BATTLE MASCOTS

User Experience Research Plan

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Every year, millions of people in the United States look forward to the highlight of autumn – the start of the football season. As fans gather around the television and gather their snacks in preparation to watch their favorite teams duke it out for the championship title. However, football games can't carry parties by themselves – people will want to mix and mingle amongst themselves and be social before the game even starts.

That being said, options for pre-game entertainment are limited. Many of the games aimed at this target audience are rather cheap and rely on their branding or being re-themes of other games to capture their audience. There's a clear market gap left for a high-quality football-focused game to capture fans' hearts.

Thus, *Battle Mascots* aims to be that game. *Battle Mascots* is a competitive game that blends card and board gaming to create the ultimate fan experience. The concept is simple – each player takes ownership of their own team mascot, which they must lead across the board and battle their opponents in order to come out on top. Each player has a total of ten turns to move across a Mario Party-style board and obtain upgrades like items and abilities from the spaces they land on.

Then, said upgrades are used in a card battle minigame in between each turn, where players' leaders and additional Units attack each other in acts of sabotage. The last mascot standing is the winner, and crowned the new mascot of the up-and-coming University of College Football. Prototyped in Tabletop Simulator, *Battle Mascots* aims to create a fun, memorable, and replayable game that deepens football fans' connection with the sport they love.

Research Goals

The Research Plan for Battle Mascots aims to figure out if the game is working as intended and that its design is appealing to users. In specific, research will heavily value survey questions that tell me users' emotional responses to the mechanics. Making sure the users understand how to play the game is vital towards the research's usefulness, as if the game doesn't sufficiently explain how to play, the whole thing falls apart. However, the biggest takeaway I aim for is this – do users want to come back to the game after playing it? Randomness, a core part of the gameplay, exists in order to generate this replayability, so if a user does not want to come back to the game, then there is a problem.

Several rounds of testing will be necessary to ensure that the research is worthwhile. Game design is as iterative as a process as anything else, so I plan to gather sets of users for at least three rounds of testing in order to constantly test the updates made to the product. Users will be asked to participate in multiple testing rounds not only so they can see the product grow in real time and provide developing feedback, but also experience the game's replayability – unlike other products, having returning users is actually a significant benefit and will give me helpful information on whether or not the game grabs people like intended.

My research hypothesis is this – at least 70% of users will express their desire to return to the game at a future date, or, if they do not, their reasons have little to do with how the game functions (e.g., the game not being for them). If the % of users that respond this way is lower than that threshold, then the takeaway will be that the game is not doing enough to grab users and entice them to come back. This game is not intended to be a one-trick pony. I also have an alternative hypothesis – that for most games, less than 20% of users will not need to ask questions or reference the manual after three turns have passed.

Feedback will be used to inform which aspects of the game need improvement – development time post-testing will be spent on gradual improvement and the addition of content to fill gaps in users' wants. The data obtained from the post-test surveys will be the primary driver for an iterative process like this.

Without the iterative feedback gained from these tests, developing a product like this is a complete shot in the dark. For a product like Battle Mascots, rigorous beta testing is similar to bug testing in a product – there could be severe issues with the gameplay loop lurking underneath the surface, but without the help of people who aren't actively involved in the creative process, it's highly unlikely that I would ever uncover them. This is why tests like these are important – simply releasing a product without UX testing is tantamount to letting your child go to school without knowing how to speak.

Methodology

Roles

As a solo team, all proctoring of the study will be administered by me and me alone. Interviews and the pre-testing survey will be proctored by me before anything else – then, the testing session will begin as I take a backseat and take notes, only stepping into clarify any confusion about mechanics. I will record all sessions via a screen recorder like Open Broadcasting Software, meaning that a person has no need to function as a photographer – I can review the footage after the fact. After the game, I will administer the post-testing survey myself as well.

Sampling

Population

- College football fans.
- Families with children.
- Those who frequent parties frequently.
- Board game and card game lovers.

