how to fight the opponents. It was up to the player to figure it out themselves with the basic moves they were given; and the scenarios were endless. Previously established, it was with *Street Fighter II* that the gameplay was popular, unlike the first *Street Fighter* game (Honda and Bison 229). Thus, while previous fighting games also required strategizing, *Street Fighter II* was “more complex”, in that “players had to work hard to learn all the moves and then the right circumstances to execute them” (Honda and Bison 230). It was not just the knowledge, but the skill and effort required for players to effectively apply their developed combo moves. Furthermore, this interesting complexity has helped developed a relatively large community of
players that come together to post, watch, discuss, and show off gameplays and new move combos (Brlek 63).

With the variety of characters discussed earlier, each with their own set of moves, abilities, and combos to explore, *Street Fighter II* players were able to experience different results and relish in learning the different moves with each character. Thus, the variety of characters also play an important role in creating a larger pool of move combos including hidden moves (Figure 5). Together, the *Street Fighter* series provides much to challenge players and keep them captivated. Brlek also notes that because of the differences in characters, “It is important for players to not only know their own character but also the character of the other player in order to choose the most appropriate overall strategy and specific attacks” (64). This suggests that players have more motivation to spend the time figuring out the different characters and finding their strengths and weaknesses, so that they would be better prepared to fight against other players. More serious players would then become more invested in the game. By maintaining the old cast of characters in *Street Fighter IV*, veteran players of the first *Street Fighter* series are given a sense of nostalgia connected to *Street Fighter II* (Su 362), but with the introduction of newer characters, they also can expand upon their expertise and enjoy mastering the new changes while not finding the game repetitive and old. Despite that, newer players of later *Street Fighter* releases will not be completely behind the older players as they figure out the new changes together.
There are also some minor tricks and skills that players have found with *Street Fighter IV* that they have used to their advantage because of how the game is programmed or how the controls are recognized. Brlek mentions two “advanced techniques”, the “option selects”, which
is where the game will “decide which action is most appropriate for the situation” after “deliberately inputting contradictory commands”; and the “auto-corrections”, which is where the game will fix “the direction of a special, super or ultra move” if the player has entered in the wrong direction (67). These minor details allowed players to create more efficient and successful gameplays, providing for a more enjoyable and satisfying game experience if they do win. Additionally, the fact that the player is skilled or knowledgeable enough to use these kinks in the system to their advantage helps create a distinction between “master” or “hardcore players” and “scrub players”, where the hardcore players are the more experienced and expert players, while the scrubs are the newbies (Su 363, 364), which is a definite ego booster. It also suggests that players are interested in and attracted enough to the game to become that invested.

*Street Fighter II*, in particular, introduced the gaming world to the new mechanic of character-specific combo moves, and gave players a variety of characters to choose from. These game mechanics allowed new skill-building and personalization opportunities for players to decide their own experience, enjoy the characters’ skills, build their own reputations and egos, and hopefully win their matches.

### 5.3 Relatability and Involvement

Players of the *Pac-Man* and *Street Fighter* series may find that they can relate to the characters or motifs in the game, or to other players of the series. The players can become more involved and find a deeper connection to the series other than just simply playing for fun. Thus, by becoming more invested in the series, players have the motivation to continue coming back to it. For the players of *Pac-Man*, there are many motifs within the game that parallel our lives, such as the consumerist Pac-Man and the maze that represents our lives (Wade 256), as well as
cultural motifs that reminds us of our childhood. Meanwhile, *Street Fighter* has garnered a large *Street Fighter* community of both hardcore and scrub players (Su 363, 364) who came together to share their experiences and mutual interests.

5.3.1 *Pac-Man: A Reflection of Ourselves*

As previously established, Pac-Man, our main character, plays an important role in the series. However, he is not simply an avatar that the player controls; Pac-Man is also a reflection of our own existence. Beyond the external cutesy image, there is a darker side to Pac-Man. Pac-Man’s whole purpose in the game is to continue eating as many pills as he can without getting caught until there is nothing left. In this sense, he is both a consumer and a person who is desperately trying to survive (Wade 256). In our own reality, much like Pac-Man, we also need to eat to survive, and we need to continue laboring within society to carve out a space of our own. We are also living in a capitalist society where materialism rules and consumerism is rampant. We eat, we work, we buy. These actions are constantly and consistently repeated in our lives, and is what keeps us functioning today.

