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MKT 542
Final Project

Nintendo – Third in Sales, but First in Hearts

Abstract

Nintendo has been a fixture of the video game community since the debut of its original entertainment system (NES) in 1985. For over 30 years, the company has seen great success thanks in part to their characters evolving into iconic brands, including Mario, Zelda, Donkey Kong and more. However, in the last decade plus, Nintendo's popularity has been challenged by Sony and Microsoft, who seem to have tailored their latest home console offerings to more "serious" gamers with Nintendo focused on appealing to the casual gamer. Its previous console, the Wii U, sold only 13.5 million units in its four-year lifespan, the lowest selling in the company's history (**APPENDIX A**). While their home console offerings have not been able to match its success within the handheld console market (Game Boy, DS, 3DS), it still has not deterred Nintendo's fan base's anticipation for the release of the company's newest console, the Nintendo Switch. Given the very lukewarm success the Wii U had, I wanted to take a look at one of Nintendo's fan communities and understand why they remain so adamant about the brand. I analyze what makes them such a close group of gamers where they don't seem to care as much about the company's standing alongside Sony and Microsoft, so long as the company remains authentic to its gaming legacy.

Background

I begin by learning more about the new Switch console and some of the prominent features that Nintendo is actively promoting to the public. The Switch appears to take the most popular features of the Wii, the Wii U and handheld console models to create a gaming experience like no other (**APPENDIX B**). Impressively, as Nintendo describes on their website, the accompanying portable tablet is powerful enough for players to take it anywhere they want and continue their games with no interruptions. This technology allows games to experience a home-console, HD quality game from a handheld environment, something the marketplace has been clamoring for in recent years. Once on the go, the Switch's controller can detach from the tablet to allow multiple players from wherever users want to play. The "Joy-Con" controllers each have the same buttons for equal play between both players, utilizing the motion controls and HD-rumble that the company successfully incorporated from the original Wii console. Each controller can also be used by one player in each hand using motion or combined with a peripheral into a more traditional gaming controller.

It appears that Nintendo is trying to incorporate what has made them successful in the industry, i.e. the motion controls from the original Wii, portable gaming through technology that allows users to play home-console quality games without a TV and providing HD gaming to a fan base that did experience this with the Wii U. The Nintendo Switch is the result of the company listening to fans and incorporating what has made it special in this last decade.

Nintendo fans are known to be some of the most passionate within the video game industry. Competing fan bases have referred to them as “sheep” because of their cult-like believe and use of Nintendo products. The company has understood the importance of their fans from its beginning, reaching out to them through the Nintendo Power magazine, an in-house publication that was sent to Nintendo Fun Club members. The magazine’s content evolved over time to include features on game strategy, reviews/previews, tips, cheats, assessing rumors and other fan services to promote their appreciation of users. At the beginning of the Internet age, the company then introduced the NSider Forums website as an online branch to Nintendo Power subscribers. This is an example of a company creating an open forum, with plentiful sections devoted to specific games and brands, and then passing control to their passionate fans. However, the forum was discontinued in 2007, replaced by a sole IT forum site. With the cancellation, Nintendo decided to encourage fans to create their own forums and pages, to ensure its many fans would still have a place to go and interact with fellow Nintendo gamers.

Finding a Forum

According to Nintendo’s Wikia website, there are 34 active, listed Nintendo websites/forums for fans to interact (**APPENDIX C**). As I began to follow each of these sites and reading the forum topics being discussed, it became apparent that NintendoLife was the perfect example of thriving brand community. Not only is the website filled with a thriving Forum section, but is complimented with feature articles, news stories, game reviews/videos, along with “Talking Point” opinion pieces that are designed to start a conversation in the comments section. In addition, the forum features an area for Nintendo users who were experiencing problems with products, including the Switch at launch, and posted their issues looking for advice from other users. NintendoLife’s online community is exactly what the brand intended its fans to create when it moved away from the NSider forums.

Let us take a look at why...

