



The Effects of Video Game Industry Controversies on Young Adults' Purchase Intentions

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Abstract

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<p>The aim of this research-based thesis is to investigate and draw conclusions upon the effects of views of video game industry controversies on consumers', in this case young adults' aged 18-30, purchase intentions. The results of the thesis will be tailored to the area of marketing communication and consumer behaviour, with the goal being for companies to be able to target their communication messages more effectively.</p> <p>The structure of this thesis consists of an introductory section, a section outlining the overall theoretical framework for the thesis including models outlining consumer behaviour, the chosen research methods for the thesis, and lastly, a discussion section presenting key findings and further recommendations.</p> <p>The research conducted for this thesis was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. In order to gain quantitative insights into the general consumer views regarding video game industry controversies, a survey was sent to people who consider themselves video game players or consumers. 72 valid answers were gathered from the survey. In addition to the survey, qualitative data was gathered by conducting an interview with 4 separate people who consider themselves video game players or consumers.</p> <p>The overall results from this thesis indicate that views of different types of controversy have varying effects on video game consumers' intent to make a purchase. Views of controversies related to video game content have a low to moderate impact on purchase intentions; views of controversies related to video game culture have a moderate to high impact on purchase intentions; and finally, views of controversies related to video game industry company practices have a high impact on purchase intentions.</p> <p>For further research, studies should concentrate on a wider range of age groups and other demographic variables, much larger population samples, and more in-depth qualitative research.</p> <p>As recommendations for businesses, the author suggests research of their specific customer segments, and creating marketing and customer communication models that emphasize transparency.</p>
Key words Consumer Behaviour, Purchase Intention, Marketing Communications, Controversy, Video Game Industry

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1 Introduction

This is a research-based bachelor's thesis for the degree programme in International Business in the major specialization of Customer Relationship Management and Communication at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the background and reasoning for the thesis topic, the research and investigative questions involved, demarcation of research, benefits to key stakeholders, and finally, the key concepts central to the thesis.

1.1 Background

There has been clear evidence – in the past decade, increasingly so – that video game controversies have a large impact on the industry itself. There is also a clear information gap in overall research in how those controversies affect customers' purchasing patterns, or if they do at all. This thesis aims to start to bridge that gap by providing the necessary knowledge about a small sample of video game consumers.

The video game industry, when considering different forms of entertainment and media, is amongst the fastest growing sectors. In 2021, total video game revenue was around 214.2 billion USD, and it is expected to rise by more than 100 billion USD by 2026. The growth is spurred by “rapidly increasing investment in in-app advertising” and a rising interest in “social/casual gaming”. (Ballhaus, Chow & Rivet 2022, 8.) Other aspects that will increase demand will likely be the increased availability of next-generation video game consoles, which encourages triple-A game development, and “new title launches”, which are projected to pick up speed in the year 2023. There is likely to be a “regulatory shift in China”, and as the country is the world's biggest consumer of video games, this will likely have a large impact on the industry. Overall, although signs of a recession exist, this is not expected to affect sales, as consumers have continued spending on video games even during recessions when looking at the past. (Morgan Stanley 2022.)

In Europe, over fifty percent of people aged between 6 and 64 years old play video games; this number grew from 118.3 million to 124.8 million between 2020 and 2021. The average age of a video game player is approximately 31 years old. The overall European video game industry is worth over 23 billion euros and is driven mainly by app revenue. (European Games Developer Federation 2022.) In the year 2020, only five countries in the European Union had video game industry revenues worth more than 1 billion euros which were, from largest to smallest, France, Germany, Sweden, Finland, and Spain. Additionally, the European Union had around 4,600 game

developer studios as well as over 170 video game publishers. (European Games Developer Federation 2021.) It can thus be stated that the industry is significant as well as impactful towards the European economy – and is still growing, especially as playing video games is becoming more and more accessible.

Despite the industry's importance and great size, certain aspects of consumer behaviour remain under-studied. Controversy has been linked to video games ever since the early days of their emergence. With video games specifically, controversies originally focused largely upon their content; after video games became more accessible to a much larger audience, attention started shifting towards a wider variety of issues, relating to both the communities surrounding video games and the companies making and producing them. Consumers' attitudes and personal values play a significant role in consumer behaviour, and it can thus be valuable to discover how attitudes towards video game industry controversies will affect purchase intentions.

1.2 Research Question and Investigative Questions

The thesis aims to investigate and draw conclusions upon the effects of views of video game industry controversies on consumers', in this case young adults' aged 18-30, purchase intentions. The results of the thesis will be tailored to the area of marketing communication and consumer behaviour, with the goal being for companies to be able to target their communication messages more effectively.

The research question (RQ) of this thesis is stated as follows: How do video game industry controversies affect young adults' intent to make a purchase?

The research question is divided into investigative questions (IQs) as follows:

IQ1. How do views of controversies related to video game content, such as violence and sexual themes, influence purchase intentions?

IQ2. How do views of controversies related to video game culture, such as addiction, cheating and harassment, influence purchase intentions?

IQ3. How do views of controversies related to video game industry practices, such as workplace concerns, influence purchase intentions?

The overlay matrix as presented in Table 1 shows the investigative questions and how they relate to the theoretical framework, research methods, and where the findings for each investigative question are located.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative question	Theoretical framework	Research methods	Findings (chapter)
IQ1. How do views of controversies related to video game content, such as violence and sexual themes, influence purchase intentions?	Consumer views and attitudes Consumer behaviour models	Quantitative data collection through Webropol survey Qualitative data collection through online thematic interviews and open survey question	4.2.
IQ2. How do views of controversies related to video game culture, such as addiction, cheating and harassment, influence purchase intentions?	Consumer views and attitudes Consumer behaviour models	Quantitative data collection through Webropol survey Qualitative data collection through online thematic interviews and open survey question	4.3.
IQ3. How do views of controversies related to video game industry practices, such as workplace concerns, influence purchase intentions?	Consumer views and attitudes Consumer behaviour models	Quantitative data collection through Webropol survey Qualitative data collection through online thematic interviews and open survey question	4.4.