The simplest connection here, is that Pac-Man eats and that we eat. Every day, it is the same routine, and if we stop, we will eventually starve and die. Pac-Man on the other hand will not starve, but if he were to simply stop consuming pills and does nothing, then he is just waiting for his death when his enemies catch up to him. Eating is just one of our most basic needs and is a necessity for survival. However, if we see the pills as not food, but actual drugs, then things might be even more crazy. Wade discusses how in the 1980s, drugs were taken for fun, or as a way for people to escape from their realities (259). That is not so different now either. Many of us still try to find our pleasure and liberation with drugs, to the point where it has become an
epidemic (at least in the U.S.). Perhaps we think it is fun and cool, or maybe we are tired with our lives and the pain that it may bring us. Either way, the phrase “popping pills” is not unknown to us. Wade also sees that “…pills are provided from the welfare state to maintain a psychologically stable and fruitful Happy Consciousness…” (259). We do not just seek drugs by ourselves, but they may be freely given to us. We are becoming increasingly reliant on prescribed pills to help us cope with our medical needs, whether it be for mental illnesses, or physical ailments. With the drugs, we are hopefully, or supposedly, able to find the relief that we seek for. Pac-Man, too, is seeking to escape from his fate and his pains, but there is never really a true exit in his maze, so perhaps in his misery, he seeks to find comfort in consuming pills. For with his quest to consume the pills, he can momentarily forget that he is actually trying to run away from his monsters.

We can also flip Pac-Man’s need to consume a little bit and interpret Pac-Man as a consumer of material things. We live in a society where our need to buy and possess materialistic things are the norm. Every day, we are assaulted by advertisements and commercials telling us to buy and buy, or else we would surely be missing out. Even in social media, we see people are constantly ‘flexing,’ or showing off what they have: the latest iPhone, the coolest Nike shoes, the most expensive Louis Vuitton bag, or the must-have luxury good of the day. Wade states that Pac-Man has “become a metaphor for life in advanced capitalist societies, riven and driven by the need for more” (256). We face constant societal pressures that make us feel as if we need to ‘keep up with the Joneses.’ Many of us cannot help but fall into that trap, so we inevitably spend, spend, spend. Pac-Man is like that pathetic consumer, who cannot help but get as many pills as he can whenever he can. He continues to consume until there is nothing left; yet when the next stage comes on and there are new pills, he begins the same cycle again, because he is not yet
satisfied with what he already has. Are we ourselves ever satisfied with what we have, or do we bend and fall for the need to get the latest and the best goods to satisfy some sort of unfulfilled need? Unfortunately, it may seem that we are like that pathetic consumer as well.

Reflecting across Wade’s arguments and the advertisements I analyzed for the game, I propose that we can also interpret Pac-Man’s actions in a third way: like a worker, a laborer who keeps going, and going, and going; unable to stop. It is just what he is destined to do in his reality – to keep grinding in his little world. In our own world, we are also laborers. Once old enough, we went to school, and when we grew older, we went to work. We have been groomed since childhood to become laborers of our society. Cynically speaking, educational institutions have turned towards (or perhaps had always had) one basic goal: to churn out better laborers for the benefit of the greater society. Once we are free of the educational institution, we are expected to work. Contribute to society and you will be rewarded. What kinds of rewards would be beyond the scope of this paper. For Pac-Man though, perhaps his reward is the momentary relief he gets at the end of each stage before he must work again, or perhaps it is the momentary thrill of becoming his enemies’ hunter. It might be, if he has any awareness, the point system (scores) that increases as he consumes, resembling much like our monetary system, where we are paid for our labor. The harder we work, or the bigger fish that we catch (e.g. ghosts and fruits), the more we get paid for. Forever he shall work until the day he dies, and forever we will work, until the day we die.
On a brighter tangent, in the *Pac-Man* franchise, there develops a whole Pac-Family, to which players can also relate to. There is a Ms. Pac-Man, Junior Pac-Man, Baby Pac-Man, and more (Kent 173). General Computer (creator of *Junior Pac-Man*) and Bally/Midway (creator of *Ms. Pac-Man* and *Baby Pac-Man*) created these games for profit of course, but they have also created this familial relation and amusing background story to entice us and make us feel a connection to this family. As seen in Figure 6, Pac-Man is depicted as a newly married groom,
where Ms. Pac-Man is his beautiful bride. It says, here is this guy, Pac-Man, who is much like us. He has this girl, Ms. Pac-Man, who he loves, and who loves him, and here they are, getting married, just like many real-life couples. Look at how happy and carefree they are; oblivious to the angry ghosts who are jealous of their union. Some of us can certainly relate to this joyful experience, or perhaps, the experience of having a family. Capitalizing on this notion of family, were the Saturday Morning cartoons of Pac-Man and his family that families could enjoy watching. As per the *New York Times* (1982), he is “a thoroughly suburban husband whose simple desire is to read his newspaper in peace” (Salmans) in the T.V. show. He runs through problems in his life like the pesky ghosts, but he can surely overcome them. He is the hero of his story, and is thus the perfect husband and father; as expected from society. We might not be Pac-Man himself, but perhaps Ms. Pac-Man, or for the younger players, Junior or Baby Pac-Man. There is a character for us all. If for whatever reason we cannot relate to the experience of having a happy family, then perhaps the Pac-family can become our family, to which we can find comfort in.