Analysis – Is it a Brand Community?

First, I looked to confirm whether NintendoLife could be considered a brand community. The website appears to be specialized solely for the Nintendo brand, with every piece of media tied to a company offering. Hierarchies of forum users are noted through users’ profile pages, which feature the number of Nintendo games owned, individual reviews of the games, the amount of forum discussions and comments they have posted on, and social media contact information and more. As with many brand communities, NintendoLife functions through the Internet-only and seems to have no major interest for in-person meetings. However, the website does not view itself only as a central “meeting place” for Nintendo fans to share their thoughts on the brand. There is a deeper sense of camaraderie among the site’s users, who appear to understand that they are viewed as the minority of video gamers. The users appear encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings about the company, in a setting that focuses on an optimistic tone. Many users are proud to have chosen Nintendo as their gaming brand of choice, while also understanding the company’s current position behind Sony and Microsoft.

The variety of forum topics is very impressive (**APPENDIX D**), including users discussing ways to build Nintendo back up in the overall marketplace and how the company could gain some market share against the top two brands respectively. Individual commenters use the forum as a way to inquire about problems they are having with their Nintendo system without having to go to a repair store, even some so specific that users will name the type of television model the user is having an issue with, i.e. “Weird Issue With Samsung KS8000 TV”. Forum visitors also use NintendoLife for advice, such as whether a particular game is worth purchasing or even whether “the Wii U [is] still worth it in 2017”. After reviewing numerous posts, what surfaces is a feeling that these fans have such a strong bond that they want to help other Nintendo users, almost compelled through a need to “stick together” as they believe the brand can rise to the top of the industry once again.

But camaraderie alone does not make a brand community. According to the principles outlined by authors O’Guinn and Muniz, there are three primary markers of a brand community - Consciousness of Kind; Rituals and Traditions; Moral Obligation. The moral obligation portion is discussed in the paragraph above, as this is one of the primary reasons why NintendoLife stood out from the rest of the brand’s forums across the web. Users of this website have a better understanding that in order for users to continue interacting with the site, they need to act as “brand ambassadors” and assist new Nintendo consumers, i.e. purchasers of the Switch, in using the product and welcoming them to the Nintendo community.

Consciousness of kind is a little more difficult to describe within NintendoLife users, but you do not have to look far to get a sense of the connection these Nintendo fans have with the brand. Just through taking a look at the top commented discussions on the NintendoLife forum and you see what they have in common... The top brand/game names under the Nintendo Umbrella. Smash Bros, Legend of Zelda, Mario, Mario Kart, Starfox, Donkey Kong, Pikmin, Fire Emblem (**APPENDIX E**). These are just some of the franchises that brought Nintendo to the top of the industry, with some having made an impact in American culture as a whole. Many gamers’ tastes change over time, going from brand to brand, home to portable systems, etc. looking to appease their ever-evolving gaming desires. However, these are the devoted fans that have been with the company from the early days of the NES and 64 consoles. These fans are not concerned with Nintendo’s competitors, even shrugging off the idea of the so-called “Console War”. Many threads centered on this topic do not receive many comments as users quickly post how stupid the discussion is and that it does not matter to them. Forum users do not seem as concerned with Nintendo selling the most consoles, but developing an experience consistent with offerings from the 80s-90s that made the company iconic. To them, the “war” is against those who do not understand that Nintendo is not trying to directly compete with Sony and Microsoft.

The last of the three markers, Rituals and Traditions, is very important when we discuss Nintendo’s mark on American culture. Its NES console revitalized the industry after the “North American video game crash of 1983”. It released the first ever portable console in 1989 with the Game Boy. The Nintendo 64 brought 3D gameplay to levels no player had considered were possible for the period. The Wii was the first of its kind to utilize motion-sensitive gameplay as the standard for a gaming console. In short, something each of the

NintendoLife users has in common is that they share an experience with one of these innovations that brought them into the Nintendo fold. The website offers users a way to reminisce about their histories with the brand through its “Retro” discussion board, which includes a wide variety of topics from “Your Favorite [Games] that No One Else Played” to users asking for problem-solving advice when using their old consoles, “N64 suddenly shuts off and restarts...” Not only are users openly sharing some of their favorite gaming memories from this era, but are still knowledgeable enough to help those that have not updated their gaming habits or were not satisfied with just reminiscing in chat rooms.