Since the investigative questions are very similar in nature and are differentiated only by the type of controversy being studied, the overall goals for findings are very straightforward.

1.3 Demarcation of Research

The main focus of this research is on how customers' views affect buying behaviour in the video game industry. The target group is thus not limited to a single geographical location but is limited to consumers who identify themselves as video game consumers or video game players. The industry that the research focuses on is also similarly limited and the results cannot be applied to customer behaviour in other markets.

The research was further narrowed down by focusing on one aspect influencing consumer behaviour: the impact of controversy. This aspect was divided into three distinct categories. No other influences on customer behaviour are researched.

The research concentrates on a specifically defined group of people (defined for population sampling purposes) – those video game players that consume video games on a regular basis, i.e., those that play games minimum one hour a week. The group of people studied was further narrowed down by limiting the age of respondents to those aged between 18 and 30 years old – or people that can be described as young adults – and by including only those that play video games on consoles and computers, thus excluding mobile game players.

1.4 Benefits

Benefits to stakeholders can be considered from an industry-wide perspective as well as a personal perspective from the author's point of view.

The results from this thesis can be utilized by both independent and major video game companies, most of which sell their products across multiple countries, and – especially in the cases of larger companies – have branches across multiple countries. The results are universally applicable, since the topics discussed are not limited to one area of the world or a single country.

Companies can gain a better understanding of how consumers' own personal values and attitudes affect their purchasing decisions, and can utilize this information in how they convey certain messages, what topics are in need of more emphasis, and how they should design their marketing efforts as well as communication with customers.

Furthermore, this area of research, as well as the industry under study, is of great interest to the author. This thesis will greatly aid in acquiring a better understanding of the video game industry, as well as in understanding tasks at both academic and professional levels.

1.5 Key Concepts

Purchase intention is the “predisposition to buy a certain brand”, based on “a matching of purchase motives with attributes or characteristics of brands under consideration” (Belch & Belch 2021, 128).

Consumer behaviour is the “study of the processes involved” when customers “select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires”. The field concentrates on the interaction between the consumer and the seller of the product or service they consume, in an exchange where two or more people and/or organizations “give and receive something of value”. (Solomon 2020, 6-7.)

Marketing communication is the exchange of communication that has been developed into a process traditionally managed by the activities within the marketing mix or the 4 Ps. This involves the research and targeting of a specific customer group’s needs, creating a product or service that answers those needs at an acceptable price point and that is distributed through specific distribution channels, and finally, “making the target audience aware of the existence” of the product or service – this is the promotional aspect of the marketing mix, where communication between seller and customer takes place. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 9.)

Controversy is very generally defined as an often public “disagreement or argument about something” which usually impacts or is held important by many people. It involves different ideas, opinions, and perspectives. (Cambridge University Press 2022.)

2 Communication, Consumer Behaviour and Controversy in the Video Game Industry

This section outlines the theoretical framework around video games, controversy, marketing communications and the relevant consumer behavioural theory applicable to the thesis.

2.1 Marketing Communications

When studying video games and the way marketing communications are established between seller and buyer, the fact that they are a so-called “cultural product” must be taken into consideration. Video games are not traditionally produced nor consumed – they can instead be likened to media products such as music and films, and thus “inhabit symbolical value about society”. The marketing for such products is not as straight-forward nor as direct as marketing for more traditional products. (Zackariasson & Dymek 2016, 14.)

Communication can be defined as a “process of establishing a commonness or oneness of thought between sender and receiver” (Schramm in Eagle, Czarnecka, Dahl & Lloyd 2020, 23). The impact or outcome of communication is of much interest to marketers since, by nature, marketing is an area of communication where there is a major concern over how a message will be received (Eagle, Czarnecka, Dahl & Lloyd 2020, 23). With marketing, however, different aspects of communication take additional importance, such as the fact that customers will not obtain information from one source, that “the chain of communication media is multi-layered” as messages travel through different types of media, and that the content of the message will vary because of that (Eagle, Czarnecka, Dahl & Lloyd 2020, 26).

The aim of marketing communications is, ultimately, to engage: customers have to be exposed to a certain message which will hopefully capture their attention and promote interaction with the sender of that message – the company (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 7). Marketing communications has to be carried out in a way that somehow meets customers’ needs and elicits some kind of response from the target audience, which then ultimately and hopefully leads to the point of purchase (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 13).

Traditionally, the exchange of communication involved in marketing communications has been developed into a process managed by the activities within the marketing mix or the 4 Ps. This involves the research and targeting of a specific customer group’s needs, creating a product or service that answers those needs at an acceptable price point and that is distributed through specific distribution channels, and finally, “making the target audience aware of the existence” of the

product or service – this is the promotional aspect of the marketing mix, where communication between seller and customer takes place. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 9.)

Most marketing has relied on a traditional communication model where the communication originates from a “source”. The message coming from the source is transmitted through a “medium”, be it social media, television, or magazines. Multiple “receivers” (or in other words, consumers) are then able to use their own knowledge and experiences to make an interpretation of the message communicated to them, creating a kind of feedback loop so that marketers can study how consumers receive the message and change it if necessary. (Solomon 2020, 293.)

