

Game review-Sonic Mania

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Game Review document – Sonic Mania

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I have gathered research from firsthand experiences and outside sources to write this review about sonic mania (2020). I have gone into many different areas of the key things needed to create a good game. There are many principles to create a good game, and I go through most of them in this review.

Visual style and Genre

To start off I am going to talk about the genre and visual style. Sonic is a platform style game that has been around since the 1990s. Sonic mania is a retro blast from the past with graphics and play style from that era to remember where sonic came from. It is a game made to emulate the 2D style displayed on the SEGA MegaDrive as talked about in many articles. “The game emulates the gameplay and 2D sprite animation of the original Sega Mega Drive *Sonic* games.” (1). The new graphics and soundtrack improve an already successful game, making it suitable for the modern audience.

The visual style of the game with its bright colours suits perfectly as this is such a fast-paced game. Even just the title of the game depicts what kind of game they will be playing, and the title “sonic mania” is perfect for this kind of game as everybody is familiar with Sonic the Hedgehog. as mentioned by Scott Rogers “A literal title makes it easy to figure out where the title came from. It can be the name of your character like sonic the hedgehog...” (2). Sonics character design and colour (blue) and his slicked back spikes really depict him as a fast paced and cool character. The character design is important as again said by Scott Rogers “your game Characters actions should be defined by his personality” (3).



Sonic mania characters (4)

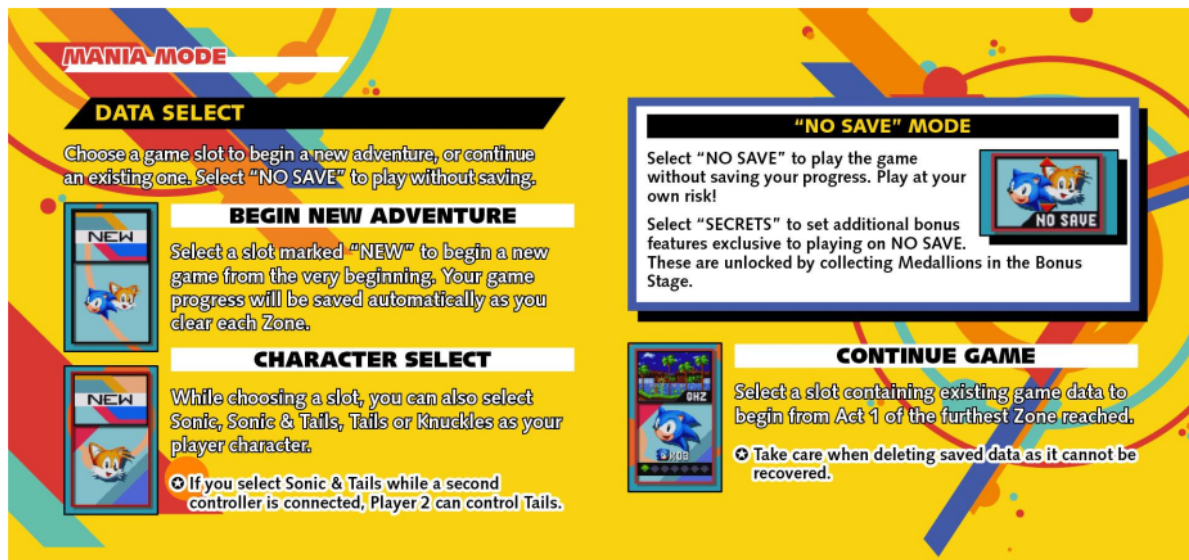
Intended demographic

There is a wide range of intended demographics for this game. With sonic manias old style artwork made to emulate the 16-bit console days one of the audiences this is strongly marketed towards is the older generation who used to own these consoles and play sonic on them.