Frame & Method

Recruiting members of my target audience will prove challenging thanks to the game being prototyped in Tabletop Simulator – a program with a built-in entrance fee of $20. That being said, some recruiting has been done already – we have already been tasked with recruiting and getting feedback on our Alpha for our product, and several of the people I recruited for that process offered to test the final product as well.

I currently plan to test in several rounds, however, so recruiting more as I go will be necessary. Both two and four-player games will be tested with groups of around 6-12 people – towards the final round of testing, my stretch goal for recruitment is about 20 people, though I don't imagine I'll meet this exactly. Recruiting will be done locally in the Athens area – fellow students and members of various gaming-focused UGA clubs will be my target. Social media will play a key role in contacting possible recruits, but I plan to go in person as well. Unlike other usability tests, I plan to contact subjects for testing multiple times – bringing the same subjects over and over will serve my primary research goal of assessing replayability perfectly.

For the group that I've recruited already, we will meet online using Discord, as the other members all have Tabletop Simulator already. For any new recruits, however, we will have to

meet in person – I will project my laptop to a big screen such that all players can play using the same monitor. No game mechanics require hiding information, so this setup will do. One obstacle will be teaching people unfamiliar with Tabletop Simulator how to navigate it – the process is simple, but it will require some extra scripting work to go through the controls and such before the game starts. Recruiting from my target audience is an intimidating task, but any feedback at all will be valuable to gauge the product's mass appeal.

Persona 1 – John Passion

John is a 22-year old student at the University of Georgia. Living in the heart of the US South and its famous college football scene has made him a lifelong fan. John is an active participant in UGA's social life, and frequently attends the football games whenever possible – and even if there isn't a home game, chances are he's going to a party with some friends to watch the game on TV. However, he's beginning to get bored of the routine and wants to spice things up beyond just snacking and chatting with friends. To that end, he is searching for a game to bring to the party – one that won't immediately bore his friends to tears, of course.

Persona 2 – Mary Line

Mary is a 42-year old mother with two pre-teen sons and a full time job. Both of her sons have an interest in college football, and the whole family routinely gathers to watch games on the weekend and indulge in merchandise. However, Mary hasn't had enough time in her life to really call herself a "fan" – she enjoys the games, sure, but she doesn't feel like she's nearly as crazy for the sport as her sons are. Once she catches wind of Battle Mascots, however, she sees an opportunity and buys the game for her sons. Now, she's able to host a family game night and deepen not only her connection with college football, but bond with her children over a mutual interest. The game is varied, but simple enough to keep her kids' attention and ensure the family game nights don't feel stale.

Testing Instruments

- Tabletop Simulator – program used to proctor the game sessions.
- Discord – chat program to contact and meet with testers over.
- Zoom – chat program to meet with testers over.
- Open Broadcasting Software – program made for streaming and recording; will use to record the test sessions and keep as reference footage.
- Google Docs – will be used to take notes and proctor the pre- and post-test surveys.

Script

Hello! My name is Kylie, and I'd like to take the opportunity to thank you for your time today. I'll be walking you through the testing process today and taking notes as I go. You probably know this already, but just as a reminder, we'll be running through a test of the game I've developed, *Battle Mascots*, over on Tabletop Simulator. Today, we'll be playing a [two/three/four] player game, in specific – the whole game should take about two hours.

The first thing I want to make clear right away is that we're testing the game, not you. Please feel free to ask questions and think aloud along the way – if you feel like you're missing something, or not understanding the game, the problem is on us. You can't do anything wrong here – unless you count losing the game, but even that is a learning experience.

As you all play the game, I'm going to reiterate – please think aloud as much as possible. I'll be on the sidelines taking notes, and speaking your thoughts aloud will give me valuable information. Also, please don't worry about hurting my feelings – all feedback is helpful, and it's okay to state if a part of the game isn't for you.

Questions, too, are okay – I might not be able to answer them right away, but asking questions will let us know where the pain points are. There will be additional information ingame that can help answer any questions that you have as well. If I'm not able to answer the question during the game, I can answer at the end. And if any of you need to take a break at any point, please let me know.