Long-standing Loyalty

This point, along with the others above, confirm that Nintendo fans are extremely long-term, in that they have been users of the brand for multiple console life-cycles. Nintendo managers seemed to understand that as far back as the Wii’s life cycle. Beginning in 2007, the company announced the Virtual Console (VC) feature, where games from previous Nintendo consoles would be made available to Wii owners after having been converted to be playable through Wii’s hardware. The feature has been viewed as a great success for the company, allowing the company to earn more revenue on a game no longer being produced, but also as a way for Nintendo fans to teach a new generation of players about the games that made them fall in love with the brand in the first place. The Virtual Console continues to form its own legacy, having been expanded through the Wii U and being developed for the Switch later this year, but also through Nintendo’s portable gaming history with a VC for its Nintendo 3DS.

Such a tactic brings to mind the Barilla case study and what happens when a company opens a platform to allow its consumers to submit their ideas to the management team. The first ideas implemented from Barilla’s “In The Mill I Wish For” initiative were bringing back previous product offerings because many fans of the brand associate these former products with their childhood. Fans of Nintendo have similar sentiment towards their favorite games as they were growing up and the company seemed to recognize this by introducing the VC feature. Company managers did a great job of understanding their fans’ desire to continue playing games from previous consoles, since this was not possible because Nintendo had used game cartridges over discs until its 2001-02 Gamecube console. As a result, fans viewed such a feature as Nintendo remaining true and authentic to their company statement, by not only providing the highest quality gaming products, “but to treat every customer with attention, consideration and respect”. This is a great example of a company being open to the ideas from their consumers, while not compromising on the potential for innovation within the industry.

Another observation was that this sense of community between the NintendoLife users is their alternative to the competing online communities of PlayStation Plus and XBOX Live. Both services were developed to allow users to play with their friends within the same game, along with the option to play with and/or against each other. This level of connectivity and ability to choose players you wanted to play with was a service Nintendo was missing through its Wii and Wii U’s life cycles. This is also a primary reason for the company falling behind Sony and XBOX. Nintendo was the first video game company to introduce such connectivity between multiple users, through their Game Boy systems.

However, the company did not adapt this in the same way that Sony and Microsoft did, continuing to rely on only local connectivity and adding the number of controllers that can be connected to a single console. This will change in the fall of 2017, when the Nintendo Switch introduces an online service similar to XBOX Live and PlayStation Plus, featuring the ability to “invite friends to play online, set play appointments, and chat with friends during online matches” through a smartphone app.

However, I observe that NintendoLife’s forums were a way for Nintendo fans to connect, chat and compete with one another. Forum topics found include the exchange of favorite characters, comparing records set to top other users and even short videos of gameplay so users can see who has the best techniques for completing a game. Such features are a staple to Sony and Microsoft’s online services, so these forums are an example of fans creating a place to utilize these features on their own without having to update their gaming loyalty.

Closing Discussion

The gaming industry is beginning a time of transition and innovation, with motion controls becoming a common occurrence; realism and stories are lauded with praise over gameplay; and virtual reality adding an innovative wrinkle for game developers. Nintendo’s answer to this innovation was to produce a console that incorporated many of the features that made it successful in previous offerings, while also not forgetting its beloved fan base, like NintendoLife users. That is clear from the reviews of *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of Wind*, the Nintendo-developed game sold alongside the launch of the Nintendo Switch, which has received masterful scores from all kinds of news sources (**APPENDIX F**).

