

Steam: Threat of Digital Disruption



Task 1

Digital Entrepreneurship BMMB7002D

Master of Business Administration

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Part A: External Marketplace (Video Presentation) -

<https://youtu.be/SzukntWJXjk>

Part B: Internal Analysis of Steam

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to identify how the Steam digital media platform internally approaches the threat of disruption. The report could be used to understand:

- The strengths and weaknesses of Steam.
- Threats or opportunities present in the video games industry.
- Practical applications to challenge global digital disruption.

Through theory surrounding value chain and digital disruption, Steam is analysed regarding:

- Content generation
- Feedback
- Customer Experience
- Innovation

The following conclusions are drawn:

- Steam have an infrastructure of information. Data is constantly generated which drives progress. There will be challenges and opportunity in utilising analytics to maintain quality of service and a personalised experience.
- Experimentation, adaptability and collaboration will help combat disruption, considering how video game interactions will evolve. This should be balanced with concentrated efforts when necessary.
- Meaningful relationships have built a strong community and reputation around Steam. This could be leveraged to extend services in linked industries to clients. However, dividing attention may be detrimental, optimal distinctiveness should be considered.

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1. Introduction

Steam is an online media distribution and community platform operated by Valve Corporation.¹ Launched in 2002, the platform allowed Valve to distribute its content online, replacing the need for formats such as CD-ROM/DVD and boxsets. Rather than having to go to a physical destination to purchase media of interest, customers can download titles to their Personal Computers (PC).

Steam have been a disruption to the media industry by removing intermediary elements of the supply chain, directly linking to the consumer (vertical integration). Alongside its own titles from Valve, Steam distributes content on behalf of other developers.² In 2017, total sales were estimated at \$4.3Billion, capturing 18% of the computer video game market share.³ There is currently an estimated 90Million active users.⁴

2. Approach

To determine internal solutions executed by Steam towards digital disruption, Porter's Value Chain⁵ is used, supported by The Virtual Value Chain.⁶ Whilst these models and theories are dated, the elements are adapted for modern application.

3. Supporting Content Generation

3.1 Developer Support

A novel means by which Steam gather content is through a supported distribution network for developers (SteamWorks).⁷ By being an intermediary, Steam capture value by utilising established infrastructures. Steam can leverage their current reputable position and influence the market.⁸ Whilst this support benefits small developers in short term operations, there will be long term challenges for Steam in retaining value. External developers may establish their own platforms.⁹ For example, Blizzard with BattleNet.¹⁰

¹ Valve, 2019

² Steam, 2019.

³ SteamSpy, 2019.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Porter, 1985.

⁶ Rayport, J.F. and Sviokla, J.J., 1995.

⁷ Steam, 2019.

⁸ Wang, Y., Hsiao, S.H., Yang, Z. and Hajli, N., 2016

⁹ Kleis Nielsen, R. and Ganter, S. A. (2018)

¹⁰ Blizzard, 2019.

3.2 Activating Co-Creation

Steam empowers developers by providing tools necessary to create content, supplemented by a retail section for creative software.¹¹ These concepts blur the lines between customer and developer, establishing a paradigm of co-creation in which Steam is the coordinator.¹² These concepts can enable greater innovation by enabling global talent, as well as creating shared value in content, building affinity and loyalty.¹³

3.3 Open Source Possibilities

Creativity is furthered by the deployment of open source code in the games published by Valve.¹⁴ Open source allows anyone to access and develop their own content, typically in the form of game “mods” (modifications). Creation generates satisfaction in players, fulfilling psychological needs in the continued use of a game and its services.¹⁵

3.4 Creative Communities

Customer generated content may negatively impact quality and experience compared to closed source, proprietary driven models.¹⁶ However, this can be controlled by utilising structured creative commons which encourage participation, innovation and recognition of achievement.¹⁷ Steam exercise this through their “Community Hub”.¹⁸ Players are able to engage socially, share content and coordinate multiplayer game experience. Such practices build relationships while reinforcing positive social behaviour, improving the online gaming environment.¹⁹

4. Enabling Feedback

4.1 Community Forums

Forums are employed by Steam which can be used for the purpose of feedback as well as sharing knowledge amongst players.²⁰ Not only does this establish a network of internal support, driving player motivations through sharing,²¹ it also enables active feedback loops which can be utilised for innovation.²² User review and ratings systems that are present on all content can aid consumer decision making and provide insights for developers.²³

¹¹ Steam, 2019.