If it's alright with you, I'll be recording your game session for reference purposes. This recording will only be viewed by me, and will remain completely private. [IF ON ZOOM] Additionally, it would also be appreciated if you could turn on your cameras – expressions can say just as much as words.

Now, I'm going to ask you to sign a consent form. Please take a look at the following document.

Consent Form

Purpose

The researcher, Kylie Sengpiel, is conducting a usability study to evaluate the design of *Battle Mascots*, a game on Tabletop Simulator. The results of this study will be used to help improve the game's design. This test is being performed as a part of the Emerging Media Masters' program 7015 Emerging Media Capstone course at the University of Georgia. The study will take approximately two hours.

As a subject, you will be asked to perform the following:

- Fill out a pre-test survey
- Consent to being observed and recorded
- Play out a full multi-player game of *Battle Mascots*
- Fill out a post-test survey
- Choose a series of Product Reaction Cards
- Give feedback on your experience

Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation

Participation in this usability study is voluntary. The descriptions and findings will be used to compile a report about the game's effectiveness. However, at no time will your full name be used. With your permission, I would like to take With your permission, I would like to take photos, videos, and notes to share with faculty members at the University of Georgia's New Media Institute.

You are at liberty to withdraw your consent to the experiment and discontinue participation at any time. If you have any questions, please contact me, Kylie Sengpiel, at 404-218-6045 or my email jts13239@uga.edu. You can also reach out to my instructor, Kyla Sterling, at kmsterli@uga.edu.

By signing below, you are indicating that you understand the information on this form:

_____   _____

Participant Signature   *Date*

Script (cont.)

Okay. Do you have any questions so far?

Alright – let's begin. I'd like to direct your attention to Tabletop Simulator.

[open Tabletop Simulator and navigate to the main menu, then create a single or multiplayer room depending on current setting]

I'm currently creating a room to load the game save in so that we can play. Please give me a moment to make sure that everything is set up properly.

[set up the game]

Alright, I'll need each of you to pick a color and a mascot piece for the game. *[if online]* You can change your color by clicking on your name on the top and hitting Change Color. *[if not]* Just tell me what seat and piece you'd like and I'll take care of it.

[let all players choose a color and piece]

Okay. With that taken care of, let's get into the game. Now that you've each chosen a mascot, I'll deal each of you three Traits – passive abilities for your leader. Please choose one from the three, and let me know when you're done.

[wait for the players]

Alright! Now we can get into the game. Before we do anything, I'd like to direct your attention to the Notebook in Tabletop Simulator. This will give you a rundown of all the rules and mechanics of the game – so whenever you need a reference, please do check it out.

Turn order will be determined by who's losing – but since you're all tied right now, we'll go from left to right. Each of you should roll a dice to determine how many spaces you'll move, so go ahead, *[name of leftmost player]*. There are plenty of branching paths, and you can go in any direction you'd like.

[wait for the first player to roll and move their spaces]

Okay! This is a good time to check the Notebook – now that you've landed on a space, you'll need to know what it does. *[pause]* So, you landed on a […] space – and you'll perform [x effect].

[continue with the turns, explaining space types as necessary. Once all players have completed their turns, continue]

With that, the first turn of Gather Phase is complete, and we'll be moving onto Battle Phase. This is your chance to sabotage your opponents.

Your field right here, where your leader cards are, is where Battle Phase takes place. Each of the cards on your field can attack once, in any order you'd like. A card's Power determines the damage it does to an opponent card's Spirit, and once it hits 0, the card is shuffled back.

[additionally explain Abilities, Units, etc. if players have come across them]

[let each player finishes their actions]

Alright, that's Battle Phase! That's the gist of the gameplay – does anyone have any questions before we continue?

If not, then I'll be taking a step back now and let you all play the game out! You have nine turns left before Sudden Death activates, so do whatever you can to power up your mascots. In the meantime, I'll be taking notes on your gameplay and what mechanics you engage with. And as a reminder, please feel free to think aloud and banter as much as you'd like.

