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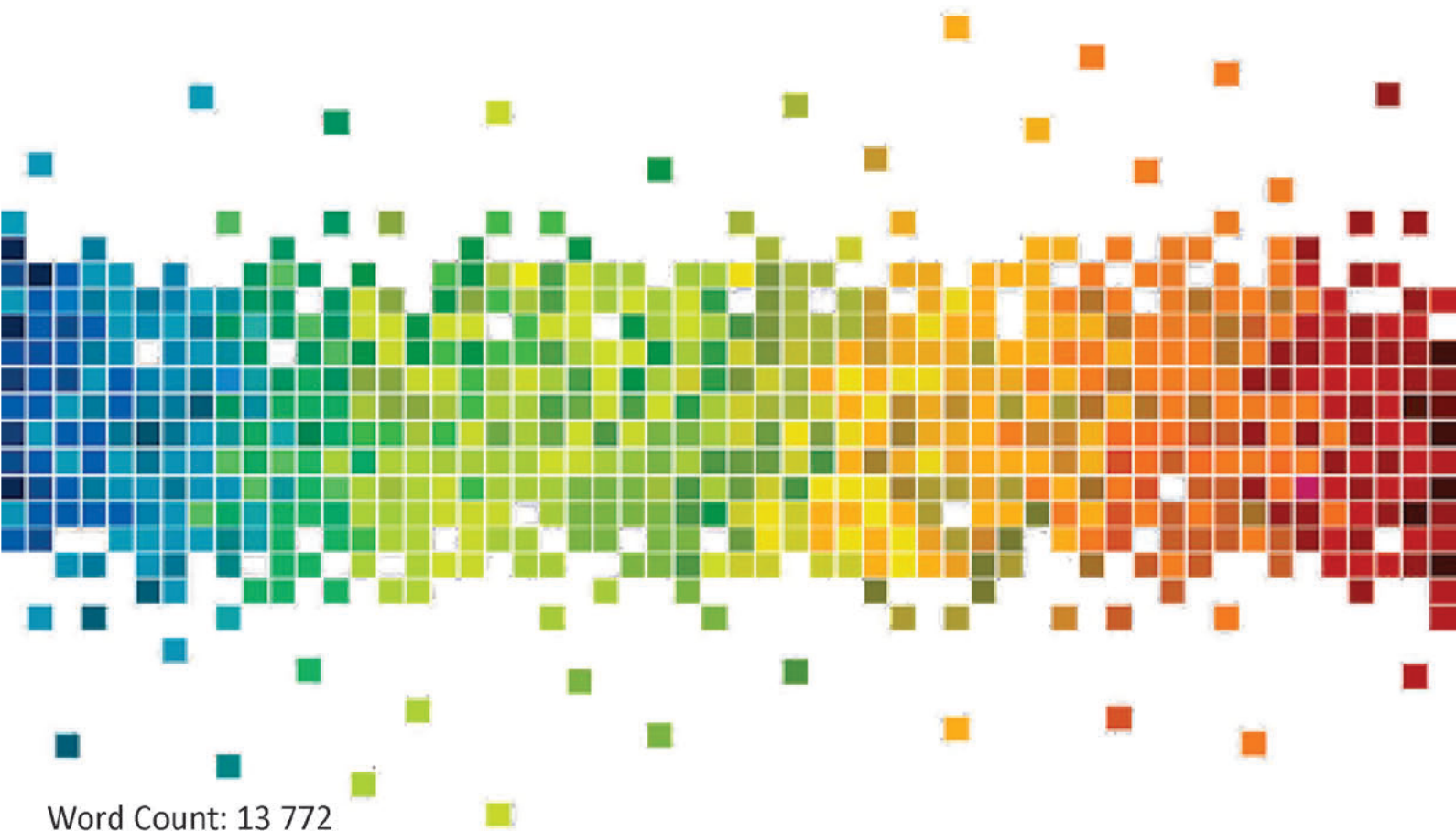


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GAME ON!

A Case Study Evaluating
In-Game Marketing with Focus on
Epic Games

a Qualitative Study



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All sources utilised herein have been acknowledged and accurately referenced according to the Harvard referencing technique. The author and date have been cited for all in-text references with the page number being cited for direct quotations. Additionally, a full and thorough reference list of any and all authors cited throughout this dissertation is included at the end of this article. Tables and figures have also been referenced throughout the text as well as in the final reference list.

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ABSTRACT

With the recency of the COVID-19 epidemic, analysts globally noticed a shift in consumer behaviour. Strict social and environmental laws were implemented to limit transmission of the virus and in turn, people needed to find a new way of fulfilling their social needs. As customers shifted toward video games and other online platforms, brands naturally followed.

This Research Report focuses on recent, new-found branding efforts that have emerged out of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a research opportunity to assess how mainline brands have attacked potential branding opportunities in the newfound video gaming channel. COVID-19 has seen a sharp increase in the number of people playing video games. The number of people playing games over the course of the pandemic saw an increase of almost 40% worldwide.

The study hones in on Epic Games, the game studio that created Fortnite, and evaluates how Epic Games created such a successful branding platform in such limited time. Due to environmental restrictions, data collection methods were restricted solely online. Open-ended questions were the main data collection technique and the rationale for doing so is expounded upon in this Research Report.

The research conducted observes how advertising in-game can be superior to any other platform because of the customers' state of mind. Watching television or scrolling through Facebook sees customers in a blasé state-of-mind. When people interact with brands in-game, they are alert, focused and engaged. This alertness makes for more meaningful and memorable brand interactions. This Research Report will elucidate how these observations were concluded.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

Introduction	2
Rationale	3
Problem Statement	4
Purpose Statement	5
Research Question / Opportunity	5
Objectives / Hypothesis	5

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualisation	6
Theoretical Foundation	8
The Research Opportunity	9
Literature Review	10
Conclusion of Literature Review	14

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction of Research Methodology	15
Paradigm and Research Design	15
Population	16
Sampling	17
Research Questions	18
Primary Research Question	18

Secondary Research Questions	18
Data Collection Methods	18
Primary Methods	18
Secondary Methods	19
Data Collection Process	19
Data Analysis Method	19
Transferability, Dependability Credibility and Confirmability	20

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Population	21
Target Population	21
Accessible Population	21
Population Parameters	21
Sampling	22
<i>Sampling Methods</i>	22
<i>Sample Size</i>	22
<i>Unit of Analysis</i>	23
Data Collection Methods	23
<i>Probability Sampling</i>	23
Application of Data-Collection Methods	24

Application of Data Analysis Methods	25
Presentation and Interpretation of Findings	26
4.1 Objective	26
4.2 Objective	28
4.3 Objective	30
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS	
Answering the Research Questions	32
5.1 Objective	32
5.2 Objective	33
5.3 Objective	34
Suggestions for Future Research	35
Implications of Findings for Future Practices	35
Anticipated Contribution	36
Ethical Considerations	36
Limitations	37
Final Conclusions	38

APPENDIX AND REFERENCE LIST

Appendix	
Originality Report	
Final Research Report Summary Document Table	
Concept Document	39
Reference List	40



GAME ON!

A Case Study Evaluating
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a Qualitative Study

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

Introduction

Traditional marketing channels like radio, television and print have long claimed the throne as the authority in the marketing landscape. As the world advances, so does the modern-day consumer. A shift in consumer behaviour is forcing brands to adopt digital channels and offer unique and personalised experiences that revolve around the consumer. A move from crafting a product for a target audience to creating an experience for an individual defines the Fourth Industrial Revolution. A personalised, human-centric experience is what brands need to aim for to cut through all of the media clutter and reach consumers in a way never executed before.