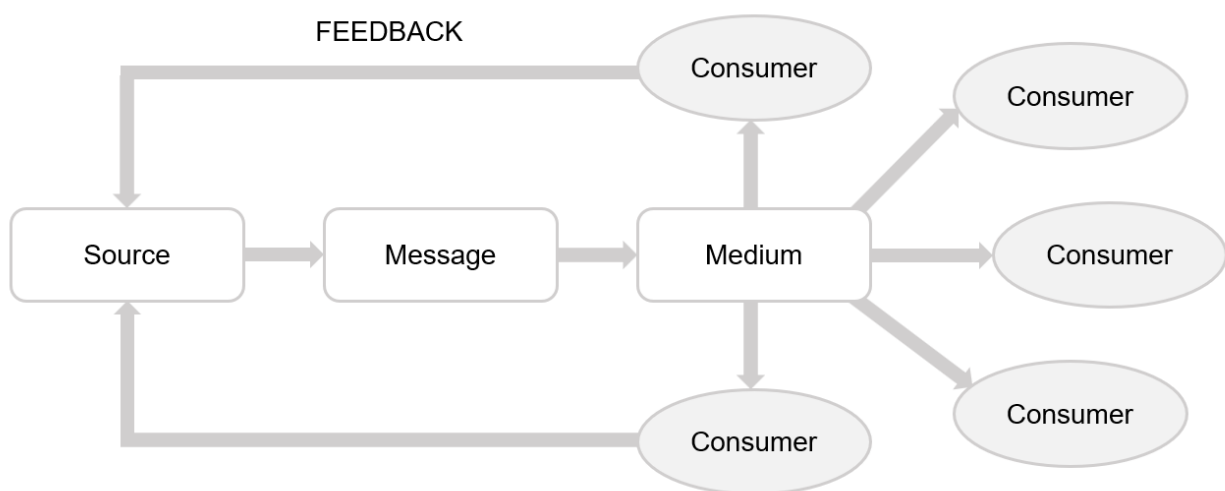


Figure 1. Traditional communication model (Solomon 2020, 294)

There are two ways in which marketing communications has mostly been utilized. It is a way of establishing brand values in the minds of customers, or strengthening certain feelings or beliefs about the brand in the customers’ minds. However, a more contemporary method has targeted the shaping of behaviour instead of emotion, and attempting to drive customers towards certain actions. This type of communication uses messaging with “calls-to-action”, thus giving message receivers “a reason to act.” Both of these methods can be mixed into a hybrid approach to marketing communications. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 10.)

In addition to the planned marketing communications employed by companies – where advertising, promotion, public relations and direct marketing come into play – there is an additional level of communications experienced by customers that relates to their experience using the company’s products and services, as well as communications that stem from “unplanned or unintended brand-related experiences”. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 11.) In the context of this thesis, both planned and unplanned marketing communications are of equal importance.

2.2 Consumer Behaviour

The aim of the study of consumer behaviour is the analysis of consumer choices “during searching, evaluating, purchasing, and using products and services that they believe would satisfy their needs”. Marketers aim to find the needs of consumers that are not yet met, and to “create and promote superior offerings” to meet those needs. How consumers behave will ultimately explain what they spend their money on, how much time they spend on consuming goods, and how much effort they go into to seek the goods they want. (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 2.) Consumers are pushed essentially by motivation; unfulfilled desires create “tensions which consumers strive to relieve” by making goals related to purchasing and need fulfilment (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 48). Those goals can be either generic or product-specific, meaning that they can either be meant to meet physiological and psychological needs, or outcomes from using a product or a service (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 50).

The aim of consumer behaviour could be described as trying to understand how consumers decide what to buy – and thus how they develop the intent to purchase. Purchase intention is the “predisposition to buy a certain brand”, based on “a matching of purchase motives with attributes or characteristics of brands under consideration” (Belch & Belch 2021, 128).

The study of consumer behaviour also necessitates that the company’s customer base be divided up into different segments – this can be done by using different demographic variables, such as age, gender, family structure, social class, ethnicity, geography, and lifestyles in general (Solomon 2020, 9-11). A company can also consider which customers are the heaviest users of its products (Solomon 2020, 8), though in the video game industry this principle could be difficult to apply to all companies, since video games themselves vary to a great degree.

There are many impacts on consumer behaviour. Any consumer’s experience begins with what they can see, hear, smell, taste, and feel – how their sensory receptors respond to basic stimuli. Perception refers to “the process by which people select, organize, and interpret these sensations”. External stimuli, also known as sensory inputs, can come from a variety of sources and create, when they are received, certain sensory experiences. (Solomon 2020, 74.)

Consumer behaviour is also affected by the way in which consumers both learn and remember. Companies can benefit from behavioural learning theory, which assumes that “learning takes place as the result of responses to external events” or stimuli (thus different behaviour can be observed) (Solomon 2020, 109), and from cognitive learning theory, which underlines “the importance of internal mental processes” (Solomon 2020, 119). Consumers are more likely to remember the first

brands to enter the market, and more likely to remember a message when it is repeated periodically over a long period of time rather than many times during a short period of time. The way in which the marketer's message is written or displayed also has an effect on how likely it is to be recalled later on – such as those that incorporate multiple types of stimuli. (Solomon 2020, 133.)

Additionally, consumers have different reasoning for using products or services – they may satisfy their needs due to a utilitarian motivation (function, practicality) or a hedonistic motivation (“an experiential need”) (Solomon 2020, 150).

For this thesis, the way in which consumers' personal opinions, attitudes values would affect their consumer behaviour is the most important factor under consideration. An attitude, defined as “a learned predisposition to behave in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way toward a given object”, generally leads to behaviour, but is not equivalent to it. Attitudes may reflect positive or negative evaluations about the objects they are directed towards, and can thus push consumers towards or pull them away from certain behaviours. (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 142-143.) In general, the more information about products and services consumers are presented with, the more likely attitude formation will become – however, only a very limited number of beliefs will be relevant in attitude formation, as consumers tend to “use only a limited amount of the information available to them” (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 143-144).

There are many factors that affect the formation of attitudes; personal and direct experiences with using certain products from certain companies, the influence of family and friends, and the impact of social and traditional media. People's own personalities and different traits will directly have an effect on the types of attitudes they will form. Giving in-depth information about products will be received well by those who “crave information and enjoy thinking” – also known as a high need for cognition. However, people that do not have a lower need for cognition respond well to marketing that features “peripheral cues” about products. It can be stated that certain behaviours always stem from similar attitudes, but consumers' attitudes can change both infrequently and frequently. Different circumstances can interfere and influence the consistency of certain behaviours and their link to attitudes. (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 144.) Different situations can “cause consumers to behave in ways seemingly inconsistent with their attitudes”. For an example, consumers' goals in their personal lives may affect their purchasing behaviours at certain times – they may want to save money, or change the type of product they buy because it will serve a particular need better than the alternative. (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 145.)

