

IN THE FLOW OF CHANGE

# MODERN TRENDS IN THE GAME. RUSSIAN GAMER'S INNER WORLD

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In Russia, video gamers have often been perceived as people wasting their time on an idle and non-serious activity for a long time. However, the situation is gradually changing under the influence of esports news. In October 2021, social and mass media were discussing a historic event; the Russian Team Spirit team won the Dota 2 International World Championship to receive a prize of \$18,000,000. The term “millionaire gamer” emerged, and many people started wondering whether computer games were really such a waste of time. The development of esports, the penetration of games into modern pop culture, and emerging metaverses are nothing but engagement of video game fans and the general public. The article explains Russians’ behavior patterns in the reality of video games, as brands have to further develop interaction with their consumers both in the real world and in the virtual one.

Game universes can transfer us to another reality. They allow us to try on a new role, become heroes, and break away from our sometimes boring reality.

However, from looking at literature and movies, we know that people are not only interested in science fiction

and fantasy but also in the world they are living today. They are also not indifferent to the past. The most fascinating plots related to our current reality or a part of our history are stories associated with our culture, perceptions of good and evil, who is an enemy and who is a friend.

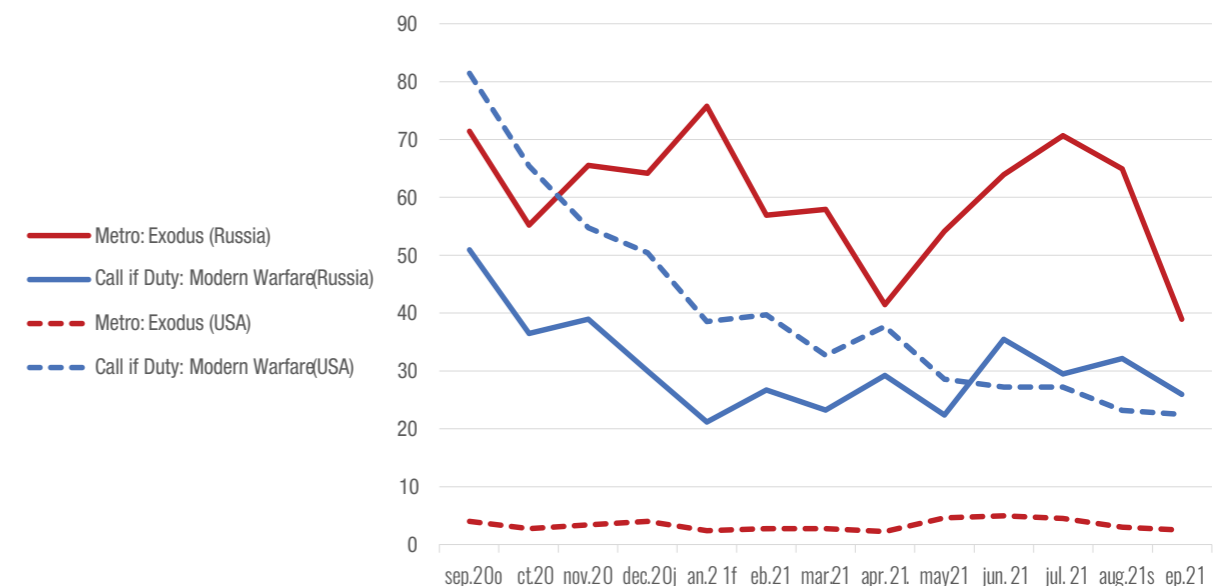
## NOT ONLY SCI-FI AND FANTASY

Russian gamers are no exception. Although they spend their time in a comfortable and thrilling way both in completely fantasy worlds and hypothetical worlds found in the cultural contexts of other countries, they are proud of their history and buy related products with great interest.

The example below illustrates the difference in interest toward products from a universe where the main protagonists are typically American (Call of Duty: Modern Warfare) and conventionally Russian characters (Metro: Exodus), depending on the sales market.