The computer gaming industry has been around since the late 1970s early 1980s where small groups of hobbyist programmers shared their homemade games with one another (Noon, 2021). Computer gaming at this point was such a niche practice only enjoyed by those who were technologically inclined toward coding. As gaming started to gain traction, the gaming sub-culture grew steadily. Games that were released in the 1990s and 2000s bettered at an exponential rate and each game built on the shoulders of its predecessors. Unfortunately, the gaming subculture harboured for itself a negative stereotype. Gamers were assumed to do nothing else than game. A typical gamer stereotype described an unhygienic male that lacked social skills and any drive in life (Frank, 2015).

As video games advanced, the possibilities and ideas that could be brought to life within the games also expanded. Branding within video games is not a new concept. The first case of advertising in a video game was in the year 2000. Pepsi added a vending machine to a game called 'The Sims' where people could go and buy a Pepsi product in-game (Darkoma, 2021). Given the niche characteristic of the video game audience in the 2000s, advertising in-game did not pose a good return on investment. Gaming continued to progress and brands' level of involvement slowly increased.

Then came the launch of Fortnite Battle Royale in 2017 (Osborn, 2017). It is a game where 100 players jump onto an island and compete against one another to be the last player standing. Within two weeks of its release, it gathered 10 million players and within six months, the game had a player base of 45 million people (Malcolm, 2021). The game saw success like no game before and no game after to this point. Fortnite now has over 200 million players. Its friendly, cartoon graphic style makes it a game that can be enjoyed by the entire family and it forms the foundation of being brand-friendly.

With Fortnite making such huge strides in the gaming industry, it started bleeding into pop culture. With huge celebrities like Drake and Travis Scott endorsing the game, Fortnite broke through and changed the stereotype that surrounded gamers forever. Suddenly gaming was being recognised as an activity that everyone can participate in. Tyler Blevins, known as 'Ninja', is a streamer and he was the first gamer to be featured on the cover of ESPN's magazine (Fogel, 2018). So gaming and its connotations have evolved to such a point that gaming is quickly becoming mainstream (Johnson, 2020).

Once Epic Games, the creators of Fortnite, recognised their ability to entertain such a large and diverse audience, they decided to reprogram their game on an engine that is capable of making the game a unique platform for brands to advertise on (Delaney, 2020). That is when Fortnite became a branding channel like the world has never seen before. This thesis will unpack Epic Games' use of experiential in-game marketing.

Rationale

As gaming starts to weave itself more and more into mainstream culture, games are getting more and more attention each year. There are officially 3.1 billion people who identify as gamers in the world as of 2021 (Williams, 2021). Gaming is becoming a channel that brands need to consider if they wish to stay relevant. As the media landscape gets more and more cluttered, it becomes harder and more expensive to stand out. Suddenly, there is a brand new channel in gaming for advertising where

brands can take the spotlight within a game with no competing brands to drown them out.

One of the driving factors in choosing this topic is the recent development of COVID-19 and how the epidemic has changed marketing practices forever. Brands, now more than ever, need to present themselves in the digital realm to their audience. There has been an exponential increase in people migrating into the video game industry due to COVID-19 (limelight.com, 2020). The increase was highest in the U.S. with a 46% increase in the size of the player base followed by France with a 41% increase in the player base (Wyatt, 2020). Watching gamers play video games online is more popular than watching sports for 18 to 25-year-olds (limelight, 2020). It's a toss-up between the preference for playing video games versus watching TV shows or movies in most countries but there is a clear preference by age groups. Gamers aged 18 to 45-year-olds prefer to play video games while those 46 and older prefer watching movies and TV shows.

With a global lockdown, people are bound to their houses and gaming provides an entertainment option, allowing people to play a game of their choice while socialising online with their friends. It is the social aspect that gaming has capitalised on and ironically so. The antisocial perceptions that surrounded gaming before COVID-19 have since evaporated.

Problem Statement

With brands always finding new, innovative ways to interact with their audience, this new gaming channel is no exception. There is no direct problem, rather, there is a void of knowledge when investigating this relatively new branding channel. This study aims to add some form of foundation to help future marketers slowly fill this void.

Purpose Statement

We are living in the infancy stages of what could be a mainstream channel for brands and that is the purpose of this study. This study is exploratory in nature and it aims to observe Epic Games' industry-leading experiential marketing as they plough forwards into the unknown territories of in-game experiential marketing. Other games have tried to imitate Fortnite in their ventures but they have failed (Kain, 2021). Fortnite has been engineered specifically toward handling these brand crossovers. This research will add to the global advancement and knowledge of experiential in-game marketing. Ideally, the research will allow the opportunity for people in the future to draw key insights from the research conducted and to build upon it.

Research Question / Opportunity

This study is rooted around uncovering people's perceptions of advertising in-game as well as investigating the possibilities of in-game advertising becoming a mainstream channel in the future.

Objectives / Hypothesis

Warrant

Experiential in-game advertising positively affects people's perception of the brands using the game as a channel. Not only this but, in-game experiential advertising will advance even after the COVID-10 epidemic has passed. It is not a phase and video games will prove to be mainstream platforms in the future.

Objectives

1. To determine the effect of brands advertising in-game on people's perceptions of the brand.
2. To determine if brands are more interactive when engaged with in-game.

3. Are brands' in-game marketing practices more memorable than other mainstream channels?
4. Is advertising in-game a viable business practice for brands post-COVID-19?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualisation of Key Terms

Engine

- The term 'engine' or 'game engine' refers to the software that the game is built on (Violini, 2021). The games engine is the foundation of how the game runs on a technical level. It refers to the coding and the better a games engine, the more the developers can program into the game. A games engine plays the same role as an engine in a car. Fortnite is built on the Unreal Engine which is regarded as the best engine in the world. The game was not originally created on the Unreal Engine, in February 2020, Fortnite was re-built on the Unreal Engine to make brand collaborations and in-game events (Delaney, 2021)

Epic Games

- Epic Games is the game development studio that created Fortnite in 2017 founded by Tim Sweeney (Epic Games, 2021)

Experiential Marketing

- Experiential marketing is an immersive, live and memorable brand expression where people can interact with the brand (Torres, 2019).
- In-game experiential marketing just refers to brands using games as a channel to interact with their audience. It encourages user-generated content and experiential marketing within Fortnite is no different.

Fortnite

- Formally known as 'Fortnite Battle Royale'. Fortnite is a game where 100 players drop onto an island and compete to be the last player standing (Epic

Games, 2021). Players range in age and skill as the game accommodates both competitive and casual players. The visual style incorporated in this game is cartoon by nature.

Human-Centric

- A term that describes putting the user in the middle of a brand experience and designing the campaigns around them (Williams, 2021). This is a term synonymous with the Fourth Industrial Revolution

In-Game Events

- These are live events that happen in-game that players can attend (Webster, 2021). You can enter games with your friends and experience these live events from the comfort of your homes. Live events range from concerts to progressions in the Fortnite storyline.

Discord

- An online community platform known and used by the gaming subculture (Discord, 2021). Similar to Facebook but with a gaming twist. Discord lobbies are populated by individuals aged 17 and older. Discord allows for large groups of people to join group calls and participate in group chats. Discord will be the primary platform used to reach the targeted demographic. It is the most popular platform used by gamers to chat with one another in-game. Discord does not display people's real names, rather it displays their gamer-tag.

Gamer-tag

- People's in-game name (Laukkonen, 2021). Not their real name. Gamer-tags are used to keep people's privacy in check. For example, Tyler Blevins' gamer-tag is 'Ninja'. It is whatever name you are known by in games.