Some consumers are much more likely to be loyal to certain brands, while certain others have more easily changeable attitudes. People will have different levels of commitment to certain attitudes, meaning that “the degree of commitment relates to their level of involvement with the

attitude object”. The different degrees of commitment can be expressed in three levels: starting from the lowest, compliance, followed by identification, and finally, internalization. With compliance, attitude formation occurs in the attempt to “gain rewards or avoid punishment”, and the attitude is thus superficial. With identification, attitude formation occurs “to conform to another person’s or group’s expectations”. With internalization, attitudes become a part of the customer’s value system, and can seldom be changed as they are deeply ingrained. (Solomon 2020, 279-280.)

2.3 The Cognitive Decision Making Process

Traditionally, consumer behaviour has been studied from a rational point of view. According to this perspective, consumers carefully evaluate what they know about a product, consider the negative and positive outcomes of alternatives, and eventually arrive at a decision. The aim of consumer behaviour study, then, is to study the steps in this type of cognitive decision making process. (Solomon 2020, 324.)



Figure 2. The cognitive decision making process (Solomon 2020, 325)

The cognitive decision making process, as illustrated in Figure 2, starts with problem recognition, followed by information search, evaluation of alternatives, product choice, and finally, outcomes (Solomon 2020, 325).

In the problem recognition stage, consumers recognize a certain desire that they want to fulfil – i.e. they realize that they have a problem that needs a solution, “a gulf between the actual state and the ideal state”. In the following stage, information search, the consumer searches the environment for data in order to come to a decision. Some consumers carry out “prepurchase search” where they search for specific information, while others partake in continuous, ongoing search in the form of casual browsing. (Solomon 2020, 326.) When consumers evaluate alternatives, they consider multiple other brands that could also fulfil their needs in a similar way. There may be certain alternatives in the consumer’s mind – “the evoked set” – but only a limited number of those that the consumer will consider purchasing – “the consideration set”. In the fourth stage, then, consumers

finally arrive at a decision, and choose which one of the alternatives they will purchase. (Solomon 2020, 328.) Finally, post-purchase evaluation will take place in the mind of the consumer, when they “experience the product or service” selected and determine whether it has truly fulfilled their needs and met all their expectations (Solomon 2020, 329).

2.4 Models Outlining Consumer Behaviour

This section outlines examples of models that have been utilized to understand consumer behaviour. This thesis aims to explain how consumers’ views – in other words, their attitudes and beliefs – about controversies may influence their intent to purchase a video game; thus, the outlined models also have a focus on such aspects.

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) – a cognitive and psychological theory – was originally formulated to define the differences between attitude and behaviour. According to the theory, “attitudes, norms, and perceived control each lead to intention”, which is “the readiness to do a behaviour” – and those intentions will then result in behaviour. (Nickerson 2022.) The theory of reasoned action assumes that each person has volitional control over their behaviours (Kan & Fabrigar 2020, 1).

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is essentially an extension of the theory of reasoned action. According to it, a person’s decision to participate in a certain behaviour “can be predicated by their intention to engage in that behaviour” where both behavioural control and intention “can be used directly to predict behavioural achievement.” (Brookes 2021.) The theory of planned behaviour was originally created after the recognition that all behaviours are not under people’s volitional control; thus, the concept of “perceived behavioural control” was added to the theory of reasoned action. Therefore, according to the TPB, behavioural intention can be described to be dictated by three factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. (Kan & Fabrigar 2020, 1.)

This chapter outlines first the TRA, as illustrated in Figure 3, and then expands to the TPB.

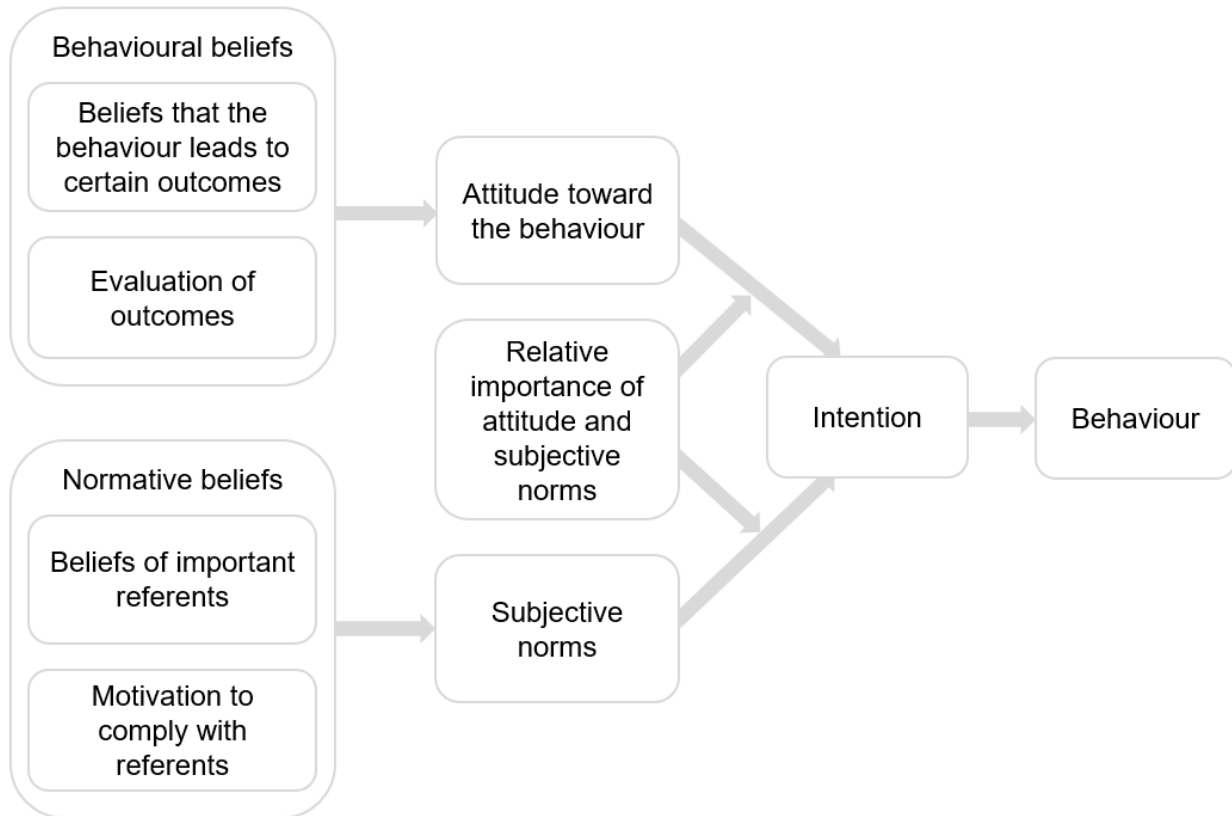


Figure 3. Illustration of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Kan & Fabrigar 2017, 2)