### COMPARISON OF THE NUMBER OF GAME SEARCH QUERIES

BY COUNTRIES NORMALIZED TO 100%

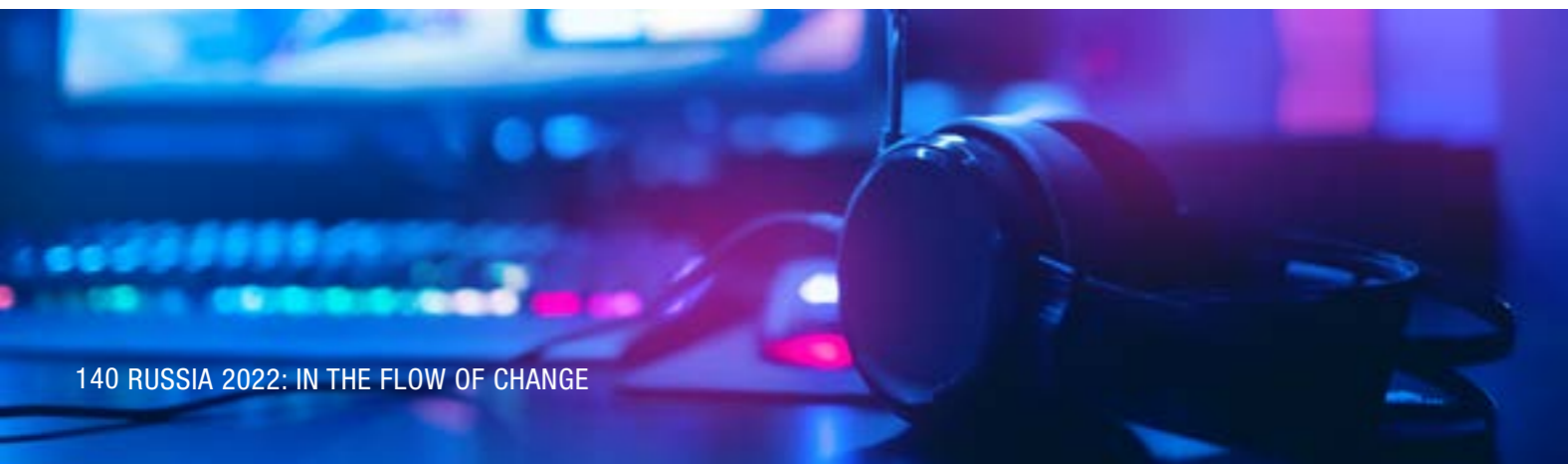


Source: Google Trends

## SHORTAGE OF LOCAL CULTURE CODES

Of course, no game is alike, and there are differences in promotion campaigns that support game

launches. It is understandable that one of the world’s most popular franchises can still generate less



interest than a local product filled with characters and cultural codes relevant to a specific region.

Russian players are deprived in this sense. Being patriots of their homeland or at least admirers of their history and culture, they very rarely have a chance to immerse themselves in a game world that is close to them as the number of relevant products is really limited.

This unmet need is mainly due to economic factors. The Russian market covers about 2% of the global market, while the European market is 18%, the US market is 24%, and the Asian

market, 50%. At the same time, there are local developers in Russia, such as Playrix, a company with a turnover exceeding the entire Russian video game market and one of world's TOP3 mobile game developers. However, they are not focused on creating games with cultural themes that are close to the Russian players as the key source of their potential income is outside Russia.

As the economic situation is unlikely to change any time soon, some Russian players will continue to miss out on stories connected with their homeland for a while still.

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## THE RUSSIAN GAMER'S IMAGE ABROAD: "EMOTIONAL TOXIC"

The term "toxic" or "toxic gamer" in the video game environment refers to players who demonstrate obvious asocial or negative behavior. Examples are bullying other players, provocations ("trolling"), and impeding team play (playing for one's own benefit rather than common benefit of all team members).

For many years, the collective image of the Russian gamers, as seen from abroad, has been negative. Foreigners consider the Russians to be toxic gamers who explicitly express negative emotions and turn the peaceful environment in online games into a boiling cauldron of conflicts, disputes, and recriminations.

There are cases when game developers even created special online game servers only for Russian-speaking players (one of the best examples is World of Warcraft

However, toxicity does not emerge on its own. It has specific causes.

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## GAMING IS SERIOUS BUSINESS

**It may sound paradoxical, but this pronounced gamer toxicity is based on positive reasons determined both by peculiarities of the Russian character and the current trend toward individualism.**

One of these reasons is strong emotional engagement in any business, and games are no exception. For the Russian gamers, the game is a personal and serious matter rather than just some light entertainment occupying a few hours of their week. Deep immersion in the process and a sense of individual responsibility for what is happening are often clearly expressed by Russian gamers. If something goes wrong, they perceive it as their own failure or downfall. The habit of spontaneously sharing emotions is passed down from generation to generation as a cultural feature of the nation. This does not

allow them to keep even negative feelings and emotions inside – all teammates should know about them!

The serious attitude toward gaming is also reinforced by strong exactingness – not only relating to oneself but also towards others. The Russian gamers strive to be the best at what they do and constantly improve their game skills. They expect the same attitude from other players. If others do not meet these expectations, Russian gamers decide to explain and teach. This may be misplaced, or unwelcome.

## VICTORY AT ALL COSTS

Another important feature is the desire to win at all costs. Often, this is the reason why the Russian gamers start playing online games, as here they can find a lot of opportunities for personal victories without facing the multiple social restrictions and conventions present in their real lives.

**Gamers from other countries prefer to initially study the rules and information then enter into a battle, while Russians most likely do exactly the opposite.**

Another cause of toxicity is that the Russians usually do not read instructions. Consequently, they will likely fail, especially in challenging

In Russia, game chats and communities are not regulated by law. A generally accepted culture of communication has not been formed on Runet or in the video game environment yet, so Russian gamers sometimes seek victory using any methods, even if this triggers the disapproval of foreign gamers.

games and new game locations. Of course, they then express indignation about the outcome.

## GAMING AS PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Many Russian gamers perceive this activity as a method of personal development, improving oneself and their personal achievements – something that is an important part of the Russian mindset. They strongly influence both self-esteem and the perception of a person within

their social circle and in society. Many Russians ask themselves what they have done and what they have achieved. Even such a seemingly insignificant fact as game victories can raise a person's status, at least in their own perception. In the videogame environment, such

achievements often form a gamer's positive reputation.

It is important for companies to take this into account, and understand broader perceptions and behaviors of players because it can provide a good channel for promoting products. As the world in video games is a projection of the real world in one form or another, it is appropriate for the advertising of many products across categories to enter. Brands focused on the Russian market should consider traditional advertising and product placement in movies and in games that are popular and held in

good regard. However, it is necessary to consider the specific behaviors and interests of Russian gamers and seamlessly fit products into a story and game mechanics.

Some brands have already started to master this approach. A good example is the product placement of the Monster energy drink in Death Stranding (2019) from the Japanese Kojima Productions studio. The product naturally fits into the game mechanics as it serves as a useful in-game item that restores character's health.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is an unmet need for games based on Russian history and culture.
- Russian gamers are characterized by strong emotional engagement in any business – including gaming.
- Russian gamers' perceived toxicity is counter-intuitively based on positive reasons that relate to the Russian character and the current trend towards individualism.
- Brands focused on the Russian market and considering product placement in games should primarily pay attention to games with the Russian specifics.