Freemium

- A term used to describe premium quality games that are usually pay-to-play that are free-to-play (Segul, 2021). It is a free game that is as good as AAA games.

AAA Games

- Pronounced “triple-A games”, refers to games that are published by the highest-end game studios (Vicente, 2020). Usually, these AAA games cost around \$60 or R1000.

Gamer

- A person who plays video games (Hunt, 2020). The term is gender-neutral and simply is used to refer to the individual who is engaging with a video game.

Crossovers

- This term refers to Fortnite’s various collaborations that they have had with brands. A crossover for example is when the Avengers collaborated with Fornite to build up hype for the release of the next movie by allowing people in Fortnite to play as Thor, for example (Goslin, 2020).

Reddit

- A social online community aimed at providing a platform for people to find other people with similar interests. The platform is geared to cater toward liking people with similar hobbies and interests.

Metaverse

- A term used to describe worlds within games. It refers to the computer-generated worlds the games take place in (Vanian, 2021).

Theoretical Foundation

1. Experiential Marketing and Gaming: *Why Games are Expanding Marketing Efforts Beyond the Digital World*

This literature piece talks about the convergence of pop culture and gaming in the last two years (Ramich, 2020). As gaming becomes more mainstream, Craig B. Ramich explains a shift towards a new 'normal'. The main point Ramich makes in this literature piece is how COVID-19 is acting as a stimulant in growing the video games channel.

2. *A Changing Industry: How Gaming is Changing the Marketing and Advertising Worlds*

This literature piece, written by Mark Brownlee, talks about the rapid change in the marketing landscape with the introduction of a new channel (Brownlee, 2017). He talks about video games having an unparalleled amount of customer engagement allowing people to be submerged into a brand like never before.

3. "Consumers' Attitudes Towards Video Gamers and Their Use as an Advertising Method: A Preliminary Study"

Alina Ghirvu's study revolves around people's perceptions toward advertising in gaming in general (Ghirvu, 2013). While not directly aligned with experiential in-game marketing, her research adds valuable insight into people's level of tolerance toward advertising in-game.

Research Opportunity

There has been a hefty push from brands in the last year and a half toward promotion within video games (Dupee, 2021). This research report is not focused on a specific problem rather, the scope of the research is to examine Epic Games and their implementation of experiential marketing. Not much is known about using video games as a channel because of the channel's relatively recent conception. This void of information and unknown territory is where this report will venture with the aim of

uncovering the channels' true potential. A new channel brings with it a host of investigations and new data. 'How does this new channel compare with other channels at holding people's attention?' is one of many questions that can form an entire research paper. This paper will focus on Epic Games and their use of experiential marketing within Fortnite on a very surface level.

Literature Review

This literature review will evaluate three main literature theories and then reinforce each theory with corresponding sources to back them up. All of the literature identified pivots around experiential marketing within video games and people's perceptions towards in-game advertising. All of the literature reviewed will contribute to painting a clearer picture surrounding perceptions of this new channel. All of the literature identified focuses on the 'how' and 'why' marketing within gaming is making such rapid advancement in the modern media landscape.

To reiterate, the research opportunity is to investigate in-game experiential marketing as practised by Epic Games and interpret people's perceptions of that new marketing channel. The literature review will address each theory individually and expound upon each one as well as draw ties to the main research opportunity. The warrant of this study assumes that in-game experiential marketing positively affects people's perception of the advertised brands. Rietkerk talks about how brands have positively benefited from advertising in games in the past namely, Red Bull and Monster Energy (Rietkerk, 2020). These two brands embraced the gaming channel in its infancy and have reaped the rewards for their efforts. Rietkerk conducted a study in Western Europe where he concluded that gamers had a more positive perception of these brands compared to non-gamers. 38% of gamers say that they have a positive perception of the brand because of their in-game marketing efforts opposed to only 17% of non-gamers having a positive perception of the brand (Rietkerk, 2020). This article by Rietkerk just reinforces the warrant of brands creating positive connections with their audience through marketing within games.

The first theory is called “Experiential Marketing and Gaming: Why Games are Expanding Marketing Efforts Beyond the Digital World” and it is written by Craig B. Ramich (Ramich, 2020). He talks about the unknown depth of the digital channel and its limitless possibilities. Digital channels can be as simple as a web banner ad or as complex as running around in a brand themed city within a video game. Ramich’s work in this field is very exploratory. It was published in 2020 which was a significant year in the development of experiential in-game marketing.

In a marketing landscape where brands fight to stay relevant, Ramich talks about how important relevance is in maintaining positive brand perceptions. Ramich argues that Fortnite is on the cusp of technology and links pop culture to video games like no other with professional athletes mimicking Fortnite dances on the field or court. Fortnite’s relevance as a channel helps brands foster positive engagements with their audience.

Ramich also makes a very interesting deduction on a change in customer behaviour. He mentions how people’s attention spans are shortening and brands need to make themselves as engageable as possible to retain the customers’ attention. Experiential marketing through video games holds the attention of the audience with the advantage of reaching the audience when they are relaxed and are in a better state of mind (Ramich, 2020). Customers now have all the power and have full control over how they consume their media (Hussung, 2021). In an age of ad-blockers, brands need to promote relevant content that the audience wants to engage with. How better to do so than to allow brands to interact with consumers in their leisure time? Ramich is sure that in-game experiential marketing leads to unrivalled customer engagement. This brand-consumer time spent will leave a lasting impression on the consumer. The extent of the positivity branching from the experience is entirely up to the brand creating a meaningful engagement in-game.

The second theory is written by Alina Ghirvu and it is titled, “Consumers’ Attitudes Towards Video Gamers and Their Use As An Advertising Method: A Preliminary Study” (Ghirvu, 2013). In her research, she addresses the perceptions people have toward advertising in gaming in general. Not specifically experiential in-game

marketing but the broader sense of advertising within games. In Ghirvu's words (2013), "We opted to define opinions, feelings and attitudes of customers towards video games in general and advertising in online games in particular". She set out to determine various aspects regarding customers' level of acceptance towards using video games as an advertising channel and determine the social acceptance of such advertising (Ghirvu, 2013).

Although her research does not line up perfectly with this research paper, her research helps in reinforcing the warrant that advertising within video games can be a viable channel in the future. She confirms its validity with her research (Ghirvu, 2013). Within her research, she cited two authors Nelson and Bambauer who undertook extensive studies into people's thoughts about brand placement and in-game advertising (Nelson and Bambauer, 2003). They talk about how customers place the brand in their mind before and after experiencing the brand in-game. They showed that the placement of a brand into a video game evaluated positively will lead to a positive change of attitude regarding that brand (Nelson and Bambauer, 2003). The source is seminal by nature but it is addressing a much earlier and primitive form of in-game advertising.

Ghirvu goes on to further confirm the interactivity of advertising in games (Ghirvu, 2013). She talks about how advertising in-game has overcome physical, temporal and spatial barriers in a way that traditional advertising was unable to do. The entire research paper is constantly comparing traditional and new media channels and it demonstrates the advantages new media channels have over their traditional counterparts (Ghirvu, 2013). With a shift in consumer behaviour, Ghirvu explains how power has shifted from advertising agencies into the hands of the customers. This is a common theme identified in the literature. With the way people are bombarded with advertising from when they wake up to when they go to sleep, Ghirvu speaks about people's negative perceptions toward traditional advertising (Ghirvu, 2013).

A very interesting point Ghirvu made was that the relevance of a marketing platform has a direct connection to how successful and influential a campaign can be. Advertising on a dead channel will result in no impressions and likely will result in a

more negative perception of your brand. The more relevant a platform is, the better and more influential the campaign can be. Given Fortnite's relevance, it makes sense for brands to use the platform as a springboard to cultivate a positive brand reputation.