The TRA was created on the basis of an assumption that human beings are rational and thus systematically utilize or apply the information available to them; this means that behaviour always has thought behind it as every individual considers the consequences of their actions. Behaviour consists of four different parts: the action or the specific act that a person performs, the target of the behaviour, the context or the situation in which the behaviour happens, and the time of the behaviour. Overall behaviour must also be differentiated from outcomes of behaviour. (Kan & Fabrigar 2017, 2-3.)

Behavioural intention – or “an individual’s perceived likelihood that he or she will perform a behaviour” – is the best determinant of behaviour, indicating that intention predicts behaviour, that other predictors like attitudes are not direct influences on behaviour (meaning they must be “mediated by intention”), and that “all behaviours are deliberate”. There are two determinants of behavioural intention: attitudes, and subjective norms. The attitude towards the behaviour refers to the person’s assessment of carrying out the behaviour, and whether they favour doing so or not – notably, the attitude is not towards the target of the behaviour, but the behaviour itself. Attitudes are analysed by measuring “behavioural beliefs”, since a person’s “attitudes toward a behaviour are an aggregate of the beliefs that the behaviour leads to certain outcomes and the evaluations of those outcomes”; only the most substantial beliefs will be part in defining one’s attitude towards a behaviour.

Subjective norms, on the other hand, refer to a person's view about to what extent others believe the behaviour should or should not be carried out, even if it may not realistically reflect what they may believe. Attitudes and subjective norms can be in disagreement when a person decides whether to perform a certain behaviour or not, in which case the determinant with greater weight will have more influence on the person's intention. With the TRA, external variables – such as “demographic variables” and “personality traits” – cannot influence behaviour directly, but do so by having an effect on behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs, attitudes, and subjective norms. (Kan & Fabrigar 2017, 2-3.)

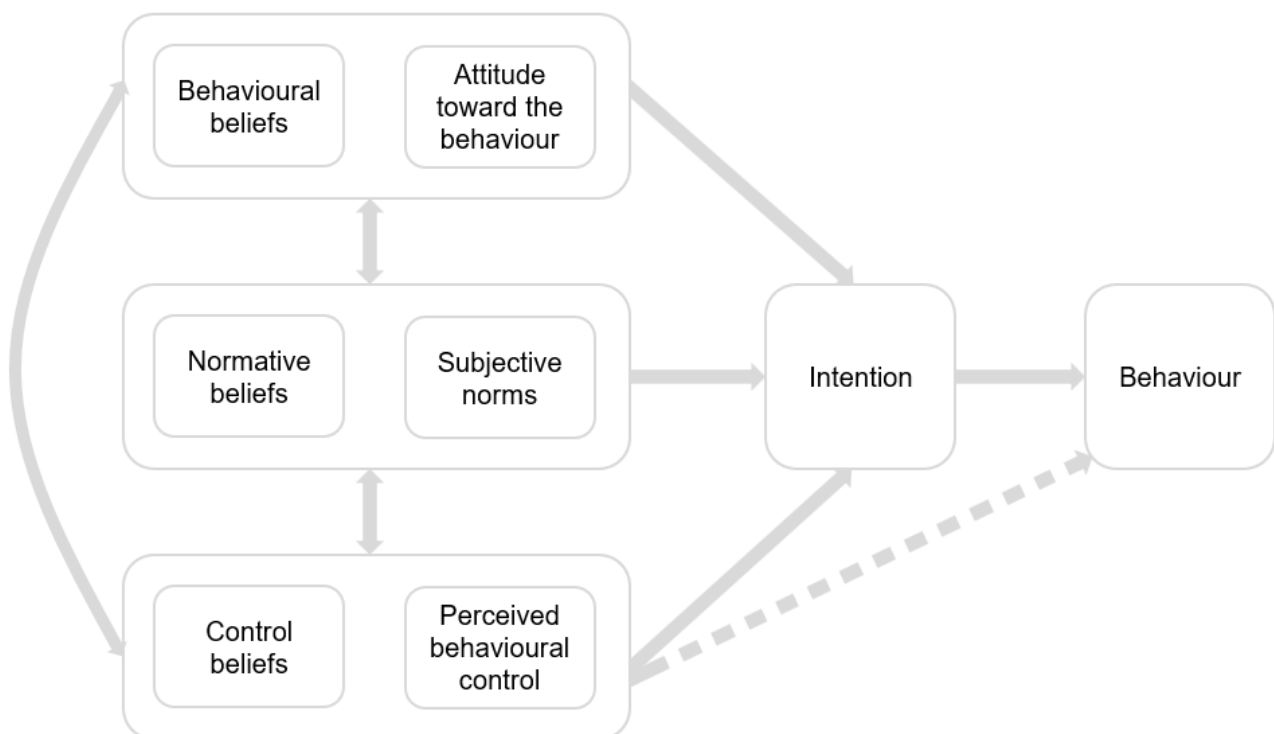


Figure 4. Illustration of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Kan & Fabrigar 2017, 4)

As stated before, the TPB expanded upon the TRA by introducing another influence upon intention, perceived behavioural control, meaning “people’s perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest”. The theory suggests that people’s actual behavioural control, or “the ability to perform a behaviour”, affects whether certain behaviour will be carried out. Furthermore, when the person gains more resources and opportunities to carry out a certain behaviour, the more likely they are also to carry out that behaviour. (Kan & Fabrigar 2017, 4.) Perceived behavioural control can thus have an effect upon people’s intentions to perform behaviours; a person may have a low intention to perform a behaviour, even if their attitude is highly favourable towards it. As such, behavioural control affects intention, but should be considered “independent of attitude toward the behaviour and subjective norms”. However, perceived behavioural control can also have a direct effect on behaviour and in situations where it is an accurate indication can represent

actual behavioural control. Perceived behavioural control is an inaccurate prediction in situations where the person has “little information about the behaviour”, or is in a situation where “requirements or available resources have changed”, or where previously unknown elements have an influence. A relationship between perceived and actual behavioural control only presents itself when there is a high degree of correspondence between the two. (Kan & Fabrigar 2017, 5.) This relationship can be seen in Figure 4.

The theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behaviour in particular have been used to “predict and understand behaviours”, and though those that defend the theory have suggested that it can predict all behaviour, others have criticized it for only being able to predict deliberate behaviour. (Kan & Fabrigar 2017, 7.)

In the field of video game consumer behaviour research, the theory of reasoned action has been used to explore “attitudes and subjective norms” and their effects on consumers to buy new versus second-hand video games (Velasquez, Newman & Miller 2012) and the theory of planned behaviour has been employed when researching “video gaming activity and problematic video game play” (Haagsma, King, Pieterse & Peters 2013).

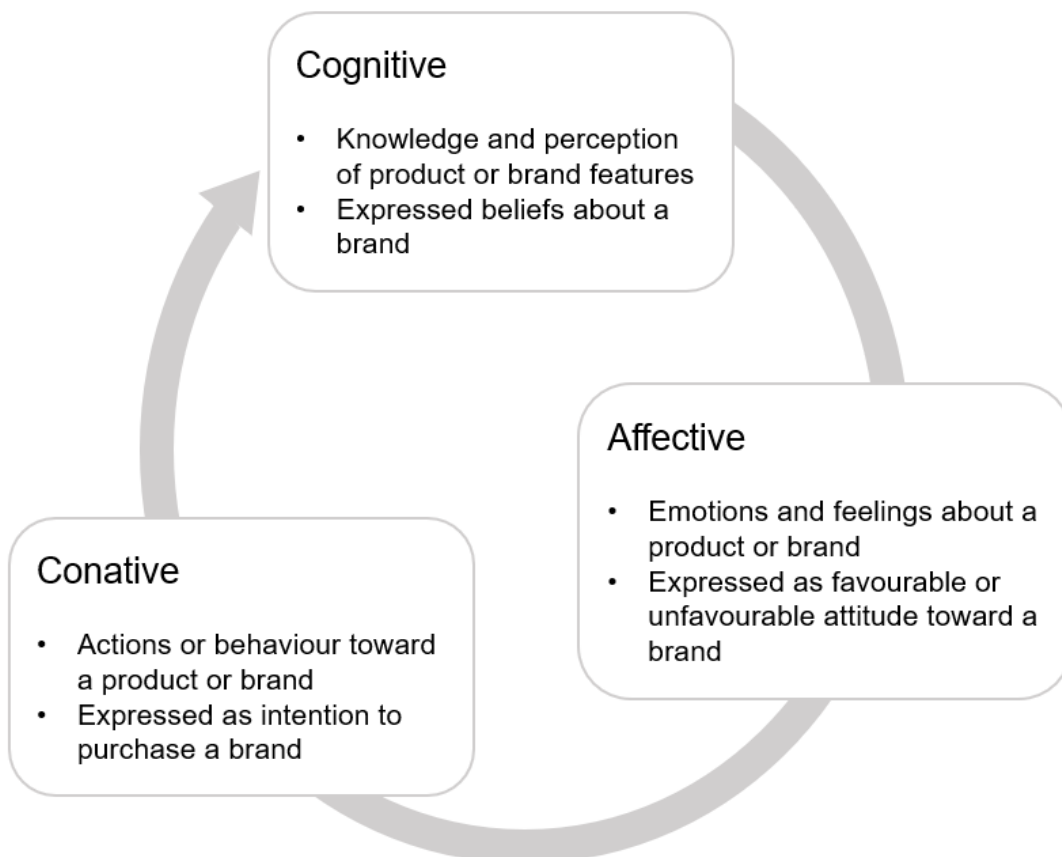


Figure 5. The tri-component attitude model (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 146)

One of the models that attempt to explain how attitudes have an effect on behaviour is the tri-component attitude model, as illustrated in Figure 5. According to this model, attitudes consist of cognitive, affective and conative components. (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 145.)

The cognitive component is made up of a person's cognitions, expressed most commonly as beliefs. Cognitions refer to all of the knowledge and perceptions of the product that the consumer possesses, either from their own experiences or from information searching. The beliefs, in turn, relate to specific characteristics of the product that the consumer believes the product to have. The affective component, on the other hand, consists of the consumer's emotions and feelings about the product in question – in other words, evaluations that “capture the consumer's global assessment” of the product, and how the consumer rates it; favourable versus unfavourable, good versus bad. Finally, the conative component “reflects the likelihood that an individual will undertake a specific action or behave in a particular way” in regard to the product, or in other words, the consumer's intention to purchase. (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 146-147.)

2.5 Controversies Related to Video Game Content

Though modern computers and electronic games came to the world in the 1940s (Dillon 2011, 11), controversy has truly been linked to video games only ever since they were made largely available to the general public in the early 1970s. The very first controversies, as this section highlights, also concentrated mostly on their content.

The year 1972 saw the release of the first home video game console named the *Odyssey*, manufactured by Magnavox (Donovan 2010, 30) as well as the installation of the first coin-operated video game arcade machine with which users could play tennis electronically with *Pong* (Hansen 2016, 12). By the end of the year 1974, around a hundred thousand units of video game arcade machines were spread across the country, making a profit of around 250 million US dollars per year (Donovan 2010, 34). The first significant video game controversies happened in the same decade; the most notable debate arguably stems from the 1975 video game *Death Race* where the player must drive over humanoid figures or “gremlins” to earn points, with the goal to earn as many as possible before the timer runs out (Karlsen 2014, 4). The moral panic surrounding the video game started from a story published in the Associated Press news wire from where it spread all across the United States, and lasted for two months in the headlines as industry distributors followed what they could learn from the controversy (Donovan 2010, 50-51).