Another important motif within the game lies with the maze’s representation of our own world (Wade 255). Since the maze is the environment that Pac-Man exists in, and Pac-Man reflects ourselves, then the maze is a representation of our own world, or of our own everyday lives (Wade 255). However, the maze is not a happy place for Pac-Man. It is this labyrinth full of trials and tribulations to which there is no way out. If we think of our own lives with a pessimistic lens, then it is also an entrapment full of things that are constantly trying to bring us down. As per John Green in *Looking for Alaska*, perhaps it is a Labyrinth of Suffering. All that we can do is keep on trying to survive. Maybe we even become exhausted with how our lives are going; with what little we can control. However, there is one major difference between Pac-Man
and ourselves. We are the players, and we control Pac-Man. Therefore, we can take control of Pac-Man’s life without any consequences, and out-beat his enemies; pretending that this is our life, that we are taking control of it, and that we are coming out on top of our own troubles. By relating ourselves to Pac-Man and his world, we provide ourselves an alternate fantasy of our own lives that we can use as a momentary escape from our real lives. However, it is still only a game, and we are not actually able to escape our lives that easily. There is no exit except for death, but perhaps momentary joy and relief is better than nothing.

Other motifs in the game’s physical structure on the other hand, appeal to our childlike fantasies. The ghosts for example, reminds us of our fears as children and the bedtime stories of monsters and ghosts we often heard (Wade 250). The power pills ability to aid Pac-Man in becoming invincible against his enemies, also is a familiar theme for some of us. MoMA state that Iwatani drew inspiration with the cartoon character Popeye, as when Popeye eats spinach, it makes him strong enough to fight off his enemies (“Popeye”). Another small relation, would be the pills marking pathways like Hansel and Gretel and their trail of crumbs (Wade 250). All these small structural motifs bring in elements of childlike fantasies that Wade believes brings up nostalgic memories that have contributed to the franchise’s success (250). It plays into the role of making Pac-Man a fun and cute game for people to play, and reminds us of our childhood innocence. Regardless of our awareness of these connections, they are still familiar structures that we have encountered before.

5.3.2 Street Fighter: A Community of Fighters

While players of Street Fighter may find some relation to the elements of the Street Fighter Series, arguably, the most notable relationship would be between the players themselves.
Previously mentioned, *Street Fighter* developed a significant community of players who came together to discuss their new fighting combos, share their gameplays, and more (Brlek 63). The community is not only about players trying to get better or to help others get better (Brlek 63), but is also about the shared experience of being *Street Fighter* fans, the relationships that players built with one another, and the power that the community has to effect game development and shape gameplay norms. In this section, I will discuss how the greater *Street Fighter* community has developed and shifted along with the franchise’s changes over time. Early *Street Fighter* communities centered around the local arcades where people would gather to play, and grew into global competitions and tournaments held for *Street Fighter II* in the early 1990s. In turn, the arcade-centric communities of *Street Fighter II* grew into the dispersed online communities surrounding the release of console-based *Street Fighter IV* with its support for online play. Alongside these gameplay-based communities, players also developed bonds through networks developed to share moves, strategies, and knowledge about gameplay. These communities remain interesting not only for their persistence over time, but also for the hierarchies within them between the ‘hardcore’ players and the ‘scrubs’ (Su 363, 364).

The *Street Fighter* community was significant enough for various organizations to hold local and global competitions and tournaments. According to Leone, Capcom held a *Street Fighter II* tournament in the U.S. in 1991 (Arcade Success Subsection), and according to Su, in 2009, Gamestop held a U.S. tournament for *Street Fighter IV*, inviting Japanese and Korean champions (364). Other countries such as Hong Kong (Ng Third Paragraph) also held their own local competitions, further showing the influence *Street Fighter*. The *Street Fighter* series has also been included every year in the Evolution Championship Series, “an annual esports event that focuses exclusively on fighting games” (“Evolution Championship Series”), which has been
broadcasted on national television by ESPN2 and streamed on Twitch before (“Evo 2016”). In Su’s research, he also notices that the crowd and spectators play a big role in the popularity of these types of tournaments, in that there is a lot of value in the responses and reactions from the crowd for both the players and the viewers (366). They create “hype” (Su 366), and makes the events more thrilling. Updating Brlek’s older observations of having “detailed knowledge of the gameplay mechanics” in order to understand the discussions and commentary for these tournaments (66), Skolnik and Conway observed that the “major tournament broadcasts such as EVO” have begun to promote a more inclusive environment by using more accessible language and descriptions in their broadcasts in response to community feedback (754). Furthermore, according to Skolnik and Conway, the nature of these tournaments began to move away from the arcades as well, with the rise of home and portable consoles (753). As these devices become more popular and accessible, players started to move their “community play meetups and tournaments in easily booked public and private spaces” (753). With the demands for accessibility with the increase in interested players, the tournament environment had to adapt to accommodate the growing community and their needs.