The last theory is presented by Mark Brownlee and is titled "How gaming is Changing the Marketing and Advertising Worlds" (Brownlee, 2017). He starts off by describing the exponential growth in the gaming industry and the rapid pace at which the gaming platform is growing into a super-channel for brands to utilise (Brownlee, 2017).

Brownlee initially speaks about the gamer stereotype and how that stereotype has been dismantled in recent years. The 'male, high school gamer' stereotype is outdated as gaming is not limited to one gender in a specific age group (Brownlee, 2017). This breakthrough in the industry has seen a boom in the numbers of people playing games which directly translates into a larger audience to market to. Brownlee states that when evaluating the gaming demographic in general across all games, female gamers make up 41% of that audience (Brownlee, 2017). With one of this study's research questions revolving around the viability of gaming as a channel, a more diverse audience is positive news for the gaming channel moving forwards.

Brownlee makes an interesting deduction where he talks about brand collaborations in games. He talks about mutual benefits for brands and games collaborating (Brownlee, 2017). Both the brand and the game have an individual audience and these two audiences also merge when brands collaborate in-game. For example, the Travis Scott experiential event in Fortnite combined two huge audiences. Travis Scott fans who hadn't played Fortnite tried the game to see their favourite rapper in the game which brought that whole audience into the Fortnite ecosystem and vice versa. People who do not normally listen to Travis Scott are exposed to his music in-game and there is a wave of new listeners for Travis Scott.

Brownlee focuses much on the economics that surrounds the gaming space. The gaming industry has been growing by 20% annually since 2017 and is predicted to maintain that growth into the foreseeable future (Witkowski, 2021). Brownlee talks

about these numbers and confirms the growth and stability of the gaming channel into the future. Brownlee addresses the fact that all of the biggest games in the world are free to play, like Fortnite. This free to play characteristic encourages huge numbers of people to play these games and in turn makes them a brandable channel for brands to use. The word used to describe these games is 'freemium'.

Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature identified is all published around marketing within video games. All three research studies point toward brands harvesting a positive brand image by advertising in-game. Ramich spoke about Red Bull and their early entry into in-game marketing. He also spoke about the rapid development of the digital channel and how it has developed from simple website banner ads to experiencing a brand first-hand within a game. Alina

Ghirvu pontificated on people's attitudes surrounding advertising in gaming in general. She cleared up any misconceptions and communicated a clear message detailing people's positive mindset toward in-game advertising. She spoke about how advertising in-game is far more interactive and how it has the ability to hold a customer's attention.

Brownlee wrote about the gaming channel's future possibilities and potential for growth and backed up his claims with data. Brownlee also touched on the dismantlement of the gaming stereotype and showed how the gaming communities demographics are reaching a point of equality. With the gaming channel becoming even more popular than the movie industry, Brownlee firmly believes in the longevity of the gaming channel.

All three studies spoke about the new trend in consumer behaviour that is becoming prevalent. Customers have the power to avoid your marketing material and customers have a noticeably shorter attention span. All three studies believe that in-game marketing is the key to retaining customer engagement.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction of Research Methodology

All research done in this research report will be qualitative. The reason for this approach is to determine the effectiveness and impact the video game channel is having on its audience. It sets out to analyse perceptions, opinions and conceptions surrounding this new channel. These perceptions cannot be quantified hence the implementation of qualitative techniques (Aspers and Corter, 2021). Qualitative techniques will answer the 'why' and give deeper humanistic insights into this new form of consumer behaviour. Qualitative analysis aids in uncovering the drivers that cause customers to engage in their buying behaviour. Gathering qualitative data implies that data collected will be affected by Qualitative Variation (Swanson, 1976). This means that data will not align as clearly as it would in quantitative research and that the research done will need to be interpreted and expounded upon. So this research will investigate what consumers find so appealing about in-game marketing. None of the data will be gathered face-to-face given the current health precautions. All data will be gathered through digital channels.

Paradigm and Research Design

This research report will be making use of the interpretivist paradigm (Dudovskiy, 2010). Interpretivism allows the researcher to evaluate motives and perceptions that have been formed around experiential campaigns within games. It allows for making deductions on psychological and unquantifiable factors. Qualitative research will be used to create a wealth of data that offers valuable insights into consumer perceptions and how they interact with brands within games. The qualitative data will be analysed using the qualitative content analysis method (Elo, 2014). This analysis method allows for similarities and relationships to be identified amongst the chosen literature.

Qualitative research comes with a number of data collection techniques. With perceptions around in-game experiential marketing, data collection methods need to allow the participants to express their personal thoughts and feelings around various topics. This rationalises the use of qualitative questionnaires, open-ended surveys and interviews. Allowing people to express themselves fully regarding their opinions will lead to the most valuable data. The research will comprise of both primary and secondary research with the aim of creating a well-rounded research report. The open-ended surveys and questionnaires will be worded in a way that encourages the participant to elaborate on their opinion of brands using experiential marketing within Fortnite.

Data will be collected from online Discord groups where the sampled population are all over the age of 18 and play Fortnite regularly. Ethical practices in collecting the data will be abided to namely; voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity (Marianna, 2021). Protecting the participants will encourage them to open up and express their true opinion without threats as not to obscure the data in the bias of the research claim. Websites Survey Monkey and SurveyCircle will be used to collect and organise the collected data. Links to these questionnaires and surveys will be posted in various Discord chat rooms.

Population

This study aims at evaluating people's perceptions of advertising in-game, more specifically, experiential advertising. The population identified involves people over the age of 18 who play Fortnite. The geographic characteristic of this audience does not hold any relevance although, the questionnaires will be pushed out on South African Discord Lobbies. Simply, the study that will be targeted at people who play Fortnite. The population is segmented with priority given to people's interests and hobbies. There is no regard given for gender or geographic position. Rather, the demographic includes all people who identify as gamers and have experienced in-game advertising in Fortnite. This demographic is easy to reach through channels like Discord where questionnaires can simply be filled out by people in specific

Discord chat rooms. The main Discord channel is a South African discord channel that has 1700 members and all things done on this Discord are Fortnite related. The rationale for choosing Discord as the main platform for gathering data is simple. Discord is synonymous with gaming. 300 million people use Discord for game-related activities (Gray, 2021). It is the most popular hangout for people who play games with their friends. So using Discord will make sure that everyone that participates in the research are gamers fundamentally. The population can be narrowed down even further by finding Discord lobbies that are built around particular games. In this case, Fortnite.

Sampling

The sampling this research makes use of is probability sampling. Using probability sampling over other sampling techniques brings with it some advantages. It allows for the absence of systematic error and prevents a sampling bias (Dudovskiy, 2021). The sample will act as a representative sample that can be applied to the gaming population as a whole. The more precise the population description is, the more relevant and accurate the sampling data will be. The qualitative nature of the study and the time constraints guides thought in determining the desired sample size. This research aims to gather between 10 and 15 thoroughly answered questionnaires. 10 to 15 comprehensively answered questionnaires will give the research ample amounts of qualitative data to decipher. Mark Mason (2010) talks about saturation in gathering data (Mason, 2010). He implies that once a sufficient amount of data has been collected, data collected after that point does not hold any new insights. Rather, it just reiterates what the data collected prior is saying. So collecting 50 unique questionnaires will not guarantee a proportionately greater amount of data and new insights. Time restraints and a higher level of complexity are factors that justify a smaller sample size.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question

Does in-game advertising in Fortnite influence people's perceptions of the brands being advertised?

Secondary Questions

Are brands' in-game marketing practices more memorable than other mainstream channels?

