Modern Gacha Gaming

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Video games have continuously evolved and so have the ways to monetize them, from licensing to availing in-game purchases, or perhaps if the creator/distributor thinks it wise or rather more profitable they would choose to reduce the financial burden on players and instead generate revenue from advertisements. Relatively recently, a certain profit generating mechanic has become more prominent in the industry, a more complex version of in-game purchases that works out better for the company yet marketed as a feature that ensures anticipation, mainly incorporated in games developed and distributed by Asian companies.

Sometimes it's unbelievable how there exists a variety of video games with impeccable design yet are playable for free. However, they are not passion projects available to the masses as their creation requires a substantial amount of resources and are made with the intent to secure a return. In regards to how they earn a profit, they rely on the ‘gacha’ system, derived from the word ‘gachapon’, a Japanese capsule toy vending machine. It essentially is a reward unlocking system where in-game currency is exchanged for the chance to acquire in-game cosmetics, characters, abilities, weapons/tools, etc. Here the desired reward is not guaranteed, where the probability of success is determined by certain factors or more commonly at the discretion of the developers.

This in-game currency can be earned, well ‘in-game’, but can also be obtained in exchange for real world currency. For convenience, Genshin Impact by Mihoyo, currently considered the largest gacha game, will be used as an example.

Genshin Impact offers the exchange of 2 selected characters and 2 weapons of a certain rarity (5 star), for a limited duration on a ‘banner’, usually 3 weeks. To obtain the desired entity, a ‘wish’ (aka. An ’intertwined fate’) is made using a certain in-game currency (primogems) that can be earned by doing daily commissions, opening treasure chests, completing quests, etc. or by purchasing them in the UI store. One wish on average, depending on the package, costs ₹19.25. A 5-star entity is guaranteed every 90 wishes (with a 50% probability of receiving the desired one) and the desired 5 star is guaranteed every 180 wishes. Therefore, a guaranteed 5 Star entity would cost you just under ₹3,500. With the sheer number of characters (and abilities obtained by obtaining them again) and weapons available and growing with every update, it's understandable that it averages around 160 million USD in revenue per month.

The game is no doubt visually stunning and being an open world action RPG (Role-Playing Game), it appeals to the masses not to mention F2P (free to play) friendly. This decision permits the +237 million downloads worldwide. Once inside, it becomes that much easier to convince those with means to use their real-world money in game. With over 100 characters and 60 5 Star weapons increasing with every update, it is easy to cycle between them while creating a sense of crisis due to the limited time option to buy/wish is available with no news of a re-run. A re-run refers to the event where a character's wish banner is made available again, with the shortest gap between 2 being 70 days and the longest lasting 588 days.

In terms of game mechanics, to unlock better rewards during events, you may attempt the levels but the level of difficulty requires multiple combinations of characters with a certain level of stats which may only be achievable from unlocking, by wishing and obtaining, the 5-star character multiple times. From a behavioural point of view, monetary transactions are made via online services which reduces the mental burden of physical loss, the ‘pain of paying’.

Whether by creating a sense of crisis with limited time events, the promise of a golden ticket except with much better odds or something as simple as the cashless effect; there are numerous ways to open wallets and generate revenue.