



# Free-to-Play VS Paid Video Games

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## INTRODUCTION

These days, kids all over the world are playing video games. When game developers create a game, they take player appeal and profit into consideration. With that being said, do you ever wonder why a game is pay to play or why a game is free to play? Furthermore, which is more beneficial, from a profit standpoint, to the developer? I plan to answer these questions through data collection and by finding correlations in my data by the end of this project.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

My research will be applied, as I am looking to solve a practical problem for game developers. The data I will be extracting will be a hybrid of quantitative and qualitative data. I interviewed game developers and asked them the influence the reputation a video game franchise has on its overall success, as well as the pros and cons of going with a particular business model from their point of view. I also gathered survey data on esports players and casual players who play popular free-to-play titles. I was able to survey 22 esports players, 20 Brawl Stars players, and 17 students. Finally, I have gathered some data to prove the influence reputation has on the success of popular pay to play titles.

## DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

Surprisingly, this project has led me to find data and make connections that I did not think I would be making. In my literature review, I analyzed several articles on success across different gaming genres from mobile one hit wonders such as Flappy Bird to successful MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) titles such as League of Legends. Excitingly, I was able to find a common answer behind the success of these popular games.

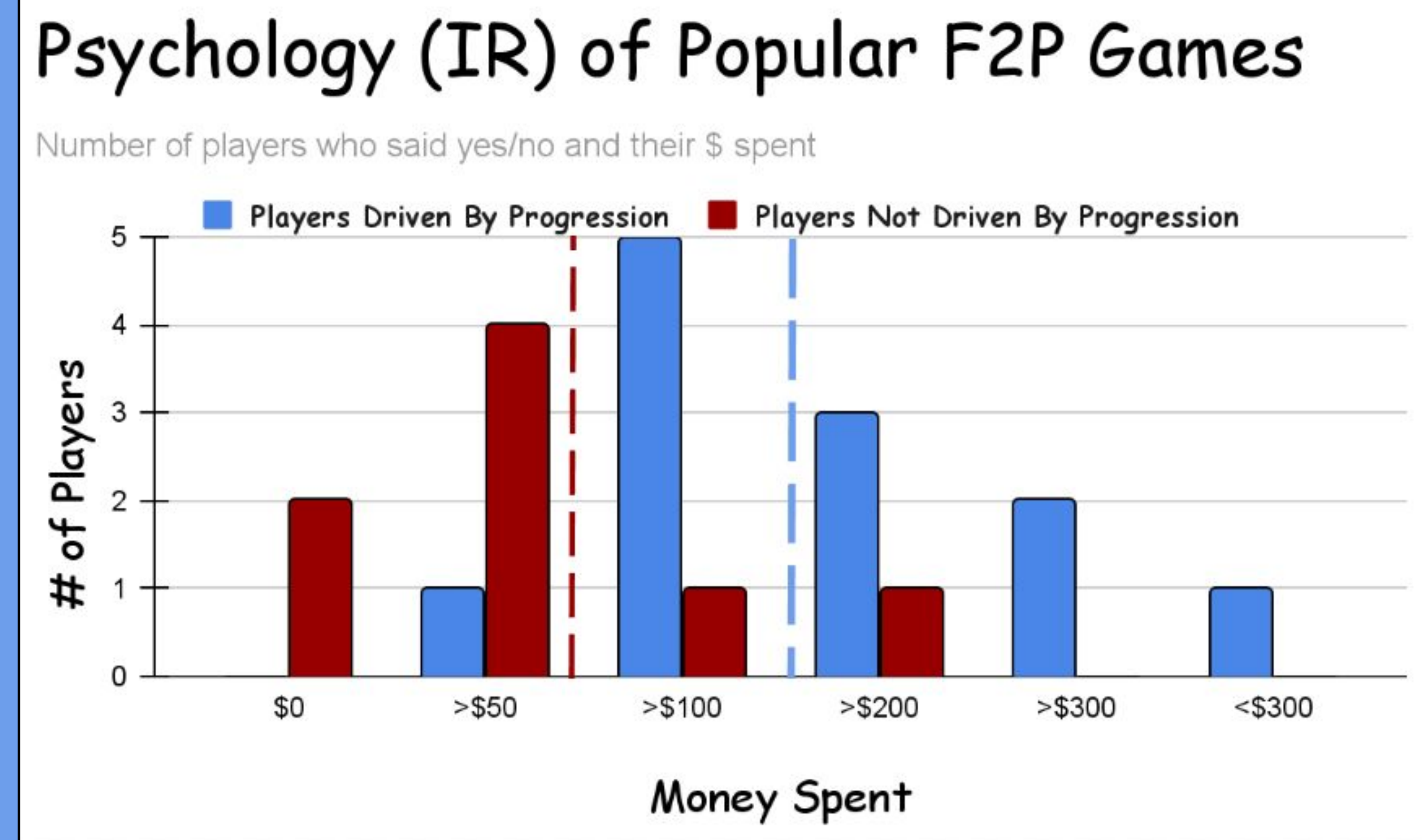
In psychology, there is this ideal known as intermittent reinforcement. This essentially means that one will continue to strive towards something until they finally succeed. A common example of this is in gambling, as people will continue to play and play until they finally win. This rush keeps them going and establishes a pattern among gamblers as well as gamers.