Is advertising in-game a viable business practice for brands post-COVID-19?

Data Collection Methods

Primary Methods

For this study, open-ended questionnaires will be used to motivate people to share their thoughts on the subject. This data collection method has been chosen given the current environmental issues posed by COVID-19. These questionnaires will be completed digitally to avoid face-to-face questioning with health concerns as the primary reason. These questionnaires are open-ended which allows the participants to share their thoughts without a word cap. This allows the data collected to be more thorough. This data collection method also allows participants to take their time in answering the questions without being put on the spot like in a traditional interview. It gives them time to ponder and formulate their answers and in turn, the highest quality of data will be gathered. Digital questionnaires allow people to participate in the research remotely and in their own time. The data can then be stored digitally and accessed in the future for further research papers. Questionnaires will be designed to encourage the most feedback from the participants by using keywords like 'why' and 'how'. The questionnaires will be made up of 10 questions. Fewer questions in this case are valued to encourage a deeper response from the

participants. The qualitative nature of these questionnaires also dictates fewer questions with the intention of harvesting better data.

Secondary Methods

Secondary data that is used in this research paper will be sourced from reputable sources, review-based websites like HelloPeter, past research papers and literature published by industry professionals.

Data Collection Process

Once clearance has been granted, research will start straight away. Questionnaires have been written with the intention of gathering data as relevant to the research's primary and secondary questions as possible. The questionnaires will use survey websites like SurveyMonkey and SurveyCircle to formulate the questionnaires. Links to these questionnaires will be shared on relevant Discord groups. The websites orchestrating the questionnaires, SurveyMonkey and SurveyCircle, store the data and allow the researcher to download spreadsheets with all of the data laid out.

Data Analysis Methods

Once the data has been collected, qualitative content data analysis will be used along with inductive reasoning which will allow for the perceptions, attitudes, feelings and values to emerge from the data (Contributor, 2021). This is a qualitative study that examines such factors. Qualitative content analysis allows the research to establish a closeness with the data collected (Bhasin, 2021). It aligns with the interpretivist paradigm used throughout this research paper. Qualitative content analysis allows parallels to be drawn within the literature and motives and intentions can be evaluated. After all, perceptions and attitudes form the foundation of the research acquired.

Trends in the data will be grouped and the qualitative data will be compared to existing research done in this field to verify the trustworthiness of the data. A technique called triangulation will be used to verify the primary data (Carter, 2014). Triangulation is a technique whereby the newly acquired data is compared to established, verified data. This adds to the integrity of the research done and the data acquired.

Transferability, Dependability Credibility and Confirmability

The factors of transferability, dependability, credibility and confirmability are all critical in ensuring the quality of the research done. These factors are all used to determine the level of trustworthiness of the research done (Devault, 2021). Credibility is the first box that needs to be ticked to ensure trustworthy data. For data to be credible, it needs to align with previous data collected about the subject. The primary research needs to show strong ties to the secondary data collected. The more the perceptions about in-game experiential marketing line up, the more accurate the research is assumed to be (Devault, 2021).

Transferability is the second mark of quality in obtaining trustworthy data (Devault, 2021). So, how well does this data transfer into other situations? Can new studies related to people's perceptions and gaming use the data acquired by this study? So the data will be kept in its purest form for future studies to make use of the findings. The third factor that makes for trustworthy research is dependability (Devault, 2021). Dependability refers to the degree of how repeatable the data collection can be. The more repeatable the data is, the more accurate it is. So can two independent research studies collect similar data? That is the measurement of dependability (Devault, 2021). So the questions in the questionnaire need to be as refined and clear as possible to make sure there is no confusion. The less confusion there is in participating in the research, the closer peoples' answers will be universally. The final measurement in ensuring the data is as trustworthy as possible is confirmability (Devault, 2021). Confirmability is the degree to which people can confirm the finding

in the data. Do other people agree with the data collected? A technique used to confirm the research's confirmability is for one researcher to play the devil's advocate and inspect the results. After this, the data can be confirmed as true and trustworthy.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter unpacks and attempts to explain the data collected during the course of this study. Due to environmental factors, limitations were placed on this research which ultimately guided the research methodologies into being digitally bound. A mix of questionnaires and live text-based focus groups make up the qualitative data. The strongly opinionated aspects of dealing with people's perceptions toward advertising in-game will be analysed thematically

Population

In any research that is conducted, the population makes up the core of that research. The population is ultimately responsible for providing your study with its necessary data (Bhandari, 2020). The more general a research study is, the broader your population sample can be. For a study like this one where the research revolves around people's opinions, the population must be carefully targeted. Many things go into forming perceptions around advertising in video games. The population needs to fulfil a set of basic requirements before they can even participate in the research. For this research, not only must the population be aware and conscious of in-game advertising, they must have been exposed to a specific type of in-game advertising. This narrows down the generality of the population from people that play games down to people that have played either Fortnite or Rocket League. For this study, all respondents that replied with 'no' to the question "Have you played Fortnite or Rocket League before?" invalidated their response and the questionnaire concluded without any further questions. Familiarity with the subject of in-game advertising practised by Epic Games, the developer of Fortnite and Rocket League, is a critical

requirement when targeting the population. For this study, the population had to meet very simple requirements; They must have played Fortnite or Rocket League before and that they were over the age of 18. Consent is also a major factor that is a prerequisite for anyone wanting to participate in the research.

Sampling

Sampling Methods

Probability sampling will be the sampling technique applied by this study. It must be stated that probability sampling is only being made use of within the targeted population (Trochim, 2021). Out of a group of people who share the desired attributes that prove valuable for this study, a randomised sample of that determined population will take part in this study. With the current limitations of COVID-19, using non-probability sampling where each candidate is handpicked will prove itself a challenge. With the time and environmental limitations of this study, probability sampling will produce the most substantial data. Participants in the study participated using the app, Discord. Discord allows an interactive atmosphere where the researcher can interact with and explain concepts to the population whilst adhering to the current COVID-19 restrictions. Mark Mason talks about a concept called 'saturation' that applies when conducting research. It refers to a point in data collection where more data does not necessarily mean more insights and unique perceptions. More data just reinforces the data collected prior (Mason, 2010). The sampling method described in this section is classified as Systematic Random Sampling (Hayes. 2021). Out of the identified population, people are randomly sampled depending on their eagerness to participate in the research.

Sample Size

With the time restriction and the nature of the current environmental landscape, the sample would ideally be composed of 15 to 25 respondents, assuming that enough relevant and coherent data is harvested. The sample size is small but the in-depth nature of the research conducted looks to engage with and form rounded answers from all people participating. The study is making use of quality over quantity

considering the limitations. So each participant's input is treated with attentiveness in order to extract the most data possible.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study encompasses people's perceptions of brands and how that is influenced when they interact with these brands in games like Fortnite and Rocket League.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection phase of this research is a critical stage. The data itself will lead the entire study. The data collection methods have been strategically chosen to deliver the best data under the given circumstances. As mentioned before, there are limitations that need to be considered. When deciding what would be the best data collection methods for this specific research, the goals of the research needs to be considered. The qualitative nature of this research guides the data collection methods toward methods that allow people to expand on their opinions.

To accommodate this observation and to collect the desired data, the best data collection method would be to publish open-ended questionnaires. Open-ended questions allow the participant to pontificate on their opinions and it allows a response that is typically more rounded than other data collection methods (Cleave, 2017). The questionnaires have been worded in a way to promote extended answers. Words like 'why' and 'how' were key in encouraging the participants to fully explain their perceptions and thoughts. The questionnaire is composed of 12 questions all designed to investigate the participants' attitudes towards advertising in-game.