The Street Fighter community existed both online and offline, and was not limited to the local sphere, but was on a global level as well. In the beginning, when Street Fighter existed primarily within the arcades, the community was more localized. However, as technology advanced, and there was a shift towards the home consoles, the community was able to grow beyond the arcades. By the time Capcom released Street Fighter IV in 2008, players had the option to play it both within the arcades on traditional arcade boxes, and at home on home consoles such as the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 with the ability for online play (Su 362). Of course, this was not the first case of the home console, nor was it the first time the home console
offered online play (“Home video game console”), but *Street Fighter IV* was the first game to introduce online play for the popular series. Online multiplayer play gave *Street Fighter* fans the ability to play comfortably at home rather than having to go to an arcade, and they could play as much as they wanted without having to queue in line waiting for their turn (Skolnik and Conway 751). Online play also gave access to those who did not live near a local arcade (Skolnik and Conway 752). With greater accessibility, an increased amount of people were able to come together, connect, enjoy battling each other, and share their techniques and tips, building deeper relationships with their fellow players.

What is interesting about this community though, is that there is a slight hierarchy of players. Those who are much more skilled are on top – the master or ‘hardcore’ players (Su 364), whereas players who are just getting the hang of things or are still resorting to button smashing are on the bottom – the ‘scrub’ players (Su 363). Kent states that “Okamoto [the leading game designer at Capcom in charge of *Street Fighter II*] was well aware of the arcade prestige given to players who master hidden moves and difficult games, and he wanted to use that prestige to his game’s advantage (466).” Thus, the relationship between the two different types of players played an important part in getting *Street Fighter* to where it is today. If players wanted to receive any type of positive recognition within the community, they had to improve their skills by spending more time playing and learning the games. To gain that respect, players had to train themselves to skillfully apply intricate combos and utilize the hidden moves affectively.

However, instead of attempting to learn how to become better themselves, scrub players could turn towards the master players for help, which created a ‘master and apprentice’ type of relationship among players in the community (Brlek 62). According to Su, senior gamers took pride in mentoring other, newer players (364). They knew they were good, but the sentiment was
probably validified by knowing that other players are looking up to them for guidance. It must have felt even better when they saw someone who was bad in the beginning grow to become excellent players under their care. Su also states that “the hardcore are privileged in constructing and shaping a ‘new’ generation of SF4 players. The expert players recognize that the survival of the franchise requires a large audience that includes newbies” (370). With the experience and knowledge that older players of the franchise bring from Street Fighter II, they can help newer players become hooked into the games as much as they were. By giving guidance and encouragement, the older players can invite more fans to the community. With a continuous and growing interest, only then can the series continue to grow and thrive.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, I supplemented a literature review with an analysis of marketing texts to illuminate a series of shared factors that help explain the popularity of both Pac-Man and Street Fighter despite the apparent dissimilarities of their content.

First, the introduction of both Pac-Man and Street Fighter brought new revolutions to the video game industry. They both represent important turning points in the video game industry, with Pac-Man expanding the scope of the arcade and video game industry in both content and audience, and Street Fighter improving upon existing content and reviving the arcades. Because of both of their initiatives, a plethora of games within their genre were able to come to fruit, with a few closely following their gameplay model with only some minor deviations.

Second, elements within their gameplay contribute to simple concepts that players can understand yet still be challenged by. There are distinctive features within the games that are attractive and relevant to their initial success. For Pac-Man, its core concepts would be the
characters and maze that contributed to the simple and cute yet hard to master gameplay. In the case of *Street Fighter*, its choices in characters and their associated hidden and combo moves contributed to the complex gameplay that enthralled its fans.

Third, both franchises offered players the opportunity to become more involved with their gaming environment and find elements that are relatable to them. The players could become more involved and find a deeper connection to the series other than just simply playing for fun. Thus, by becoming more invested in the series, players have motive to continue coming back to it. For the players of *Pac-Man*, there are many motifs within the game that parallel our lives, while, *Street Fighter* has garnered a large *Street Fighter* community of both hardcore and scrub players (Su 363, 364) who came together to share their experiences and mutual interests.

Perhaps these three overarching categories can similarly be found in other games, and provide a formula for a long-lasting and successful series. Or maybe we can find these points in unsuccessful games, and that there are other underlying conditions that need to be considered. For now, it is significant to have found these common attributes with two series that are seemingly different on the surface. By abstracting up from the specifics of either game, this analysis helps us to better understand the bigger picture reasons for video game success. With an understanding of how and why these two different games were able to find success, we shed new light on the ways that games find success beyond the specifics of their topic or features, and might eventually utilize these findings for the development of future games.
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