The ultimate guide to hypercasual games in 2021

Hypercasual games are taking the mobile gaming industry by storm, and they have been for a while now.

Not convinced? All you need to do is look at the numbers. Hypercasual games were the number one genre for downloads - worldwide - in the third quarter of 2021, with over 3.5 billion downloads.

But, everything is not as rosy as it may seem. According to Gamesindustry.biz, a publisher needs to test about 40 ideas on average on the way to a hit.

This is a giant problem for hypercasual game developers and publishers alike. So we thought it was high-time that we addressed the major question, what makes hypercasual games successful, and why?

To do this, we've gobbled up the data on the top 200 gaming apps in terms of downloads, retention and revenue, and spluttered out the ultimate guide to hypercasual games in 2021. Take a look at what we found.

Ready? Good. Let's get started. But first, let's get the basics out of the way.
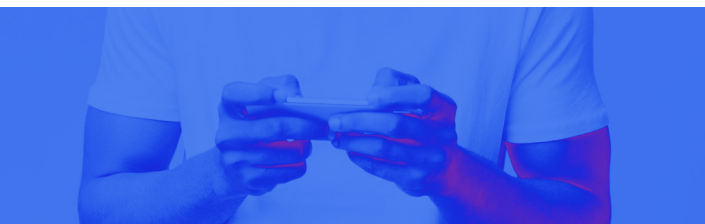
Today's facts.
Tomorrow's results.

What are hypercasual games?

A hypercasual game is a mobile video game which is easy-to-play, and almost always free-to-play. They also tend to feature very minimalistic user interfaces. These games are designed to be played quickly after downloading, usually without any tutorial or instructions. They also often use a 2D design, paired with a simple colour scheme and easy gameplay mechanics, to add to their simplicity. That's why so many users are able to multitask when playing these kinds of games - another one of their key selling points.

> Usually featuring infinite looped mechanics, hypercasual games are playable for an unlimited amount of time, which only contributes to their addictive nature.

Some even say hypercasual games are more of a business model than a specific mobile game genre. Because of the lack of a robust in-game economy or download cost, revenue is mostly generated from ads.

The best hypercasual gameplay mechanics

The key to a successful hypercasual game is making sure it's short, simple and satisfying. There are a lot of different gameplay mechanics that you can use to achieve this, so we thought we'd explore which ones do the best, and why.

To do this, we've looked at the most downloaded and 'stickiest' (ie. highest retention rates) gaming apps of 2021, as per the type of gameplay mechanic. By looking at the most successful apps through the scope of the gameplay mechanics they've utilised, we can see the true story behind what makes a hypercasual game successful and why.

Identifying the reasons behind the success of other hypercasual apps gives you the all-import building blocks of game design you need to make the next hit game. The more of these building blocks you know about, the more likely you are to create a hit.

That's why we're urging you to use this report as a trusted source of inspiration for the hypercasual gaming category. One of the biggest findings and takeaways you'll see in the following pages is the importance of fusing together the different gameplay mechanics of hypercasual games. Doing this often creates an original, fresh game in itself.

> And innovation, as is the case in any industry, will always be a winner.

This is by no means a comprehensive list of all the different gameplay mechanics in hypercasual games. It is purely an exploration of the stickiest hypercasual games, looked at through the lens of gameplay mechanics.

Timing mechanics

Timing mechanics are all about tapping the screen at the right moment; think of the classic - and original hypercasual game - flappy bird, or a sports game where you are tasked with precisely hitting a ball. The main mechanic in these games is essentially a shrinking window of opportunity over time, like a repeating gauge. If you miss your chance, you'll need to wait again for the perfect moment.

Tap and Timing games are the most popular form of mechanics for hyper casual games, and in truth most of the other mechanics use tapping or timing as an input method for their particular gameplay. But in a game that is pure tap and timing, precision is key, and perfection is the goal.

Only the perfect tap will bring the maximum score. The rest of the game's feel and creativity relies on exploiting small inaccuracies in the tap to reduce the player's ability to win, usually in the form of a high score.