Not all issues or problems can be predicted through observations of past mistakes, however. This was highlighted especially with the 1977 release of the *Atari 2600*, a video game console

developed by Atari Incorporated (Donovan 2010, 79). Unbeknownst to the console's producers, it had a major flaw when it was released – namely that its software “could not be controlled”, meaning that third-party companies were able to produce playable cartridges that could then be used on the console. This, in turn, enabled the release of certain video games which were not under Atari's control: one of them, released in 1982 and often highlighted as one of the most offensive examples from the time, was *Custer's Revenge*, in which the goal was to sexually assault a native American woman tied to a post. Third-party games continued to be produced throughout the video game console's lifetime, and they considerably lessened the *Atari 2600*'s once-high appeal. (Donovan 2010, 113.)

Outside of the United States, video game controversies started to pick up speed in the 1980s when video games themselves started to become more widespread amongst consumers. In Finland, the first notable controversy caused by a video game occurred in 1985, when a review of the game *Raid Over Moscow* was released in the *MikroBitti* magazine and then highly criticized. This widespread criticism caused a so-called “media panic” and eventually prompted a member of the Finnish parliament to start a debate about whether the video game should be allowed to be sold in the country at all. (Pasanen 2011, 1.) The release of *Raid Over Moscow* was also protested in the United Kingdom by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or CND, an advocacy group (Donovan 2010, 248).

Although the video game crash of the 1980s did not last forever, it had a significant impact on the industry – especially in the United States where it mostly occurred. By the 1990s, the industry had become revitalized, largely due to technical developments and the influence from European and Japanese video game producers, as well as a general rise in consumer interest. However, the decade was not left unmarked from controversy, and the 1993 Congressional Hearings in the United States focused on the topic of video game violence, bringing out *Mortal Kombat*, *Doom* and *Night Trap* (released in 1992-1993) as primary examples. In Germany, *Mortal Kombat* was deemed to be so violent that the country's “youth media watchdog Bundesprüfstelle für Jugendgefährdende Medien” banned the game entirely (Donovan 2010, 252).

In the United States, the Entertainment Software Rating Board or the ESRB was created due to the controversy caused by the 1993 Congressional Hearings and under pressure from the American government, which threatened to intervene if the video game industry did not create such an age rating system of their own (Hansen 2016, 114). In Europe, separate but similar regulatory systems were also created throughout the 1990s, until a new “transnational system” was established in 2003 – Pan European Game Information, or PEGI (Karlsen 2014, 8).

Unfortunately, video games also have a history of being linked to shootings in the United States. In 1997, several video game companies were named in a lawsuit after the Heath High School shooting that occurred in Kentucky – the lawsuit claimed that the perpetrator was influenced by violent video games such as *Mortal Kombat*, *Quake*, and *Doom* (The Associated Press 1999). In 1999, the perpetrators of the Columbine High School massacre were revealed to be fans of violent video games such as *Doom*, and the parents of victims filed several lawsuits against multiple entertainment companies – including video game developers and distributors (The Guardian 2001). In 2003, after a shooter claimed to be imitating the video game *Grand Theft Auto* by opening fire on a highway, at least one victim's family sued the game's developer, Take-Two Interactive (ABC News 2003). Furthermore, one of the deadliest mass shootings in United States' history which occurred at Sandy Hook elementary school in Connecticut in 2012 also prompted another widespread discussion about video games and violence. A year after the shooting occurred, a 48-page report summary of the investigation of the shooting was released: it listed a total of 12 different video games which the mass shooter had played, and the list included popular titles like *Call of Duty*, *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Doom*. (Pilkington 2013.)

Since video games have so often been linked to incidents of violence, the effect of video games on children, and whether they have a negative influence or not, has been a greatly debated topic “in the scientific community, among politicians, and in the general public”. However, results from over a hundred studies have suggested that the effects on children and adolescents' aggression, prosocial behaviour, academic performance, depression and inattention is minimal – in other words, the negative effects upon children's well-being is minimal. This has been shown especially in studies with controlled outside variables, and which used “well-standardized and validated outcome measures”. However, studies that attempt to find a causal link between video games and aggression have also suffered from publication bias, referring to “the selective publication of statistically significant reports”, and this continues to be an issue in the field. (Ferguson 2015.)

Beyond the inclusion of and arguments around violence in video games, different representations of people have also been analysed over time, and the topic has been under scrutiny. For an example, in 2009, a “large-scale content analysis of characters in video games” was carried out in order to understand how gender, race and age is portrayed in games in comparison to the United States' population. The results indicated a significant over-representation of white and male characters, with other races and genders being more likely to appear in secondary roles rather than primary ones in video games. (Williams, Martins, Consalvo & Ivory 2009, 824-826.) Similarly, another study focusing on gendered portrayals in video games found that similar patterns of women's under-representation can be found in other media that is associated with gaming, such as magazines,

reviews, trailers, and additionally, can appear in gaming communities and sub-cultures (Cross, Kaye, Savostijanovs, McLatchie, Johnston, Whiteman, Mooney & Atherton 2022).

An analysis of a hundred video games released between 2017 to 2021 by the largest video game publishers revealed that almost 80 percent of video game protagonists (main characters) are male, and that 54.2 percent are white. Video games with only male characters significantly outnumber video games with solely female characters. Additionally, over 60 percent of *all* video game characters are white, with all other ethnicities being represented by less than 40 percent. Only 5.3 percent of video games did not include a playable white character. (Lin 2023.)

An analysis that focused on MOGAI (marginalized orientations, gender alignments, and intersex) characters found that representation has been evident since the creation of video games, but extremely sparse – especially in primary roles. The early 2000s saw an increase in representation of MOGAI characters, but they “tended to be one dimensional”, flat, and rely mostly on stereotypes; additionally, the characters made “little to no impact on players”. Despite the increase, however, only 63 video games with MOGAI characters were published in the 2010-2015 time period in the United States. (Talbert 2016, 89-91.)