¹² OHern, M.S. and Rindfleisch, A., 2010.

¹³ Porter, M.E. and Kramer, M.R., 2019.

¹⁴ Valve, 2019

¹⁵ Postigo, H., 2007.

¹⁶ Raghunathan, S., Prasad, A., Mishra, B.K. and Chang, H., 2005.

¹⁷ Allen, D.W. and Potts, J., 2016.

¹⁸ Steam, 2019.

¹⁹ Molyneux, L., Vasudevan, K. and Gil de Zúñiga, H., 2015

²⁰ Steam, 2019.

²¹ Rogers, R., 2017.

²² Chirumalla, K., 2017.

²³ Lin, D., Bezemer, C.P., Zou, Y. and Hassan, A.E., 2019.

4.2 Capturing User Value

Actively involving users in Steam's Online platform leverages value beyond initial purchases. Continued engagement enables long-term contributions from consumers in the form of knowledge and feedback.²⁴ Recognising and valuing opinion has positive effects on consumer satisfaction.²⁵ Establishing and maintaining relationships is a key consideration in managing digital disruption.

5. Customer Experience

5.1 Gamifying for Satisfaction

Social aspects of Steam are reinforced with an achievement recognition service. Players are awarded an accomplishment or "badge" for their profile upon completing defined objectives. Demonstrating achievements and comparison to others are key motivators for engaging players in online gaming.²⁶ Understanding such stimuli is important in determining the design of future content, ensuring positive experience and immersion for all player types.²⁷

There is value in concepts of "gamification" which could be exported to other industries, particularly education.²⁸ A demonstration of external efficacy can be found in the learning platform, Curatr.²⁹

5.2 Supporting Users

Steam has customer support that addresses issues on the platform in the form of a knowledge base and live technical assistance.³⁰ This maintains standards and upholds user enjoyment. Steam also employ anti-cheating software, to maintain fair standards in online play (VACS).³¹ While banning cheating users may solve the immediate problem, value could be captured by Steam if they attempted to convert cheaters by understanding their behaviours.³²

²⁴ Kumar, V. et al. 2010

²⁵ Mascarenhas, O., Kesavan, R. & Bernacchi, M., 2004.

²⁶ Yee, N., Ducheneaut, N. and Nelson, L., 2012

²⁷ Jakobsson, M., 2011

²⁸ Kiesler, S, et al. 2011.

²⁹ Curatr, 2019.

³⁰ Steam, 2019.

³¹ Steam, 2019.

³² Chen, V.H.H. and Wu, Y., 2015.

Vigilance must be exercised by Steam in approaching cyber-security.³³ In response to threats Steam utilise modern technology and preparedness to make changes to their hardware or software. Security in users is promoted in their online forums and support pages.³⁴ Empowering and enabling the public is means to halt cyber-crime.³⁵ This is supported by their account authenticator, “Steam Guard” included in their Steam App.³⁶ This app extends engagement by allowing access to the platform by users at any time, integrating into daily life.³⁷

5.3 Negative Behaviours

With online interactions, moderation and direction are required. Without suitable support, behaviours can manifest which cause psychological issues in gamers.³⁸ Elevated commitment to aspects of online games can have negative consequences on daily life. Although, many harmful online behaviours are triggered by real world circumstances.³⁹ Steam could include supporting services for the benefit of user health.

There is a problem of “toxic” behaviours in online games.⁴⁰ To counter this, Steam introduced concepts of player feedback. Cognitive dissonance is utilised through peer surveys to make players conscious of their behaviour, who in turn seek approval by positive action.⁴¹ Gamifying reputation has reduced negative activity.