Baseball Boy by Voodoo focuses a player's attention on a single baseball bat hit as the only action they can perform. Every hit is exhilarating, but the perfect hit is even better.

This brings us to our first sticky game of 2021: **Baseball Boy!**

> When thinking of tap and timing mechanics you must strip away any external or confusing factors for the player and provide a clear visual objective for them to achieve.

Visual feedback is extremely important here with a clear representation of what makes a bad shot, but also large amounts of positive reinforcement for the Perfect Shot.

The clearer the goal, and the harder the perfect shot, the more fun it is when you hit it.

App Name	Publisher Name	Retention
Baseball Boy	Voodoo	0.257

Puzzle mechanics

What separates generic puzzle apps from their hypercasual counterparts is the fact that hypercasual puzzles are much easier to complete. These games focus on the pure satisfaction of completing a puzzle rather than the difficulty of the puzzles themselves. It could be moving shapes around a screen, drawing lines to filter liquescent substances or cutting shapes in paper.

In hypercasual puzzles, the big key is that there isn't a time limit. But just because the time limit has been removed, this doesn't necessarily make the levels any longer. Instead, it removes the element of stress and balances out the gameplay.

Unlike other board games such as Chess or Chequers, which have clear end goals, hypercasual puzzle games usually have no finish point:

It's simply a case of lasting as long as you can.

The stickiest puzzle game of 2021: Paper Fold

Paper Fold is an excellent example of a hypercasual puzzle game. As its name suggests, the app tasks players with folding paper to create a picture, much like in a classic puzzle. But where Paper Fold truly succeeds at tying players in with its fun and addictive gameplay is the app developer's decision to never drastically increase the difficulty of the gameplay. It should never take more than a minute for a player to complete a hypercasual puzzle, and in Paper Fold it often takes less than 30 seconds.

Another aspect of the success of Paper Fold is due to its aesthetics. The fact that the puzzles are cute and fun adds an entertaining aspect to the game itself. Rather than making the puzzle particularly hard, the player is tempted into playing more due to the satisfying and relaxing feel of creating pictures that are easy on the eye and pass the time.

The stats speak for themselves...

Top iOS hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher Name	Download growth (#)	Rank
Paper Fold	Good Job Games	14,559,197	6

iOS retention

App Name	Publisher Name	Retention
Two Dots	Playdots, Inc.	0.425

Top Android hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher Name	Download growth (#)	Rank
DOP 2: Delete One Part	SayGames Ltd	68,610,234	10
Paper Fold	Good Job Games	46,479,488	

Android retention

App Name	Publisher Name	Retention
Block Puzzle 2020 - Wood Style Game	GameKore Co.	0.099

Swerve Mechanic

The Swerve Mechanic is a hypercasual classic. Games that use a swerving gameplay mechanic involve the player dragging their finger horizontally or vertically across the screen,typically in an attempt to avoid obstacles.

To control their character, the player needs to hold down and move their finger, swiping across the screen to avoid the endless slew of obstacles coming towards them.

> Swerve mechanics are impossible to recreate on other gaming platforms as touch screen controls are essential.
> This creates a unique user-experience for the player, deepening immersion.

Unsurprisingly, in 2021 there was a host of hypercasual games utilizing the Swerve Mechanic near or near-about at the top of the leaderboards. However, running away with the accolade of the stickiest swerve gameplay mechanic is Temple Run. Just as Angry Birds once defined the physics-based puzzler, Temple Run has been the flagship franchise for endless running games for a number of years now.

When it comes to swerving games, what's important is that the game accurately tracks the way the user drags and sweeps their finger, rather than just the timing of a tap.

From a gameplay perspective, what makes Temple Run a classic game that people keep coming back to is the fact that its pinpoint accuracy makes for super intense gameplay. Players can spend hours upon hours perfecting the timing of their swipe as they approach the ever-tightening corners.