This game was made to bring back the joy of playing sonic in its old art style with an upgraded retro style soundtrack. This game was made to be able to bring the retro version of sonic to a more modern audience. The joy of sonic as it is a very self-explanatory easy to play game but also has challenge so any age group can enjoy and play this game. As Tim Schafer, the designer of psychonauts and brutal legend said all good games provide wish fulfillment (6)

Use of audio and visual impact

The use of audio and visual impact in this game is great. The soundtrack is modernized but still fits the retro theme as same goes with the graphics. Even the title screens etc. have a retro feel to them to really emulate the original sonic.



some designs of the UI (4)

Because Sonic Mania is a more modern game, the soundtrack is also modern while keeping the retro style. The only issue with the soundtrack is the music could be more upbeat in some areas, so the music is faster paced. I feel with a game like Sonic you constantly need upbeat music to keep up with the flow of the game play. Although this does suit the game perfectly as it is extremely like the original Sonic soundtrack which everyone knows and loves. Between the 80s and 90s video game soundtracks showed vast improvement in their overall composition. As mentioned in S. Rogers book "Back in the 1970s and 1980s, arcade and console programmers had only electronic beeps and boops" (5). The Boss music in the game is more upbeat than normal game play, which makes sense as at that point in the game you are under more pressure and under a smaller time limit etc.

Game structure

I would class the overall game structure within Sonic Mania as quite good. One thing that could be improved is the creativity of the levels. Although these levels are supposed to follow a retro 90s style, I think they could have integrated some newer level designs more modern themes to almost mash the two worlds together. The levels are set out well and are a good playability length. When you lose all your lives in this game you get sent back to the beginning of the level. You can lose lives for things such as touching forbidden objects such as spikes etc. or even getting touched/attacked by enemies. There are also ways you can gain lives after you have lost some such as breaking item boxes containing 1 ups, getting 50,000 points or collecting 100 and 200 rings in zones. All of this is explained on the Sonic Mania wiki page (7). One frustrating thing about this system is that if you lose all your lives on a boss level, you must complete the past 2 levels to make it to the boss again. This game consists of 13 levels which take about 2 hours to do a complete run-through without stopping, with this information I suspect it would take around 4-5 hours for the average person to complete this game making quite a short game. There are also 3 characters you can play, one being Sonic and the other two being Tails and Knuckles. Sonic can also fly with the help of Tails if they are playing a level together.

There are enough challenges in this game for it to be interesting for the whole duration of the game. As the game is inspired by the original Sonic there is no auto run feature meaning the game is a lot more

challenging as you must create momentum and speed to be able to get over big hills and get into different gaps. There are also many different routes and ways you can go which go to the same finish point, but it is a challenge trying to find all the diverse ways. These challenges make the game more fun to play, which is important as mentioned by S. Rogers "is it fun? Is the question I dread the most when coming up with new game ideas. Many gaming academics have attempted to define what fun is" (8). A fun game is usually what makes the whole game. If a game is not interesting or fun to play nobody is going to want to play it. It keeps the consumer engaged and wanting to play the game more than once. Another thing that creates more challenge is the enemies in this game. You must try and avoid them or kill them otherwise you lose lives and must start the level all over again. There are also certain objects you cannot touch, meaning there are some areas you cannot jump on, or you will lose rings and lives.

There are also boss enemies in the game that you must battle with and defeat to progress through. Some of the bosses are harder to defeat than others but this game is not too challenging to the point you will be spending hours defeating a boss. This is important as if a game is too challenging the consumer may get bored and not bother playing the rest of the game and not bother checking out other games in the franchise. The only thing is their game may not be challenging enough for the older 90s fans and they may be looking for more in this game. They may have been wanting the sonic they all know and love but with a lot more challenge as it is now the modern day and more challenging levels are a lot easier to create. There is also a game mode for time trials which really adds to the fun aspect of the game as when you have completed the full game you can then go back and complete your favourite levels while racing against the clock and playing the levels over and over again hoping to get a better score the next time trying to beat the high score. The time trials mode really adds to the retro aspect of the game giving the game that arcade feel.



Game flow

The game flow is good in this game as the levels flow quite nicely. I also really like the movement of the camera as the way it follows the character and the level/scene around them really keeps you immersed in the game. You can get the game done as quick as possible as there is no manual camera scrolling meaning it is saving a lot of time which is extremely important in time trials which every small second is needed in. Another thing that contributes to game flow is that this game can be played in 4k resolution with no issues. This gives the game a clearer crisper look making it flow a lot better. I also really like how

there are different power ups you can get in this game that help you progress through it such as invincible which means you will not get harmed by the materials/enemies that cause the most damage for a brief period. Power sneakers which resemble one of sonics shoes and they temporarily boost your speed.

