



GAMES: IMPROVING SOCIAL ISSUES

Nonprofit organizations and issue advocates now view video games as an effective medium for communicating ideas and generating support among tech-savvy consumers. Video games are successful vehicles to teach important values, engage a new generation of voters, and bring the problems facing other countries to new audiences' front doors.

GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Video games' rich storytelling and personal narratives allow players to connect emotionally with deeply moving characters and events. Many organizations have capitalized on this perspective by developing video games that provide a window into the suffering and perseverance of people from around the world. For example, University of Southern California students created *Darfur is Dying* to raise awareness of genocide in Sudan. High school students participating in a Global Kids of New York after-school project created *Ayiti: The Cost of Life*, a video game that focuses on poverty in Haiti.

Players of *Cropland Capture*, a game created by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and hosted by the Geo-Wiki Project, are helping real-world farmers classify unidentified cropland and refine existing maps, enabling on-the-ground organizations to better track food harvests. Within its first week,



players identified 65,000 square kilometers of cropland, proving to be just as successful as cropland experts. The IIASA plans to use thousands of data points gathered from game play to improve current maps and ultimately help organizations better understand global food security, identify yield gaps, and monitor crops affected by droughts.

Players can also act as central bankers, helping stave off inflation, debt crises, and persistent unemployment. *Top Floor — Make your way up*, an interactive quiz from the European Central Bank (ECB), allows players to ascend to the top of the ECB by correctly answering questions about the institutional framework and tasks of the bank, and collecting briefing documents for each correct answer. The game is the third in a series of games produced by the

42,000

The number of *Nightmare: Malaria* players that visited the Against Malaria Foundation's donation page in the first week the game was available.



ECB. The others are *€CONOMIA*, in which players adjust interest rates to keep inflation low and stable, and *Inflation Island*, which examines public reaction to inflation and deflation. The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco also released a game that lets players act as the Fed chairman, using monetary policies to manage inflation and unemployment.



Additionally, developers use games to transform news and real-life events into interactive experiences. The game *1979 Revolution*, created by veteran game designer Navid Khonsari, educates players about a pivotal conflict: the Iranian Revolution. Gamers play as a young photojournalist in Tehran during the tumultuous days of the Iranian Revolution, exploring the event's real-world motivations, dangers, and repercussions.

Some games allow players to contribute to charitable causes. One example is *Nightmare: Malaria*, a mobile game created by Psyop Games that challenges players to help a little girl save her teddy bears from a scary dream world infested with malaria-carrying mosquitoes and vats of the dangerous disease. When players complete a mission, they are presented with the option to donate real money, which will go toward providing mosquito nets to people at risk for contracting malaria.

ISSUE ADVOCACY

Video games educate young people about a variety of issues including Internet safety, bullying, healthy lifestyles, and current events. Through interactive lessons, these video games help adolescents cope with serious issues.

Advocacy groups and scientists are using games to reduce risky behavior among teens. A team of medical researchers at Yale believe video games can play a vital role in the fight against HIV and other serious diseases. Yale's Play2Prevent lab is part of a fast-growing movement in the public health industry to better understand and utilize virtual game environments to



help improve the lives of players in the real world. With the help of a grant from the Women's Health Research at Yale Pilot program, medical researchers and educators developed a game aimed to reduce HIV infections among young African American women.

Other games address issues of school violence and bullying. *High School Story*, a mobile game developed by Pixelberry Studios uses the innate drama of high school to raise awareness of issues affecting young people. Using sensitive, realistic messaging developed in collaboration with award-winning cyberbullying charity The Cybersmile Foundation, Pixelberry launched a cyber-bullying-themed quest that aims to help those who are victim to it in real life. At the start of their quest, players meet a young cyberbullying victim named Hope and help her stand up to bullies through proven cyberbullying prevention techniques. Additionally, microtransactions offered during the cyber-bullying quest will directly benefit the Cybersmile Foundation.

Breakaway, a game developed by students from the Emergent Media Center at Champlain College in Vermont with support from the United Nations Population Fund and the Popular Media Center, educates young boys about violence, gender issues, and racial stereotypes. The online game

**More than
101 billion**

The total number of individual grains of rice donated by players through the World Food Programme's online game FreeRice, as of January 2014.



alternates between game play and narrative story lines and challenges players to make tough decisions about social issues, which impact future player success. Part of the UN Secretary General's UNiTE to End Violence Against Women campaign, the game has attracted users from 95 countries including Ghana, Mali, Tunisia, Indonesia, and Azerbaijan, and continues to educate young boys about making positive and impactful choices.

Additionally, ethics-based video games are helping students develop a sense of right and wrong by placing them in difficult scenarios and challenging them to think before acting. The 2013 Games for Change Festival "Game of the Year" award winner *Quandary* promotes ethical thinking and reasoning through a three-episode story that follows the development of a futuristic space colony. Players take on the role of captain of the colony and must solve complex problems, separating facts from opinions and evaluating arguments before offering solutions.

65,000

Square kilometers of cropland players mapped during the first week of *Cropland Capture*.

POLITICS

Organizations and individuals utilize entertainment software for political purposes, either by creating games that highlight a divisive political topic or by harnessing a successful game to bring increased attention to a political cause.

Several games were created during the 2012 presidential campaign to help drive interest and voter turnout, including *VOTE!!! The Game*, released by Epic Games, Inc. and ChAIR Entertainment. The game enabled players to take control of either President Barack Obama or former presidential candidate Mitt Romney as they battled each other for the White House. *VOTE!!!* offered players in-game voter registration resources, along with information about the candidates and the issues to inform players about the election.



Similarly, Comedy Central and 2K Play partnered to create the *Indecision Game*, which challenged players' knowledge of government while also imparting valuable information about America's political system in a fun and humorous way.



Fantasy Election '12 – an online game created by MTV – energized the youth vote in 2012 by awarding players points for real-life achievements such as registering to vote, supporting candidates who exemplify political civility, and voting. The game also asked players to "draft" candidates running for president, the U.S. Senate, and the House of Representatives in a style similar to fantasy sports. The game rated those candidates on a variety of metrics, including honesty, integrity, fundraising transparency, social media engagement, and poll numbers.

Other games encourage understanding of and participation in our political process. Middle school and ninth-grade teachers use iCivics to help teach civics lessons. Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor collaborated with Georgetown University Law School and Arizona State University to develop the online, game-based learning platform. First launched in 2009, iCivics now features 21 games about constitutional law and the branches of U.S. government, each of which also comes with suggested lesson plans tailored to meet state-specific learning standards. Recently, a study from Baylor University confirmed that iCivics is an effective tool for teaching civics concepts to primary and middle school students, with the largest gains focused in younger students.



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