Many imitators have sought to replicate its success, Subway Surfers being a notable one. But Temple Run wins the stickiness award for us, especially considering it is still topping the iOS retention leaderboards over a decade after release (3rd of August 2011).
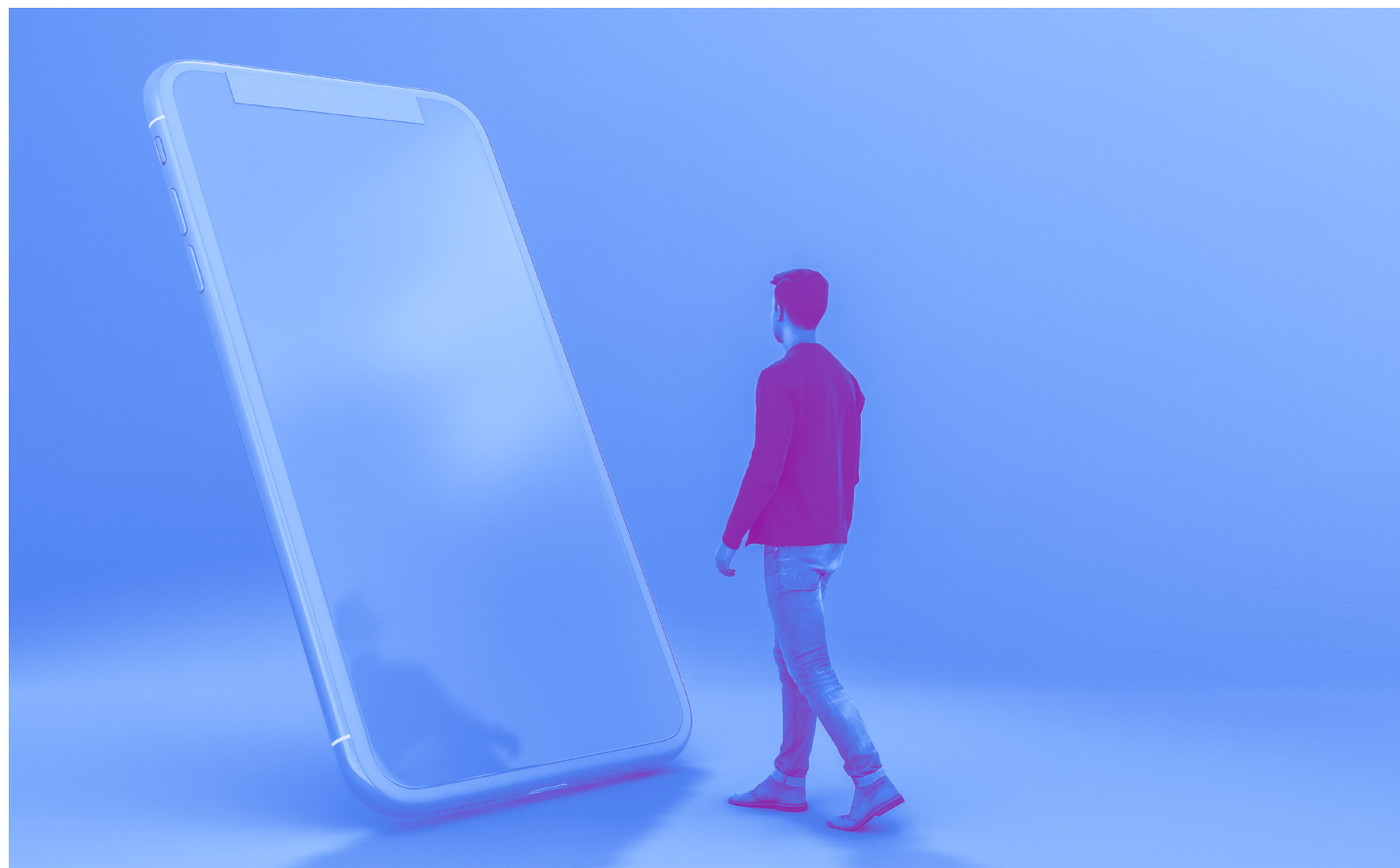
Top iOS hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher Name	Download growth (#)	Rank
Subway Surfers	Sybo Games	20,673,684	3

iOS retention

App Name	Publisher Name	Retention
Temple Run	Imangi Studios, LLC.	0.306

Top Android hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher Name	Download growth (#)	Rank
Subway Surfers	Sybo Games	108,589,004	2

