

The Dawn of the 9th Console Generation: The Scalpers' Heaven

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The 'jump' from one console generation to the next is one of the most anticipated events in the world of digital games. The new hardware opens up possibilities to develop games that were not feasible on their predecessors, especially allowing even more convincing visuals. With both the *Playstation 5* and the *Xbox Series X/S* that have been recently released, we have now made our first firm steps into the 'next generation' of gaming. From the hardware perspective, the new consoles can be called equal, with minimal computing power differences. Thus, a customer choosing between the two will more likely look at other features of the consoles, as well as products and services tied to them. PlayStation has already created a solid foundation of first-party exclusive titles with focus on single-player experiences in the last generation. Games like *God of War* (Santa Monica Studio, 2018) and *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017) have already announced sequels, while, *Spider-Man: Miles Morales* (Insomniac Games, 2020) was launched as a PS5 title. On the other hand, Microsoft achieved success with a subscription service called Xbox Game Pass, where players can choose from an expanding list of over 200 games, akin to the popular Netflix. So, while both consoles are similar on a hardware level, they offer different types of value, appealing to different types of customers. The hardest part at the start of a new generation is to choose. Well, things are not so simple nowadays...

Even before the initial release, Sony stated that production of PS5 consoles will be limited during its first year on the market. This sentiment was only strengthened by the widespread COVID-19 pandemic, which delayed production even more. The pre-order process itself was handled poorly, too. The date of pre-order was not stated clearly, thus many retailers allowed people to purchase the console earlier than intended, often during hours when potential customers were asleep. Alongside broken marketing promises, the first wave of consoles was later revealed to be only available through online retailers to hamper the spread of COVID-19. This created a fertile ground for a group of people profiteering from reselling various items greatly above the MSRP, or so-called *scalpers*. Even though the Xbox did not have such a bad pre-launch period as the PlayStation, they were both heavily targeted and bought out by scalpers, only to be resold for upwards of 5,000 USD (ten times the retail price). A GameStop director reported: "At times, more than 60% of our traffic – across hundreds of millions of visitors a day – was bots or scrapers. Especially in the run-up to big launches".¹ Now both the PlayStation 5 and the Xbox Series X are out of stock everywhere, except on eBay, where one can buy them any time, for double the price. To put the scale of the problem into perspective, just a single scalper group in the United Kingdom is reported to 'hold' over 3,500 PS5 units.²

1 TASSI, P.: *Bots and Scalpers Are Making Finding PS5 and Xbox Series X Stock a Nightmare*. Released on 26th November 2020. [online]. [2020-26-11]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/paultassi/2020/11/26/bots-and-scalpers-are-making-finding-ps5-and-xbox-series-x-stock-a-nightmare/?sh=7a7fde81238d>>.

2 BARKER, S.: *UK Scalper Group Claims It's Snagged 3,500 PS5 Consoles*. Released on 24th November 2020. [online]. [2020-26-11]. Available at: <https://www.pushsquare.com/news/2020/11/uk_scalper_group_claims_its_snagged_3500_ps5_consoles>.

The whole situation can be compared to what happens with limited editions of the Nintendo Switch on a regular basis. However while those are highly limited and valuable collectors' pieces, new consoles suffering from shortages now are just mass-produced machines with no significant long-term value. Yet what about Nintendo and the next generation? While both Microsoft and Sony had a head start, Nintendo does not yet have a horse in this race. And they do not need to. Nintendo consoles have never been about graphical prowess or raw power. They were about fun, gimmicks and experiences. And if Nintendo Switch sales are something to go by, Nintendo can disregard the competition and do all the whacky stuff they can think of. But to be precise, Nintendo did release a brand-new console. *Game & Watch: Super Mario Bros.* So, anyone who wants one should go and get it; before the scalpers strike again.

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Among Us: The Example of Current Digital Influencers' Impact on the Digital Games' Popularity

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There is no doubt that influencers have enormous strength and power today. We can also increasingly see their importance in the game environment, as evidenced in recent weeks, for example, by the success of the game *Among Us*¹. This game shook the gaming industry perhaps even more than *Fall Guys: Ultimate Knockout* did in August. *Among Us* is an online multiplayer space-themed deduction game. The game was published by the American game studio InnerSloth in August 2018. However, it became a hit game only this year thanks to video game streamers on Twitch, when they realized this game could be great to fill one's time during the COVID-19 quarantine and they started streaming their online competitions. Thanks to virtual gaming and the dependence on social interaction, *Among Us* was a great fit for virtual socialization, which temporarily replaced face-to face socialization. Streamers on Twitch (e.g. Sodapoppin, Pokimane, PewDiePie and others) have been promoting the game among their followers since the beginning of July. However,

1 INNERSLOTH: *Among Us*. [digital game]. Redmond, WA : Innersloth, 2018.