The second data collection method is focus groups. Focus groups come with a distinct set of advantages (Boughton, 2021). These focus groups are strictly digital given the current limitations of COVID-19. However, online focus groups do possess advantages. The online nature of these focus groups eradicates any geographical limitations allowing a group of people from a more diverse geographical location. The focus group will be hosted on a Discord server and will host five participants. All five participants have been individually chosen because they fit the targeted demographic. It will make use of purposeful sampling as each participant is hand-picked (Ames, 2019). The focus group session will be recorded and transcribed to ensure all relevant information gathered can be gathered. The questions will not be asked in a leading way as not to obscure the data. The focus group will be open for the participants to discuss amongst themselves in the hopes of unearthing common grounds in opinions. The focus group will start with a welcoming statement as well as a statement dictating the purpose of the focus group. All participants will be free to leave whenever they desire and each participant will be required to sign a consent form before they are granted access to the session. The goal is to walk the participants through a list of questions with the intention of allowing the questions to flow organically from one question to the next.

Application of Data Collection Methods

Both the open-ended questionnaires and the focus group were undertaken with the intention of harvesting relevant primary, qualitative data. After sending out the questionnaire, there were a total of 17 respondents that suited the demographic correctly. All participants that answered 'no' to playing the two games in the study, Fortnite and Rocket League, invalidated their answers and the data from these participants were not used. This is simply due to the fact that they have not been exposed to the specific type of advertising that the two games present. The questionnaires were sent out on Discord groups because it makes it easier to target specific demographics on Discord. Posting the questionnaire to online communities that regularly play the game gives this research the most plausible chance of being successful. 12 questions were designed and sent out using Google Forms as the

medium. Google Forms allows for a convenient experience for the participants in the study. With mobile, tablet and PC access, participants can fill out the survey using their tool of choice.

After the questionnaires had been collected, a focus group was held. The focus group consisted of five participants who had all consented to be a part of the research. Focus groups have huge potential but the implementation of the focus group can prove challenging. Steering conversation to keep it in line with the questions whilst keeping the atmosphere authentic and not forced is a delicate balance. The participants were referred to by their first name and not their full name to keep their identities hidden. Giving the participants the freedom to express their opinions without disclosing their identity gives them the freedom to say whatever comes to mind without being personally responsible for their opinions. There were interesting insights gathered with the average participant in the focus group having played Fortnite for more than 3 years.

Application of Data Analysis Methods

This step in the research is where theory and application overlap. The whole research paper has led up to the point of collecting and analysing the raw data. After accessing the qualitative data, it is clear that a structured data analysis method is needed to interpret the data. With so many people answering the open-ended questions in their own way, much effort needs to be applied to interpreting and categorising the various responses into subgroups. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to sort these responses and identify the most prominent themes. In the data that has been collected, linguistic skills were used to interpret the data as accurately as possible. The initial thematic analysis implemented was to group the data into the most basic groups. From participants that find in-game advertising effective to those who find it intrusive. Between these two prominent points of view, there were participants who felt indifferent on the topic. The outliers were then separated into finer groups where they were interrogated further.

The focus group also reaped some qualitative data. The data needed to be transcribed from audio to text in order to group the data thematically. The six participants that were involved in the focus group shared a similar point of view when talking about the advertising within the games Fortnite and Rocket League. So as the data from the focus group is transcribed, precautions need to be taken. The thematic analysis needs to group perceptions of in-game advertising into more specific themes than just do you like/not like in-game advertising. It can specify further into exactly what type of in-game advertising they appreciate the most and which form they find most effective.

Presentation and Interpretation of Findings

4.1 Objective 1- To understand if people feel branding in Fortnite makes the brands more memorable

This objective was put into place to gain a general understanding of how people interact and remember brands that they encounter in a gaming landscape. This objective is to evaluate whether or not branding within video games, especially Fortnite, is a worthwhile brand endeavour in the hopes of building brand awareness and brand affinity. This objective sought to understand what it is about gaming that could make it a viable advertising medium. Questions were phrased around the objective of extracting people's opinions on what makes advertising in-game more memorable in relation to Fortnite. Fortnite's crossovers, when they collaborate with brands, was the main focus of these questions. All participants understood the context of the questions related to Fortnite.

Question: *Do you remember the brands that you have seen in a game? Do you think brands are more memorable when they advertise in-game? Why?*

Answers for this question varied slightly but all respondents agreed that advertising through video games makes the brands more memorable. Participants referred to the digital aspect of advertising in-game and suggested that because the brands are in Fortnite, they will interact with them as long as they play the game. Two participants spoke about the relevance of gathering branded content within Fortnite. Once you own a cosmetic item in Fortnite like a branded character to play with, like Thor for example, every time you play the game, you come into contact with that character and that further deepens the brand-customer relationship.

Answers of Interest:

- “I always have the skins on my account so I remember them every time I open the game”
- “Fortnite makes an effort to make ads playable. I remember the crossovers but some were definitely better than others”
- “Brands are definitely more memorable when experienced through games for me personally as I am likely to relate the brand to the game I enjoy”
- “Yes, definitely more memorable because we talk about them afterwards. Especially Fortnite”

So the driving factor in the memorability of brands within Fortnite is the ability to interact with the brands. This is an innovation in the advertising industry that Fortnite has invented. They have the ability to bring brands to life within their virtual world and allow people to play the game and see the featured brands as companions which produces a personal relationship. They have taken advertising in-game from being a static billboard to being an experiential touchpoint. However, it must be stated that people also voiced their concerns about games like Fortnite becoming fully brand saturated and in turn, losing that personal experience. They fear the possibility of being bombarded by brands in-game like they do on mainstream channels like television and radio. Some of the respondents stated that in-game advertising did not increase their affinity toward a certain brand, rather it increased their brand awareness. Another factor that contributes to the memorability is the prolonged contact time the participants experienced with the brands in-game.

Answers of Interest:

- “They are memorable to a point. When it's one or two brands advertising they can be memorable, when it's a whole sea of advertising, the brands get drowned out”
- “I love games. I'm just afraid games will just become full of ads like everything else”
- “I don't mean to exaggerate, but I'm legitimately concerned at what direction this game's heading”

So yes, in general, the participants believe that brands are more memorable in-game but games like Fortnite need to monitor their brand collaborations to avoid saturating the game and destroying the primary, core user experience.

4.2 Objective 2 - Do people think games like Fortnite have the potential to become mainstream channels?

This objective has the intent of harvesting the participants' conceptions surrounding the viability of Fortnite, and other games, as a mainstream channel in the future. So broken down, it has two underlying questions; Does in-game advertising have a future beyond COVID-19? Does in-game advertising influence your buying behaviour?

Context to the question

Due to COVID-19, people worldwide on average have increased their time playing games since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic by 41% (Statista, 2021). Fortnite, just before the pandemic, upgraded their game engine which allowed them to collaborate more effectively with brands. With Fortnite's innovation, can Fortnite potentially become a mainstream channel?

Question: *Do you think advertising in-game has more potential than more traditional advertising like television and the radio? Why?*

Every participant agreed on the long-term potential of Fortnite as an advertising channel. The question was phrased in a way to make people compare established channels like television and radio to Fortnite. The reason for this is that Fortnite, and other games, need to compare their potential to established channels as a benchmark of what it means to be 'mainstream'. Many of the respondents spoke about the advantage of interactivity that games like Fortnite present that older channels like television and radio simply cannot. A deep insight that was also derived from the data is that the majority of the participants do not even watch television. It just demonstrates how power has shifted from major media houses into the hands of the customer. They have full control of the content they consume. The participants also voiced the way advertising in-game had led to brand interaction outside of Fortnite. With regard to the in-game music concerts, many people said that the concerts made them aware of the artists' music which even led to them downloading the artists' music. One participant reported being exposed to Travis Scotts' music during the event which familiarised him to the artist. He then bought the Travis Scott skin in the Fortnite store and then went to download his album post the event.

