

# 21087 Video games have replaced music as the most important aspect of youth culture

By Sean Monahan, *The Guardian*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021

It would be incorrect to say video games went mainstream in 2020. They've been mainstream for decades. But their place in pop culture feels far more central – to gamers and non-gamers alike – than ever before. Like so many trends during the pandemic, Covid didn't spark this particular trajectory so much as intensify it. Long before the lockdowns, video games had triumphed as the most popular form of entertainment among young people.

In November 2019, Morning Consult, a consumer intelligence firm, reported that the controversial YouTube star PewDiePie had the same name recognition as super-athlete LeBron James among Gen-Z American men. Who's PewDiePie? confused millennials wondered. (He's a Swedish YouTuber who reviews video games. Teens like to watch videos of him playing.) The global gaming industry is set to take in \$180bn for 2020 – a 20% increase in revenue, and more than sports and movies worldwide. Video games now come within striking distance of the largest Hollywood production budgets.

Across music and fashion, cultural leaders have taken note and begun producing gamerbait: cultural products inspired by the aesthetic ecosystem of the gaming world. On the fashion front, Balenciaga released their Fall 2021 collection in the form of a video game. On the music front, Travis Scott and Lil Nas X delivered blockbuster performances on the soundtracks of the video games *Fortnite* and *Roblox*, respectively.

We're in the midst of a cultural shift. It's easy to forget: video games are designed as social experiences. In a study by the entertainment brand Whistle, 68% of Gen-Z men said gaming was an important part of their identity, 91% said they played video games regularly and 74% said video games helped them stay connected with their friends.

While the gaming industry booms, the music industry struggles with multiple overlapping crises: streaming platforms pay artists disastrously low royalties, venues fight to make rent in rapidly gentrifying cities from London to Los Angeles, and Covid prevents artists from making any money whatsoever from live performances.

But gaming's wins can't be chalked up to the difficulties in other culture industries alone. It's difficult not to look at the graphics of the latest video games like *The Witcher*, *Call of Duty*, or *Control* and see some of the most compelling imagery of our age. As much as it may disturb many people, if music was the most important form of youth culture in the 20th century, video games seem slated to be the most important in the 21st.

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