Nintendo’s practices confirm that even without hosting an online community as plentiful as their Sony and Microsoft competitors, it realized that their true fans would come together through creating websites and forums like NintendoLife. Observing this forum gave me a sense of how committed Nintendo fans are to the brand and to each other, bringing their own form authenticity that many “hardcore gamers” do not experience when they go from console to console, looking for gaming experiences. While the brand may be in third place within the “console war” landscape, it does not appear to deter those fans from supporting Nintendo. The release of the Switch console appears no different.

Sources Cited

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APPENDIX A

(As of December 31, 2016)



Wii U

Hardware: **13.56** million units
Software: **96.52** million units



Nintendo 3DS

Hardware: **65.30** million units
Software: **320.96** million units

APPENDIX B



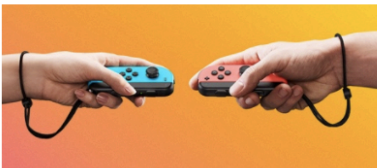
It's bigger, brown. It's colorful, too.

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Freedom to have fun. Wherever. Whenever.



Nintendo Switch is designed to go wherever you do, transforming from home console to portable system in a snap. So you get more time to play the games you love, however you like.



APPENDIX C

Name ↕	Description ↕	URL ↕	Topic ↕
1UP	Video game blog with news, game reviews, clubs, podcasts, contests, and forums.	http://www.1up.com/ [↗]	Gaming
Bulbagarden	Pokémon community with news, forums, chats, galleries, and a wiki .	http://www.bulbagarden.net/ [↗]	Pokémon
Dromble	Video game blog with the news.	http://www.dromble.com/ [↗]	Gaming
Floatzel.Net	Pokémon website with news, game info, and forums	http://floatzel.net/ [↗]	Pokémon
GameFAQs	Video game website with game information, game walkthroughs, and forums.	http://www.gamefaqs.com/ [↗]	Gaming
Gamespot	Video game blog with news and game reviews.	http://www.gamespot.com/ [↗]	Gaming
GameTrailers	Video game website with news, game reviews, game trailers, and forums.	http://www.gametrailers.com/ [↗]	Gaming
GameXplain	Video game website with news and game reviews. Most famous for its trailer analysis.	http://gameexplain.com/ [↗]	Gaming
GoNintendo	Nintendo blog with news, podcasts, and forums.	http://www.gonintendo.com/ [↗]	Nintendo
Hidden Triforce	Zelda website with news, game walkthroughs, and media.	http://hiddentriforce.com/ [↗]	Zelda
Hyrule.net	Zelda website with forums.	http://www.hyrule.net/ [↗]	Zelda
IGN	Video game website with news, game reviews, blogs, forums, and wikis.	http://www.ign.com/ [↗]	Gaming
Kotaku	Video game website with news.	http://kotaku.com/ [↗]	Gaming
Legendary Pokémon	Pokémon website with news, game info, and forums	http://www.legendarypokemon.net/ [↗]	Pokémon
Nintendo Age	Nintendo blog with news and forums	http://nintendoage.com/ [↗]	Nintendo
Nintendo Connect	Nintendo blog with news and podcasts	http://www.nintendoconnect.com/ [↗]	Nintendo
Nintendo Enthusiast	Nintendo blog with news and forums.	http://nintendoenthusiast.com/ [↗]	Nintendo
Nintendo Independent Wiki Alliance	Website of alliance of independent Nintendo wikis	http://www.niwanetwork.org/ [↗]	Nintendo
Nintendo Life	Nintendo blog with news, game reviews, and forums.	http://www.nintendolife.com/ [↗]	Nintendo
Nintendo News	Nintendo blog with news.	http://nintendonews.com/ [↗]	Nintendo
Nintendo-x2.com	Nintendo blog with news and forum.	http://www.nintendo-x2.com/ [↗]	Nintendo
PocketMonsters.net	Pokémon website with news, game info, and forums	http://www.pocketmonsters.net/ [↗]	Pokémon
Portal to Hyrule	Zelda website with news and forums.	http://www.portaltohyrule.com/ [↗]	Zelda
ScrewAttack.com	Video game website with news, game reviews, forums, and shows.	http://www.screwattack.com/ [↗]	Gaming
Serebii.net	Pokémon website with news, game info, and forums	http://www.serebii.net/ [↗]	Pokémon
Serenes Forest	Fire Emblem website with news, game info, and forums	http://serenesforest.net/ [↗]	Fire Emblem
Super Luigi Bros.	Mario blog with news and game reviews	http://www.superluigibros.com/ [↗]	Mario
Wii's World	Nintendo blog with news.	http://www.wiisworld.com/ [↗]	Nintendo
Vooks	Nintendo blog with news, forums, and game reviews.	http://www.vooks.net/ [↗]	Nintendo
Wii U Daily	Nintendo blog with news.	http://wiiudaily.com/ [↗]	Nintendo
Zelda Dungeon	Zelda website with news, game walkthroughs, forums, media, and a wiki .	http://www.zeldadungeon.net/ [↗]	Zelda
Zelda Eternity	Zelda website with news, game walkthroughs, and forums.	http://www.zeldaeternity.com/ [↗]	Zelda
Zelda Sanctuary	Zelda website with news, game walkthroughs, forums, and a wiki .	http://www.zelda-sanctuary.net/ [↗]	Zelda
Zelda Universe	Zelda website with news, game walkthroughs, forums, and media.	http://www.zeldauniverse.net/ [↗]	Zelda