Answers of Interest:

- "I knew of Travis Scott before but it was fun going to the concert with my friends. It actually made me go back and listen to some of his music. I also bought his skin in the store"
- It was the first time I had heard his music. I didn't really go and listen to more of his music. It's not my style. But I know who he is now and I saw his name all over Instagram after this live event.
- The reason it has potential is because streamers broadcast these brands to millions of people while playing the game. It's free media coverage. Articles are written by independent journalists because whatever they publish that's Fortnite related will get views.

A very interesting insight uncovered after examining the data is *how* people approach gaming versus *how* they approach watching television. This ties into why advertising within video games possibly has more potential than other mainstream advertising platforms. When people watch television, in most cases, people 'zone-out' and relax, making them less susceptible to advertising. When people play games, especially Fortnite, they are focused intensely on the task and they pay greater attention to exactly what is going on around them. This heightened form of concentration allows brands to interact with customers who are fully cognisant. There is a stark contrast in a customer's mental state when comparing playing video games to watching television. A more cognisant receiver of the media will retain the brand's media better (Wacek, 2018).

4.3 Objective 3 - To understand people's perceptions towards in-game advertising?

- *Focussed on two main topics; Does it violate their privacy and do people mind in-game advertising*

This objective is important in developing the overall topic of deciphering peoples adaptation of gaming as a new, mainstream advertising channel. Because of the opinionated nature of this objective, it is crucial to give the participants an opportunity to fully express themselves. A new channel has early adopters as well as people who grow to accept the new channel. This group of participants had people who resided in both camps. The main question asked was simple.

Question: *What do you think about the crossovers in Fortnite at the moment?*

As mentioned before, answers from participants varied from far too many brands to 'the more the merrier'. Participants described the crossovers/ advertising as a delicate balance between a tasteful implementation of a brand that aligns with the Fortnite game. 47% of the participants in the research stated that advertising in Fortnite is a strong advantage for the game itself. Another 47% of the participants felt that advertising in Fortnite is not a bad thing for the game with only one participant saying that advertising does not belong in the game.

Answers of Interest:

- “I don't mind it if it's done correctly. Discreet is the word. Popups are annoying even when they contain relevant info.. but say, the billboards on the side of the road in Fortnite don't break my suspension of disbelief. In a sense, it adds a dose of reality.”
- “I'm probably in the minority here, but I love the collaborations and brands in Fortnite! I'd rather them stay out of the Battle Pass and be only in the item shop, but I'm always excited when I hear a new one is coming.”
- “One thing bugs me with advertising in game. If it feels too pushed, it can ruin the game. I see how it can be a goldmine for companies. It just has to fit in with the game or it can have the opposite effect.”
- I think it's pretty awesome. It makes the game worlds feel full and I like the detail it adds to the game

So in terms of acceptance, it is apparent that people are conditioned to receive advertising, regardless of what they do be it leisure, work or play. People are so conditioned to being bombarded with advertising that many respondents say that it makes the games feel more 'real' to them if there is advertising in-game, in a positive way. With the invasion of privacy also being an issue brands need to consider, only 11% of the participants felt like brands that feature in games like Fortnite were invading their privacy to an extent. People play games for various reasons and a main reason is escapism. Trying to distance themselves from reality for a time. So it is interesting to see how many people are pro-advertising even in their downtime if it is done tastefully.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Answering the Research Questions:

5.1 Objective 1:

To determine the effect of brands advertising in-game on people's perceptions of the brand.

Findings from Research:

According to the research that was done, perceptions around brands advertising within games was overwhelmingly positive. People were willing that brands interact with them in-game to the extent that they wanted more branding in-game. Respondents even gave suggestions for brands that they wanted to see in their favourite games. People, in general, love the idea of interacting with brands within a game. Perceptions of the brands are not altered vastly, however, the level of brand awareness increased exponentially. A larger brand awareness gives brands an audience that they can target and present a desirable brand image. Branding within video games, according to the research, exposed the brand to a bigger audience and did less in the way of building perceptions.

Findings from Literature:

The literature that was inspected pointed in a similar direction to the data collected. The literature written by Alina Ghirvu suggested that people's tolerance of in-game marketing was much higher than more traditional forms of marketing. This proved to be true. While there was no direct impact on the brands' perceptions, Ghirvu predicted people's callousness to in-game marketing.

Conclusion:

Overall, brand awareness is built to a larger extent. So to answer the objective, brand perceptions are altered positively but that is not the primary consequence of in-game marketing.

5.2 Objective 2: Are brands' in-game marketing practices more memorable than other mainstream channels?

Findings from Research:

The research conducted substantially came to the conclusion that in-game marketing was far more memorable than any marketing campaign in mainstream channels. Responses stated that they still vividly remember brand crossovers within Fortnite. Not only do people experience these in-game brand collaborations with their friends, but these collaborations left a lasting remnant. Gamers could keep the items they acquired from the brand during these collaborations and use them in-game for years to come. So every time people boot up Fortnite, they encounter brands that they have collaborated with in the past. So brands are more interactive and memorable when tastefully implemented in-game.

Findings from Literature:

Brownlee, in his literature that pivots around in-game brand interactivity, talks about how the interactive nature of in-game advertising makes for a more engaging and memorable experience.

Conclusion:

Interactivity and memorability are two concepts that go hand-in-hand. The research goes to prove what Brownlee said regarding this topic. The more immersed one is in a game, the more they will remember and their resultant perceptions of the featured brand will be more positive. Hyped events where brands featured, according to the research, created a call-to-action on the consumers' side. Consumers report interacting with the brand outside of the gaming channel as a result of the brands' in-game presence.

5.3 Objective 3: *Is advertising in-game a viable business practice for brands post-COVID-19?*

Findings from Research:

Findings from the research regarding this question validate the possibility of brands expanding within the gaming landscape. COVID-19 forced major brands to access their media mix and their approach in targeting people. COVID-19 saw a maturation of the digital channel to extremes that were previously not thought possible. Interactivity, engagement and viewer retention are all factors that excel within the gaming channel. Brands have the undivided attention of their audience like no other channel. This advertising in Fortnite, which occurred over the course of the epidemic, serves as a small foretaste of what is to come. Branding executions within video games is only limited by the imagination of the marketing team. With the gaming communities growing at an exponential rate, the gaming channel is fast becoming a mainstream channel that brands need to seriously consider.

Findings from Literature:

In Craig Ramich's literature titled, "*Why Games are Expanding Marketing Efforts Beyond the Digital World*", he talks about the convergence of gaming and pop culture and how advertising in games has not even begun to see the possible return on investment in this highly engaging medium. Gaming is losing its negative stereotype and is being embraced as a mainstream recreational activity. Gaming and advertising within it is a practice that is here to stay. In many ways, advertising within gaming is still in its infancy.

Conclusion:

In conclusion of this research objective, the validity of in-game marketing is no longer a term that can be shrugged off and labelled as experimental branding endeavour. Ramich predicts that as time goes, advertising within games will become a staple of mainstream brand-building practice.