[after ten turns have passed]

That's the end of the turn limit! I hope you've been enjoying the game so far – it's time for the final round! Sudden Death begins now. Starting from now, a line will be moved up the board, and if you're below that line, you'll start taking damage. Aim for the top of the board – there won't be a Battle Phase until you all make it there.

[players complete this]

With that, the last mascot standing wins! Good luck!

[the game concludes]

Thank you so much for testing Battle Mascots! That was a great – and very informative – match. There's just two more things I need you all to do – I have a post-test survey form and a set of Product Reaction Cards for all of you to complete.

Thank you so much for your cooperation!

Pre-Test Survey

1. How familiar with card and board games would you describe yourself as?

_____

2. Have you used Tabletop Simulator before this test?   Yes/No

3. What is your first impression of the game's premise? Rate your reaction on this scale.

Not Interested   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Extremely Interested

4. What are your thoughts upon seeing the game board for the first time?

_____

5. I would call myself a college football fan.

Strongly Disagree   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Strongly Agree

6. How often do you attend parties?

Never   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Very Often

7. I find learning how to play new games to be an overwhelming process.

Strongly Disagree   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Strongly Agree

8. Do you find yourself returning to games you've played before frequently?

_____

9. I find the overall look of Battle Mascots to be…

Unappealing   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Appealing

10. I believe that I will get attached to my player character based on what I know.

Strongly Disagree   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   Strongly Agree

Task Table

Instead of outright tasks, this table takes the form of a checklist – are players engaging with the mechanics in any given game? If not, then there is probably a usability issue or a lack of emphasis on a specific mechanic.

Task	Completion Rate	Observations
Have all users upgraded their Leader with a Bench space at least once?	0 / 4	
Have all users gained at least one additional Trait for their leaders?	0 / 4	
Have all users played at least three different Unit cards onto their field throughout the game?	0 / 4	
Have all users gained at least one Ability for their leader?	0 / 4	
Have all users used at least two Items during the game?	0 / 4	
Has at least one player been sabotaged to the point where they're very close to being knocked out (sent back to the stadium)?	0 / 1	
Have all users asked a rules question or checked the notebook during the game?	0 / 4	
Have all users defeated at least four enemy Unit cards each?	0 / 4	
Have all users used the Warp Spaces on the edge of the board to travel quicker?	0 / 4	
Have all users avoided the Sudden Death line, taking damage from it one or less times?	0 / 4	

Post-Task Survey

1. What are your raw overall thoughts, fresh off of the game ending?

_____

2. I got attached to my player character and was invested in their victory.

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

3. Using the following scale, how would you describe the process of learning the rules and getting used to the gameplay loop?

Confusing ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Intuitive

4. How did you feel about the game length? The turn limit before Sudden Death, and the experience overall?

Too Short ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Too Long

5. What were your thoughts on the different types of cards (Units, Items, Abilities, etc.)? Which felt the most versus the least useful? How easy were they to learn?

_____

6. Was there a pain point with a particular moment that you'd like to bring up?

_____

7. The overall theming added to or enhanced my enjoyment of the game.

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

8. I felt that there were sufficient opportunities to sow chaos and sabotage opponents.

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

9. How likely would you say it is that you would consider returning to this game?

Unlikely ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very Likely

10. Are there any additional thoughts that you'd like to provide?

_____

Product Reaction Cards

Please choose five of the following Product Reaction Cards to describe your game experience. Then, below this section, explain your choices in detail.