Rhythm-based Mechanic

Tiles Hop – EDM Rush is a rhythm-based game where the player controls a ball, guiding it to hit tiles in time with the music. Despite the title, the player is allowed to select almost any genre of music they would like to listen to as they play. Tiles Hop EDM Rush is an evolution of the swerve mechanic games, and the implementation of a rhythm mechanic serves to enhance the user experience, adding a new layer to the gameplay.

Just like in most swerve mechanic games, the gameplay is high stakes. One incorrect move and it's all over. Combine this with an intense symphony of your favourite music genre, and you can see why this hypercasual game was such a hit in 2021.

Magic Tiles is another successful hypercasual game that utilises rhythm-based mechanics, but is based around the piano

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Top Android hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher Name	Download growth (#)	Rank
Tiles Hop: EDM Rush!	Amanotes Pte. Ltd.	75,997,404	6
Magic Tiles 3	Amanotes Pte. Ltd.	75,350,101	7

| Top iOS hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher Name	Download growth (#)
Tiles Hop: EDM Rush!	Amanotes Pte.	9,269,975

Take note: a recurring theme throughout this report demonstrates that the most successful hypercasual games successfully integrate two or more gaming mechanics into one game, while still managing to create a fun and easy-to-use gameplay experience.

Resizing/desizing

The resizing/desizing mechanic is based around the player collecting objects in order to grow. If too few of these items are collected the player will decrease in size as they venture through the course. There will be obstacles that the player needs to avoid unless they want to be drastically desized, which will usually result in the game ending early if too many are hit.

How could we do a hypercasual game report for 2021 and not mention High Heels!?

Well, we certainly are.

High Heels! is one of 2021's biggest hypercasual winners

High Heels!, published by Rollic Games, is an excellent example of resizing/desizing gameplay. Players can instantly jump into the action, with simple gameplay and level structure. There's almost no-learning curve, and this creates a feeling of instant gratification and fun. It's release was also perfectly timed during a global pandemic, which surely helped downloads for High Heels! reach the heights they did.

But the reason why High Heels! is so successful is not just because of the fun, easy-to-use gameplay. A big portion of High Heels!' popularity comes from the implementation of a queer aesthetic that resonates with people all over the world.

In High Heels!, the player's avatar is a glamorous femme character, wearing iconic high-heels as they strut down the course and occasionaly employing the splits when large gaps in the road appear. Nods to the LGBTQ+ community are pretty much everywhere. The game's avatars, which are unlocked through collecting diamonds or watching ads, come in a wide spectrum of gender presentations and body types. Large, skinny, black, white - and not just male or female.

This gives players infinite freedom of expression to customize their character to be whatever they want to be.

And High Heels! encourages you no matter what - the phrase

YASS QUEEN POP OFF

is blasted out to cheer you on as you reach the next level.

High Heels!' embrace of the queer community led it to become a viral sensation on social media apps such as TikTok, which added yet more fuel to the fire - taking the popularity of High Heels! into the stratosphere.

According to Airnow sources, High Heels!

Top Android hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
High Heels!	Zynga Inc.	21,999,639	9

The viral success of High Heels! speaks to another incredibly important feature of the hypercasual market that simply cannot be ignored by game developers/publishers: demographics.

Demographics

High Heels!'s combination of queer, feminine-self love and glam culture resonates with a significant portion of the hypercasual player-base. Contrary to many people's initial judgements, the hypercasual player base isn't just made up of stereotypical 'boy gamers'.