Replay Value

This game has a high replay value as there is more than one mode you can play on. Once you have completed the main levels (mania mode) there are other modes you can play on. But even in mania mode there is a high replay value as there are lots of different tracks you can follow and diverse ways you can go to try and complete the level by going a completely unique way. This also applies to time trials as you can try and work out what route on each level is the fastest. You can also try and complete the time trials using many different routes. After finding the quickest route for each level on the time trial mode you can then put that to the test on competition mode to see if you will be the fastest and win.

Conclusion

There are many positive and negative points to this game, and I discussed many of them in this review, but I am going to summarize some of the points. One thing that could have added more to this game is a world map. I think creating a few more levels and making a world map of all the various levels would have made the game a little bit more engaging having to navigate through the world map unlocking various levels as you go wondering what kind of world is going to come next. Something that could have benefitted from this is the time trials unlocking with the levels instead of all the levels being available from the start. This could have added to the surprise aspect of the game. Some of the camera angle choices were also very odd especially on the 13th level which sonic is moved into the background for I feel like the camera could have zoomed in a slight bit to make that section a bit more visible. Some good points are how all the characters have different abilities meaning you can pick the right character for you and what ability you think would be best to complete each level. There is also a range of powerups to help guide you through levels which is a plus. The time trials also have a way more upbeat song than the mania mode which I think really adds to the experience and gives you that boost of energy and motivation you need to be able to complete the level efficiently. Overall sonic mania is a great game with many good points and some things that could be worked on. I would recommend this game to play as it is a short and simple game which is fun to play alone or with friends with plenty of different replay options .

(1) Sonic wiki zone [online] Available: https://sonic.fandom.com/wiki/Sonic_Mania
[Accessed November 1,2023]

(2) S.Rogers, Level Up The guide to great video game design: Writing the story, 2nd edition, Wiley, 2014. Page 56

(3) S.Rogers, Level Up The guide to great video game design: Writing the story, 2nd edition, Wiley, 2014. Page 61

(4) Sonic the hedgehog [online] Available: <https://www.sonicthehedgehog.com/mania/manual/en/index.html?pid=2> [Accessed November 1, 2023]

(5) S.Rogers, Level Up The guide to great video game design: Writing the story, 2nd edition, Wiley, 2014. Page 428

(6) S.Rogers, Level Up The guide to great video game design: Writing the story, 2nd edition, Wiley, 2014. Page 35

(7) Sonic wiki zone [online] Available: <https://sonic.fandom.com/wiki/Life#:~:text=Sonic%20Mania,-In%20Sonic%20Mania&text=playable%20character%27s%20face%3A-.In%20gameplay%2C%20the%20player%20will%20receive%20more%20lives%20when%20fulfilling.Getting%2050%2C000%20points>. [accessed November 2 2023]

(8) S.Rogers, Level Up The guide to great video game design: Writing the story, 2nd edition, Wiley, 2014. Page 40



Game review-Sonic Mania

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

57 / 100

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. Engagement With Literature Skills

Evidence of research has been shown in both the main body of text and an attached bibliography in the work, with citations in the report supported by entries in the bibliography. Both follow the IEEE formatting guidelines specified in the assessment brief, which is good as you have demonstrated an ability to follow specific guidelines.

2. Knowledge & Understanding Skills

A good understanding of the purpose of the assignment is evidenced in the submitted work, with discussions of game elements on your allocated game separated under specific sub headings.

Good application of content from the work of Scott Rogers, particularly regarding characters. We haven't specifically discussed this in class so this is evidence of analysis and research conducted independently, which is always good to see.

3.Cognitive & Intellectual Skills

Discussion of gameplay supported by appropriately-paced audio shows an appreciation for aesthetic style and presentation.

Suggestions have been made for improving the experience, such as the addition of a world map. As this has featured in one of the oldest Sonic games before, I would agree that this could be a nice addition. Opinions aside, this shows an ability to analyse the game's content and offer alternative ways to engage and entertain.

4. Practical Application Skills

(Not assessed in this assignment).

5. Transferrable Skills for Life and Professional Practice

The work has been submitted online to Turnitin by the deadline specified.

Images have been included as part of the work – this is good to see as they provide context to the written element of the assessment.

Some of the formatting seems to be off in the document with the font size and style changing halfway through a paragraph. Try to keep this a little more consistent as this helps with overall presentation.

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