APPENDIX D

Nintendo Life Forums

Welcome to the Nintendo Life Forums, the place you can discuss everything from the world of Nintendo. Please be friendly and respect the [community rules](#).


















News & Announcements [All Topics](#) [New Topics](#) [Unread Topics](#) [Watched Topics](#)

 Announcements If we've got something important to tell you, it'll go in here. Keep checking back for important information!	Topics: 56 Replies: 1,957	Mon 27th Feb 2017 by Lena_B
 News Converse about the latest video game news stories flying around the interweb	Topics: 560 Replies: 8,887	Sun, 12:21am by Captain_Toad
Channels		
 Nintendo Switch Nintendo are already talking about their "new concept" gaming platform, so we can too, in this forum.	Topics: 786 Replies: 46,283	3m ago by WraidN
 Nintendo Mobile It's happening, Nintendo will start publishing games & apps for mobile starting with Miitomo	Topics: 45 Replies: 2,313	3:53pm by edhe
 amiibo Talk about amiibo, Nintendo's NFC figure platform in this dedicated forum!	Topics: 291 Replies: 6,863	7:12am by TheLZdragon
 Wii U Nintendo's first foray into HD gaming and touch-screen in the living room, it's Wii U!	Topics: 6,312 Replies: 251,594	Yesterday, 12:15pm by Sobek4k
 Wii U eShop Addicted to downloading from the Wii U eShop? Talk about it here!	Topics: 674 Replies: 13,196	Wed 8th Mar 2017 by Pocky
 Wii U Virtual Console Don't be afraid to look into the past, we all love the Virtual Console and now on Wii U!	Topics: 474 Replies: 10,250	4:30pm by NateKimble
 3DS Nintendo's latest innovation for the handheld gaming world	Topics: 6,823 Replies: 253,932	4:16pm by Pokefanmum82
 3DS eShop Chat about downloadable content from the 3DS eShop here	Topics: 1,276 Replies: 35,092	Thu, 7:39am by Rikaria
 3DS Virtual Console Talk about those handheld classics found on the 3DS Virtual Console here	Topics: 489 Replies: 15,248	Yesterday, 7:40pm by GameOtaku
 Wii Still playing on your Wii? Come and chat to others here.	Topics: 4,142 Replies: 101,062	1pm by VoodooTrumpet
 WiiWare Does WiiWare float your boat? Then this is the place for you	Topics: 1,458 Replies: 30,143	Sat, 4:40pm by Bass_X0
 Wii Virtual Console Don those rose-tinted specs and shoot the breeze about Wii Virtual Console downloads	Topics: 1,499 Replies: 33,021	Mon, 4:11pm by Bass_X0
 DSi / DS If you're interested in talking about the Dual Screen family, pull up a chair	Topics: 1,826 Replies: 33,188	1m ago by maceng
 DSiWare Talk about Nintendo's very own ground-breaking 'App Store' here	Topics: 1,398 Replies: 38,623	Mon, 6:32am by T'bender
 Retro Do you love the Power Glove? Reminisce about classic Nintendo consoles here	Topics: 2,466 Replies: 52,675	Yesterday, 5:30pm by Nes_Bullet83
   		