> It is in fact a predominantly female demographic.

According to Udonis, in the US, the female to male ratio of hypercasual players is 55% to 45%. In the UK and South Korea, 60% of hypercasual players are women and 40% are men.

You get the picture - the majority of hypercasual gamers are women. But what does this mean for hypercasual game developers? Well, as you can see from the High Heels! case study, leveraging this information to direct some of the features of your game is a great way of increasing downloads alongside the 'stickability' of your hypercasual game.

New companies are already popping up around the globe to try and capitalise on the situation. Companies have been putting their efforts into creating hypercasual games specifically for the female

market. Notable releases include Catwalk Beauty, which saw over 17 million downloads on Android, and Rollic games' Hair Challenge. The concept of Hair Challenge is strikingly similar to High Heels!, but in place of the heels, a giant pony tail is used.

High Heels! and other games inspired by it don't exactly reinvent the wheel. What they do highlight, however, is the importance of style in hypercasual games.

The similarity of its gameplay didn't stop Hair Challenge from reaching the lofty heights at the top of the download leaderboards. And the success of the 'fashion' subgenre of hypercasual games in 2021 serves as a stark reminder of the power of catering hypercasual games to their demographic.

Can you think of a style to base your game that appeals to the hypercasual demographic?
If so, you may have found the next big hit.

| Top Android hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
Hair Challenge	Rollic Games	93,994,211	3

| Top iOS hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
Hair Challenge	Rollic Games	19,920,725	4

Clash mechanics

Clash mechanics are similar to resizing/desizing mechanics, but due to the surge in popularity of specifically clash based games, we think they warrant a name of their very own.

In clash mechanics, the player focuses on collecting objects by hitting into them or 'clashing', which either makes them increase or decrease in size. But, if you clash into the wrong thing, say a hole in the course, you will decrease in size. The game will stop if the player's size is reduced to zero.

Since December 2019, the developer group FreePlay has had more than 420 million downloads

of its hypercasual games, which include Join Clash (developed by FreePlay and published by Supersonic Games), Count Masters and Fidget Toys Trading 3D. Both Join Clash and Count Master are excellent examples of clash gameplay mechanics done right.

Join Clash debuted in December 2019 and it has amassed 280 million to date. Count Masters has had more than 100 million downloads since March, and Fidget Trader just crossed the 40 million mark.

In Count Master the player starts with one person, and as you pass through the obstacle course ahead of you, you build up your squad. Of course, as you go you can lose squad members. Lose too many people and you won't be able to beat the boss at the end. If all your people are lost, the game will end.

With just one in-app purchase available (the removal of ads for £2.49), Count Masters keeps things simple for players and doesn't overcomplicate the sales proposition with hundreds of tiny IAPs.

According to Airnow sources, the winner of the stickiest clash game is **Count Master**

A good strategy, we think.

Count Master's success is also partly derived from the fact that it integrates and builds upon the Swerve Gameplay Mechanic in new and inventive ways (we will cover why combining two mechanics is a ticket to success in more detail later). Keep in mind that Count Master, Join Clash and Crowd City are very similar in their gameplay, and their comparable success in the app market.

| Top iOS hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
Count Masters: Crowd Runner 3D	Tap2Play LLC	26,727,550	1
Join Clash	Supersonic Studios Ltd.	7,067,219	

| iOS retention

App Name	Publisher	Retention
Crowd City	Voodoo	0.233

| Top Android hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
Join Clash 3D	Supersonic Studios Ltd.	93,437,924	4
Count Masters: Crowd Clash & Stickman Running Game	Freeplay Inc	82,394,306	5

Top iOS hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
Blob Runner 3D	Zynga Inc.	12,513,687	8

Top Android hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
Blob Runner 3D	Zynga Inc.	36,807,535	

Honorable mention to Blob Runner: a jelly-like interpretation of the resizing/desizing gameplay mechanic.