In gaming, we see players who spend hours on end playing one single game. Why? The answer is simple. In MOBA games, these players aim to achieve a certain rank, item, or milestone that sets them above the others. Naturally, these players want to be the best they can be at these games, and if not, at least better than others. Therefore, they tend to spend more time and money to speed up this process.

After interviewing Blizzard team leaders Walter Kong and Chris Paulson respectively, I began to get a clearer understanding. Although they oversaw popular titles Hearthstone and Diablo, a lot of their popularity and downloads came from the reputation they established with their earlier games such as World of Warcraft. "As long as a steady stream of loyal players are able to build this foundation, we have no need to adopt the free-to-play business model."

## DATA AND FINDINGS

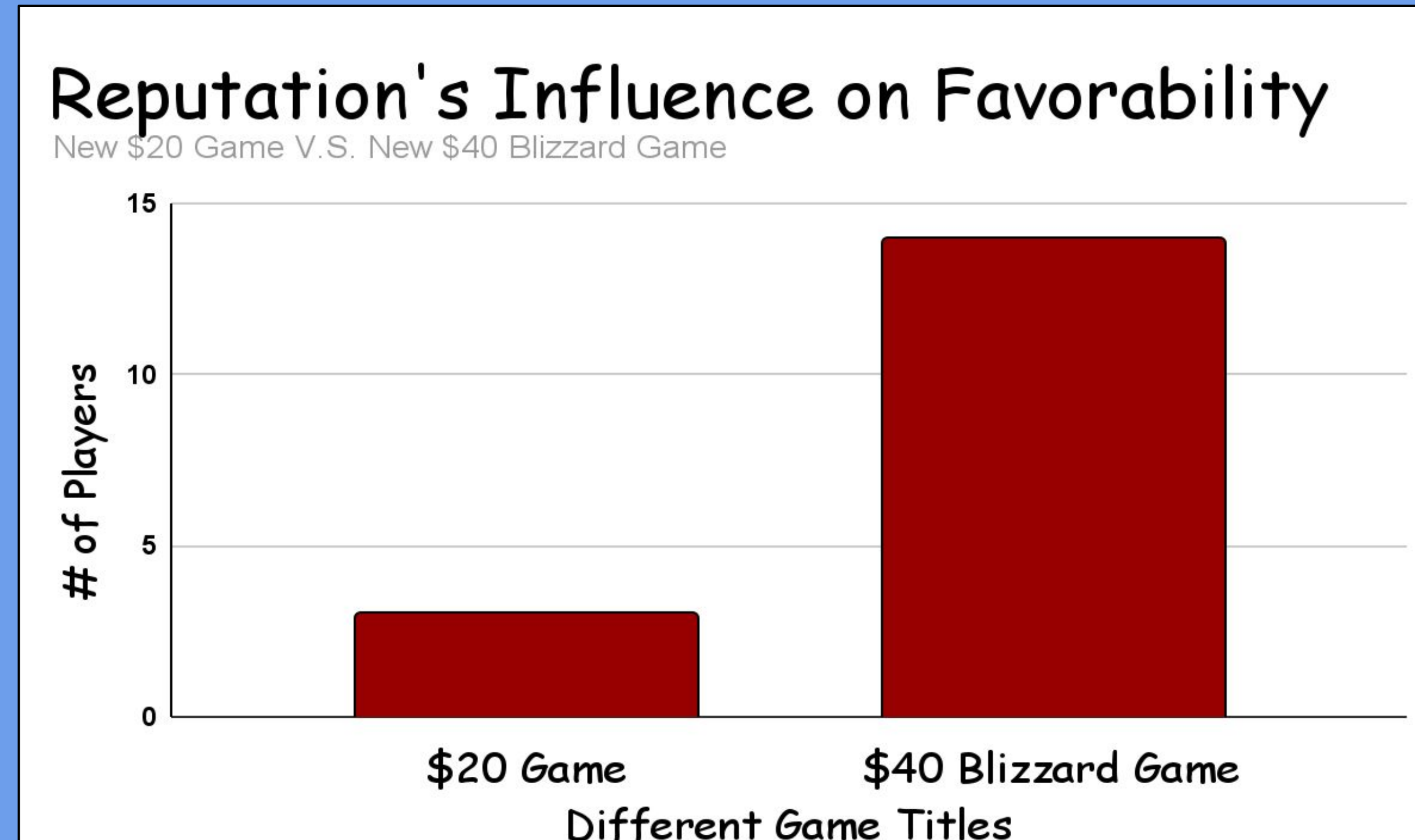
My initial survey on the mobile game Brawl Stars, created by Supercell, gave me a lot of insight and some crucial data. I attempted to find a correlation between the majority of players, 60%, who said either trophy pushing or the progression system within the game was their main motivation to continue playing it, and the amount of money they had spent on the game.



I found that, on average, someone who plays Brawl Stars in order to push trophies and their own accounts higher and further than others will, statistically, pay almost three times more than players who don't. These players play to have fun, join clubs, etc.

**\$170.83** average in-game purchases of Trophy Pushers  
**\$62.50** average in-game purchases of Non-Trophy Pushers  
**3X THE AMOUNT!**

Although this data was telling regarding profit and the main reason for profit among free-to-play games, I also had to cover trends about pay-to-play games. To do this, I interviewed a few classmates at LBHS as well as students in Irvine. I asked one simple question: if your friends were to tell you to buy a game and play with them, would you rather buy a new, \$20 game by an original developer, or the new game developed by Activision and Blizzard that costs \$40.



## CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

After gathering quality qualitative and quantitative data, a clear conclusion has been obtained. As a new developer, I do not see a path in which the premium business model would be more beneficial than the free business model. Publishing a new game in the premium business model without any previous reputation will simply not generate nearly enough traction and overall downloads as opposed to it being free to play. By publishing the game as free to play, individuals curious about the game do not feel obligated to make an investment, and will download and try it out.

Initially, I didn't think the project would follow the trend that it did, being centered around psychology. Although my initial hypothesis was proven correct, I realize the mindset that players had, depending on their individual values, played the biggest part in a game's success.

This project has opened many avenues for me as a gamer. I have always loved playing different types of games since I could remember, and was always very interested in the professional side of gaming. By pursuing my passions with this project, I was able to meet and establish a relationship with Adam Lopez, founder and coach of Irvine Valley College Esports. I was invited to an esports event at IVC and was given an inside look into their achievements, how they have grown, and their next steps as a program. I learned that there are hundreds of different career pathways within the esports world, and how it truly is becoming an industry of its own. I am ultimately very grateful for the relationships and connections that this project has allowed me to make, and I learned a lot more about gaming as well as myself through this project.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

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