5.4 Optimising Enjoyment

Steam complement their value chain by involving psychological analysis in their operations. For example, in the measure of biofeedback to determine optimal gaming experiences.⁴² There is also recognition of valuing user opinion; using suitable methods to gather accurately representative data which can be applied to enhance offering.⁴³ Discussing improving operations, Valve have an expansive recruitment system.⁴⁴ This is an adaptable approach, recognising involvement of employees and collaborators in light of digital disruption.⁴⁵

³³ Forbes, 2019.

³⁴ Steam 2019.

³⁵ Chang, L.Y., Zhong, L.Y. and Grabosky, P.N., 2018

³⁶ Steam, 2019.

³⁷ Schwab, K., 2017

³⁸ Billieux, J., et al. 2015.

³⁹ Kardefelt-Winther, D., 2014.

⁴⁰ The Guardian, 2018.

⁴¹ SteamWorks Development (Youtube Channel), 2016

⁴² Ambinder, M., 2011,

⁴³ Ambinder, M., 2009

⁴⁴ Valve, 2019.

⁴⁵ BBC, 2019. World Economic Forum, 2016

5.5 In-game Economies

Steam deploy a “Marketplace” where users can trade game items online.⁴⁶ This prevents disruption from external game marketplaces, also providing a reliable and authentic platform for users.⁴⁷ Given a recent European Court decision, this function may need to allow trading of game product keys for Steam to be legally compliant.⁴⁸ There may also still be disruption in the form of external sites offering levelling or achievement services.

6. Expansive Innovation

6.1 Disruptive Hardware

Hardware innovation is undertaken by Steam. They support Virtual Reality (Valve Index/Vive),⁴⁹ a controller which mimics games consoles,⁵⁰ as well as an app which allows users to link their mobile technology to Steam (Steam Link).⁵¹ This provides greater variety for existing users of Steam, while also improving transition appeal for users of other platforms. Driving wider industry disruption through offensive, continued innovation is a means by which Steam can remain competitive.⁵²

6.2 Future Analytics

Utilising existing infrastructures, Steam have initiated a zone of reflective experimentation (Steam Labs).⁵³ This combines insights from consumers and developers, driven by Big Data, Artificial Intelligence and algorithms. Whilst this generates novel means to deliver personalised content, more crucially it establishes an evolving culture of discovery and improvement, driving innovation.⁵⁴ This is supported by shared user statistics generated by Steam.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ Steam, 2019.

⁴⁷ GamesIndustry.Biz, 2019

⁴⁸ European Commission, 2019.

⁴⁹ Steam, 2019.

⁵⁰ Steam, 2019.

⁵¹ Steam, 2019.

⁵² Bughin, J. and Van Zeebroeck, N., 2017

⁵³ Steam, 2019.

⁵⁴ Tian, M., Deng, P., Zhang, Y. and Salmador, M.P., 2018.

⁵⁵ Steam, 2019.

Conclusion

- Steam have an infrastructure of information. Transparent, usable data is constantly generated which drives strategy, innovation and decision making. A focus on maintaining quality of service and experience will be vital to challenge disruption, driven by analytics. Personalised and reliable delivery of digital products is a competitive offering.
- A culture of experimentation, adaptability and willingness to collaborate is present in Steam. Being open to multiple avenues will help combat disruptive shifts. However, this should be balanced with concentrated efforts when necessary. While Steam are rumoured to be working on Cloud Gaming,⁵⁶ consideration should be given to the concept and how interactions of users with technology will evolve.
- An emphasis on meaningful relationships has built a strong community and reputation around Steam, as well as opening sources of content contribution. This should be supported and leveraged to extend services to clients in related digital industries. Including esports,⁵⁷ health or education. However, dividing attention may be detrimental, optimal distinctiveness should be considered.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ TechReport, 2019.

⁵⁷ Hamari, J. and Sjöblom, M., 2017

⁵⁸ Zhao, E.Y., Ishihara, M., Jennings, P.D. and Lounsbury, M., 2018

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Part A: External Marketplace

YouTube Video Link to Part A:
<https://youtu.be/SzukntWJXjk>

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