Simplistic	Inviting	Clean	Irrelevant	Patronizing
Not Valuable	Approachable	Dated	Valuable	Consistent
Boring	Effortless	Comprehensive	Stable	Easy to use
Motivating	Compelling	Overbearing	Disconnected	Satisfying
Organized	Fragile	Accessible	Confusing	Useful
Fresh	Creative	Relevant	Impressive	Ordinary
Energetic	Not Secure	Low Maintenance	Stimulating	Enthusiastic
Empowering	Unconventional	Controllable	Exceptional	Predictable
Desirable	Comfortable	Impersonal	Business-like	Convenient
Effective	Difficult	Frustrating	Clear	Gets in the way
Powerful	Customizable	Hard to Use	Fast	Stressful
Time-Saving	Connected	Compatible	Calm	Undesirable
Attractive	Efficient	Poor quality	Inconsistent	Uncontrollable
Familiar	Overwhelming	Unpredictable	Complex	Confident
Unrefined	Rigid	Engaging	Annoying	Busy
Expected	Sterile	Advanced	Essential	Straight Forward
Unapproachable	Distracting	Meaningful	Trustworthy	Old
Intuitive	Cutting edge	Integrated	Unattractive	Intimidating
Time-consuming	Secure	Ineffective	Helpful	Too Technical
Optimistic	Personal	Exciting	Professional	High quality
Disruptive	Collaborative	Fun	Entertaining	Flexible
Inspiring	Slow	Appealing	Understandable	Incomprehensible
Dull	Responsive	Reliable	Sophisticated	
Innovative	Novel	Usable	Friendly	

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Analysis

Qualitative results will be the primary method of analysis for this research project. Many of the survey questions are open-ended, as well as the explanations of the Product Reaction Cards – this is by design, as the game's randomness makes it somewhat difficult to give quantitative estimates for statistics such as play time. Emotional responses are largely what will be mined here. I will extrapolate the overall thoughts from the written responses and rank them in a list based on urgency – if a criticism appears multiple times, or is more related to the game's core values, it will be placed higher in the ranking. This will inform development priorities for the game.

That being said, quantitative metrics will still play a key role in my analysis. My tasks are designed with a specific completion rate in mind – the higher the completion rate, the greater confidence I will have that the game is functioning properly. Once I have enough data, I will compile it all into two different analyses – a set of confidence intervals to determine how likely it is that the game is working as intended, and charts that display how the percent completions changed over time between each individual testing session. The former will be useful as it is very unlikely that I will end up recruiting enough people to properly represent my target audience, while the latter will mainly inform which mechanics need the most work.

The survey questions based in the Likert scale and semantic differential scales will also be analyzed as averages, with the most negative response for each question being assigned 1s and the positive ones 5s. The lower the average is on the 1-5 scale, the more likely it is that there is a pain point hiding in the product that bears investigation.

Given that the core aspect of the game is its replayability and ability to craft a customizable character, the post-test survey questions surrounding those aspects will be highly valued, and if responses are below-average, this will immediately be noted as a major issue and development priority. Lack of content will also be considered a major issue, as having an appropriate amount of content is paramount to the game being replayable. Issues that do not orbit these priorities as closely, such as issues with the UI or wording of the rules, will be considered more minor issues.

Various other observations, such as the notes I take during the games themselves about the tasks and users' emotional reactions, will also factor into the development process, but these are harder to sort. For the remaining bits of data I have, I will simply use them to inform the aforementioned priority ranking of issues.

Conclusion

Adapting a UX Research Plan to a board game was difficult, but I believe that it will prove fruitful. Battle Mascots aims to bring a new, memorable experience to the college football party that has a strong amount of staying power – and UX research will prove a vital role in ensuring that the game has the appeal it was designed to have. Without user testing, releasing a game with an intent like this would be the equivalent of flailing around wildly. That's why I've created pre and post-test surveys as well as a task-like checklist to be able to assess the game's functionality and obtain proper data on how users are interacting with the mechanics at play.

In particular, the surveys will prove extremely valuable in assessing the functionality of the product. It is very difficult to quantify problems with games using data – hence the necessity to ask users for good, detailed feedback. This was largely the reason I chose to use Product Reaction Cards over the System Usability Scale. Quantitative data will still be useful to know what to prioritize in development, but the emotional responses from the users will be most useful. I'm looking forward to the testing phase, and watching users finally get their game on with my product beta for the first time.