Multiplayer integration

Bridge Race is an interesting take on the resizing/desizing mechanic. The player has to collect as many bricks as possible to build stairs to get further in the game. All the while, the player is competing against in-game bots to collect the bricks, and players can knock each other down, reducing their stacks.

While Bridge Race has seen massive success in 2021 in terms of downloads, the game's suitability to multiplayer brings up the question:

When will we see real-time multiplayer integration into hypercasual games?

Real-time multiplayer refers to when the player's actions can be seen simultaneously on multiple devices, in real-time. There are countless examples of mobile games with this feature, from Call of Duty Mobile to Clash Royale. But we are yet to see this integrated into a hypercasual game. Of course, real-time multiplayer comes with certain difficulties in terms of latencies which is why these games are generally built by studios backed with large teams of developers. However, this leaves an excellent opportunity for hypercasual developers to capitalise on the gap in the market.

Top Android hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
Bridge Race	Supersonic Studios Ltd.	121,180,778	1

Top iOS hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
Bridge Race	Supersonic Studios Ltd.	17,807,865	5

Stacking mechanics

Games that use stacking mechanics take the tap/timing mechanic to the next level. Rather than all the gameplay revolving around one precise moment, in stacking games every move you make has a direct impact on the progress of the round. In this way, stacking mechanics provide more points of failure for players, although each failure has a small effect, making it a matter of attrition rather than an insta-fail. The quintessential stacking game is Tetris. However, as you will see, hypercasual s have made some innovations to the iconic format (although, as gaming purists, we like to think Tetris will never be bettered in terms of gaming perfection - a topic for another day).

Stacky Dash is a game about swiping up tiles, then using them to build pathways to more tiles. What sets Stacky Dash apart from the rest, and explains its position high up the leaderboards for 2021, is the fact that it successfully integrates with puzzle mechanics. This fusion between traditional stacking mechanics and puzzle

The winner of the 2021 stacking mechanics' stickiest game is **Stacky Dash**

mechanics creates a unique, hybrid game. Stacky Dash is simple to play at the start and players will find themselves breezing through levels with little change. But soon the difficulty starts stepping up, with new features introduced such as arrow boost tiles or bouncing corners - forcing players to rethink their strategy.

Top iOS hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
Stacky Dash	Supersonic Studios Ltd.	11,125,424	10

Top Android hypercasual games (downloads)

App Name	Publisher	Download growth (#)	Rank
Stack Ball - Crash Platforms	Casual Azur Games	57,571,430	

Honorable mention: Stack Ball - Crash Platforms

The keys to success in the hypercasual category

As you can see. The stickiest games are rarely games that just use one mechanic. They manage to integrate two or more mechanics into the gameplay, while still managing to keep the overall gameplay simple for the player.

From the combination of swerve and rhythm-based mechanics we see in Tiles Hop - EDM Rush to the super satisfying combination of swerve and clash mechanics that have become so popular recently with the likes of Count Masters: Crowd Runner 3D.

> Finding the sweet spot of combining multiple mechanics while retaining the simplicity and easy playability that gets people hooked and keeps people playing your hypercasual game is the key to success.

On top of this in 2021, games which have seen rampant success are also ones that successfully integrate a stylised mechanic that appeals to a specific person within the hypercasual gaming community.

The most striking example of this year was High Heels! which managed to captivate a large audience through its queer and LGBTQ+ style.

If queer was the name of the game in 2021, we are just waiting for a gaming studio to harness a new subculture in 2022. A goth game? Mods? Hip Hop? Drum and Bass? Creating a game that celebrates a subculture and has fun and satisfying gameplay may be your ticket to the top of the app store.

And last but not least, the seemingly perfect compatibility between Stacky Dash and multiplayer opens up the question - when will we see real-time multiplayer be integrated into a hypercasual game? We know this is by no means an easy feat and will require a gaming studio with some backing behind it. But maybe, just maybe, the first studio to do this will have a real hit on their hands.

It's just waiting to happen.