Suggestions for Future Research

We know just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to this new form of interactive marketing. The possibilities it holds are seemingly limitless. The more research that is conducted around this topic, the better. The more it is understood, the more honed marketing practices can become to reap the most out of this new channel. Future studies need to target these communities more accurately. Online communities like Reddit are not harvested by brands. The amount of data that can be collected on sites like Reddit is second to none. People are relaxed and willing to share honest opinions on Reddit without the concerns of retaliation. People are anonymous and willing to share their opinions. Another great feature that Reddit offers to market researchers which is not used is the ability to conduct Text-based focus groups. In essence, it allows someone to ask a question and then people answer the question and feed off one another's answers which brings dimension into the study. It mirrors real, face-to-face focus groups with the one difference that it is purely written. People discuss in live time with the only limitation being the inability to notice the tone of voice.

Implications of Findings for Future Practices

Findings and research will just snowball as time goes on with more and more people paying interest in the gaming channel. The intention is that these findings help lay the foundation of further studies. As gaming becomes more mainstream, the communities will broaden from the subculture that is gaming and grow to include a much more diverse clientele. So as people move into and start consuming gaming content, the data collected in this research may only describe a smaller segment of the new gaming audience. The early adopters may find themselves characteristically differentiated from people who only start gaming when they are much older. This research will only prove applicable and describe people who have played games before it became a normative practice.

Anticipated Contribution

With the recency of this platform, the amount of data that has been collected about using games as a channel is minimal (Kainth, 2021). This research is undertaken with the intention of gathering fresh insights and to collect data to add to the global database. The data collected should be available for data analysts and marketers to guide their strategy and help them understand people's perceptions of in-game experiential marketing. The data collected should be built upon. This point reiterates the importance of the data being transferable, dependable, credible and confirmable. This data will help formulate the foundation of in-game experiential marketing as the earliest journal articles written on the subject are dated back to early 2017. This research was conducted with the intention of being expounded upon.

Ethical Considerations

The research undertaken by this study and the ways the research is collected, analysed and reported upon will stay in strict concordance to pre-established ethical guidelines. Anonymity will be the first ethical consideration (Arifin, 2018). Keeping the participants' identities hidden allows them to say what they need to say without the fear of being held accountable for their opinions. The next consideration in conducting this research is about the voluntary aspect of interacting with the questionnaire (Arifin, 2018). There will be no obligation or threat made to force people to fill the questionnaires. The voluntary nature of this research also ensures that everybody that decides to interact with the questionnaire will be willing and knowledgeable on the topic.

Data tampering is also an activity that contaminates the collected data (Arifin, 2018). Data tampering will not happen with the collection or inspection of the data collected. This allows for bias that can sway the findings and will obscure any potential insights that can be derived from the data. Data tampering can also be done by the participants. By threatening the participants verbally or even physically can sway the

data and in turn, tamper the data. So there will be no physical or psychological threats made in order to keep the data as pure as possible (Arifin, 2018). The final ethical consideration will be to ensure that the participants fully understand the scope and purpose of the research (Arifin, 2018). It is critical for participants to know that their responses will be considered strongly and that they have a direct influence on potential future insights.

Limitations

In a study like this one, especially at an Honours level, there are many restrictions that come into play. There is a limited window in which the data can be collected (Dudovskiy, 2018). This limited-time window also means that there will be a limit on the quantity of data that can be collected. With less data collected, the research will be less valid than it would be if there was a longer time allocated to collect more data. This negatively impacts the validity of the data. Reaching a larger sample size also requires more money to boost the surveys (Dudovskiy, 2018). Adequate funding will allow the questionnaires to be sent out to a much bigger audience which would validate the data. No funding is a limitation to the research. With a smaller audience, a limitation could be a shortage of comprehensive data. Perhaps only 50% of the received questionnaires will be valid for this research (Dudovskiy, 2018). Another limitation could be the limited number of data collection techniques (Dudovskiy, 2018). With the limited time frame, only questionnaires can be sent out. With a longer research period and more funding, more data collection techniques can be used. One of the main limitations in carrying out this research is the barrier of COVID-19 (Dudovskiy, 2018). Precautions like social distancing and limited people per room can have a negative impact on how many people can participate in the research. Qualitative observations like noting body language and tone are two critical factors that cannot be captured in a questionnaire (Dudovskiy, 2018). Feelings and perceptions can only be assessed through peoples' responses. If the participants are not good at capturing their emotions into their responses, these valuable qualitative insights will be lost.

Final Conclusions

As society moves forward and finds new ways to satisfy their social and rehabilitative needs, brands need to follow and innovate in these newfound marketing channels. As gaming becomes a part of pop culture, it cements itself into society as a normative practice. According to the research conducted, gaming not only appears to be growing exponentially, it appears to be a channel where user engagement and user retention appear to dwarf any other mainstream channel. A key insight into the effectiveness of gaming as a channel comes down to the user's state of mind. When people watch television after a long workday or scroll through Facebook during their lunch break, people approach these leisurely activities with little enthusiasm. They barely pay attention. When it comes to marketing within video games, like Fortnite, users are giving all of their attention to whatever is happening on screen. They interact with these brands with a whole new demeanour. They engage with the content on screen making marketing more engaging, memorable and personalised. This is the key advantage brands acquire when advertising within games like Fortnite. The users' undivided attention and sharpened state of mind. According to the data, brands just need to tastefully weave themselves into the games metaverse.

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Anticipated Findings
This research is a case study on Epic Games and their implementation of in-game experiential advertising and how that influences peoples perceptions on the brands featured	Does experiential in-game advertising in Fortnite influence people's perceptions of the brands being advertised?	The experiential in-game marketing channel is new and the global player base has almost doubled in size since COVID-19. Researching this channel will aid in developing effective experiential campaigns in the future.	Alan Bryman, 2006	Theme 1: Effectivness Theme 2: Brand Experience Theme 3: Brand Perceptions Theme 4: A Growing Audience Theme 5: Brand Credibility Theme 6: More Popular than TV Theme 7: Interactivity	Interpretivism Epistimology: There is a limitation in the knowledge in this field and its relevance with this rapidly growing channel. Its a new way to experience brands. It adds another dimension to marketing	Qualitative	Questionnaires on Discord	Questionnaires will be completely voluntary. Participants’ names will remain as their Twitch username, as not to reveal their identity. Data collected will not be adjusted or tampered with. There will be not physical/psychological threats to obscure results. Participants will understand the scope of the research.	The study expects to draw postive perceptions around in-game experiential marketing and confirm its effectiveness
						Population			
						People part of the gaming Subculture in South Africa who play Fornite and use Discord			
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/ Hypotheses/ Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories			Sampling	Data Analysis Method(s)	Limitations	Anticipated Contribution
There is no problem that is being addressed, rather this research will analyse Epic Games and how in-game advertising influences the brands image	Are brands’ in-game marketing practices more memorable than other mainstream channels? Is advertising in-game a viable business practice for brands post-COVID-19?	Experiential Marketing Audience Engagement Partnerships Brand Awareness Gaming Subculture	<u>Experiential Marketing and Gaming</u> : Why Games are Expanding Marketing Efforts Beyond the Digital World (Craig B. Ramich) <u>A Changing Industry</u> : How Gaming is Changing the Marketing and Advertising Worlds (Mark Brownlee)			Probability Sampling Sampling Mehod: Simple Random Sampling Size: 10-15 Participants	Qualitative Content Analysis Unit of Analysis: Fortnite Gamers	A small sample group means the data will not be an accurate general census. Short time may also hinder the severity of the study. COVID-19 prohibits any face-to-face research	To add insights into the field of in-game experiential marketing. To add to the body of knowledge and deduce how to execute in-game experiential marketing more effectively. What makes it so effective?

Date 09 July 2021

Student name: Timothy Talbot

Student number: [REDACTED]

Campus: Vega School Durban

Re: Approval of RESE8419 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.

3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor name: **Simon Grainger**

Signature:



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) name: **Carolanda du Toit**



Signature:

12 July 2021

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