Off Topic		
 General Discussion Life and everything with it	Topics: 8,661 Replies: 537,354	15m ago by Fbigabig
 Online Gaming Rally the clan troops for all online matches here	Topics: 678 Replies: 225,566	5:45pm by Mandybom
 Other Gaming Because we're not naive enough to think that Nintendo is the only gaming company out there	Topics: 3,095 Replies: 90,808	27m ago by Ryu_Niyama
Other		
 Suggestions, Ideas & Feedback Like something about Nintendo Life? Hate something about Nintendo Life? Tell us here.	Topics: 608 Replies: 7,622	12:45pm by Gr8saiyaman88
 Help / Problems Need help with something? Ask the community here.	Topics: 1,304 Replies: 6,835	4:12pm by Tarvaax

APPENDIX E

Forum: Nintendo Switch

Topics 1 to 25 of 784

 Switch Controller Discussion Pages: 1 2 3 4 5 ... Last	Replies:356 Views:26.1k	5 hours ago by ProjectX1991
 Nintendo Switch Pre-Order Thread Pages: 1 2 3 4 5 ... Last	Replies:814 Views:24.2k	11 hours ago by Bunkerneath
 Battery percent incorrect Pages: 1	Replies:1 Views:20	3 mins ago by WraidN
 Tegra X1 confirmed. Pages: 1	Replies:3 Views:83	32 mins ago by edhe
 Friend Exchange - Share friend codes for Switch multiplayer matches Pages: 1 2 3 4 5 ... Last	Replies:113 Views:2.9k	37 mins ago by ThatNyteDaez
 Who owned a wil u before getting a switch. Pages: 1 2	Replies:34 Views:501	44 mins ago by DarkmarkUnited
 Am I the only one not really liking Fast RMX? Pages: 1	Replies:11 Views:283	45 mins ago by Raiko
 Is your screen bezel flush? Pages: 1	Replies:9 Views:298	1 hour ago by ogo79
 The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild Pages: 1 2 3 4 5 ... Last	Replies:11,585 Views:460.7k	2 hours ago by Ryu_Niiyama
 Nintendo Switch Accessories Pages: 1 2	Replies:26 Views:761	2 hours ago by lordred12345
 Nintendo's Official Carrying Case/Screen Protector VS Alternatives Pages: 1 2 3	Replies:47 Views:2.9k	2 hours ago by lordred12345
 Orzly/Mibote Screen Protectors, Video of Application & Quality Pages: 1	Replies:1 Views:29	2 hours ago by lordred12345
 Switch Apps and Browser Pages: 1 2	Replies:21 Views:1.1k	3 hours ago by RainbowCat14
		
 Physical Cartridges and Digital Downloads Pages: 1	Replies:1 Views:64	3 hours ago by Super_Gravy
 about to buy one console but : is the switch the next gen console? or should I get wii u for Zelda Breath of the wild? Pages: 1	Replies:12 Views:457	3 hours ago by RainbowCat14
 E3 and Beyond! What do you realistically expect to be released this year. Pages: 1 2 3 4 5 ... Last	Replies:115 Views:3.1k	4 hours ago by FragRed

APPENDIX F