2.6 Controversies Related to Video Game Culture

In the context of this thesis, video game culture refers to both the culture around the players (which concentrates largely on themes such as harassment or online bullying) and the culture within companies in the industry (which also concentrates on employee treatment).

Video game consumer culture has not always been seen in a positive light, and the largely online event colloquially known as “Gamergate” which occurred in 2014 to 2015 has strengthened its negative views. The event stemmed from “a blog attack by an ex-boyfriend against a female video game developer”. The topics raised gained momentum as social media users on Twitter and other platforms posted under the hashtag #gamergate to debate about the connectedness of journalists and video game developers and how they were “actively colluding with the industry” to elevate certain “social justice” agendas or themes in video games. The same hashtag was also used to harass women and minorities in the video game industry and in video game development in the form of death threats or even “doxing”, where personal information of game developers and critics, such as addresses and names, were searched and released to the public without the victims’ permission. (Perreault & Vos 2016.)

Due to “Gamergate”, video game journalism was abruptly being questioned on the basis of the relationships between journalists and developers, and on the basis of being “quasi-representatives of the gamers” that make the space unwelcoming for both women and many types of other marginalized groups. (Perreault & Vos 2016.) The actual size of the “Gamergate” event is difficult to gauge, and only a few studies have attempted to do so. While the event was quite large in the gaming sphere, its overall numbers remain contested. (Mortensen 2016.)

Considering video game player culture, trends like bullying and harassment are very closely related to – and contribute towards – events such as “Gamergate”. Multiple studies have investigated women’s experiences in online video games in particular. As outlined by the European Institute for Gender Equality, women and girls are extremely exposed to cyber violence in online spaces, are more likely to be targeted, and may endure severe consequences from it – “resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm and suffering.” (European Institute for Gender Equality 2022, 10.) Cyber violence includes cyber stalking, online hate speech, cyber harassment or bullying and “non-consensual intimate image abuse” (European Institute for Gender Equality 2022, 14-15). The most impactful ways to mitigate harassment are seeking help, raising awareness, and implementing systems within video games where reporting instances of harassment is easier (Fox & Tang 2017).

Regarding video games and the online spaces they foster, past media coverage and other research efforts have concentrated mostly on gender-based harassment in massively multiplayer online games (MMOG), massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPG), and multiplayer first person shooter (FPS) games; these types of games allow for a large variety of people, from different backgrounds and geographical locations, to interact and communicate with one another – most commonly through “text or pre-designated commands” and through voice chat (Easpaign 2018, 122). Approximately half of video game players are women, yet the video gaming sphere is seen as one of the most inequitable environments. Women are more likely to be the victims of more severe forms of online harassment, and report higher levels of emotional distress as a result when compared to men. With video games, the characteristics of the online space may enable harassment to occur – this includes aspects such as “anonymity, diminished nonverbal cues, lack of observable authority, and a hypermasculine atmosphere”. (Fox & Tang 2017.)

A 2020 report revealed that approximately 40 percent of female video game players have experienced some type of verbal abuse in online multiplayer games. Furthermore, 35 percent stated they had been “sent inappropriate content or messages”, and 28 percent said they had experienced sexual harassment from other players. Unfortunately, inappropriate or harmful behaviour is rarely prevented or challenged by other players, and the behaviour is further enabled by the anonymous

nature of many multiplayer video games. Most female video game players lack faith in the current reporting and punishment systems set in place, and both female and male video game players believe that companies are not doing enough to prevent harassment and toxic behaviour. (Tarrant 2020.)

Harassment towards women is unfortunately not the only negative aspect of online gaming platforms. While harassment affects women to a greater degree, bullying is a much more general phenomenon, and thus affects all types of people playing video games. A report including answers from 1,400 video game players revealed that over 90 percent of respondents had either experienced or witnessed bullying while playing video games. This ranged from offensive name-calling and explicit language to swatting and doxing. Shooter-type video games were the most common video games for people to experience bullying in, followed by multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) -type video games. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents admitted that they have bullied others while playing video games. (Zajechowski 2023.)

Another aspect of video game player culture is the occurrence of cheating. In the 1980s when video games were becoming more popular, certain cheats were implemented into video games by their developers. These were usually included so that the game could be tested; developers had to jump to different parts of games quickly without having to play through parts beforehand or try out certain features of the game. However, post-release, players of video games could also access various features of video games to edit certain values and thus modify how the video game was played. Cheating in video games became a harmless hobby, and then a “commercial enterprise” that companies were able to exploit. Multiple magazines and even other publications about cheating in video games were published in the 1990s and 2000s, and although they withered away over time, the trend of developers implementing cheats into their games remains in place. Individually cheating in single-player video games is not the primary reason that cheating is seen as a negative phenomenon by video game consumers – however, when it occurs in modern-day online multiplayer video games, it is an entirely different story; in these instances, cheating directly affects everyone else in the game. (Tarantola 2019.)

A survey conducted by Irdeto Global Gaming on more than nine thousand video game consumers across China, Germany, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the U.S. discovered that 60 percent of video game players “feel they have had their multiplayer experience negatively impacted by other players cheating on multiple occasions”. Furthermore, 76 percent of video game players thought that it was paramount that online multiplayer video games are “secured against other players gaining an advantage through cheating”. (Irdeto 2018, 3.)

Finally, there is also a need to consider the concept of addiction when discussing video game culture. Video game addiction can be considered an Internet Gaming Disorder or IGD – these types of disorders have been linked to “motivational control issues”. Furthermore, research has shown that playing video games activates the brain’s reward system similarly to gambling and substances. Those suffering from video game addiction might lose interest in other favourite activities, may withdraw socially, “become emotionally unstable”, and suffer from feelings of extreme anger. Video game addiction is often treated in the same manner as substance abuse, though cognitive behaviour therapy has also been proposed as treatment. This type of addiction, however, is a very new concept, and thus research on treatment is ongoing. (Mohammad, Jan & Alsaedi 2023.)

2.7 Controversies Related to Video Game Industry Practices

Controversy related to video game industry practices has become a more and more popularized topic in the modern era.

More recently, a lot of controversy has concentrated upon certain company practices within their released video games, such as the inclusion of microtransactions. Microtransactions refer to “the ability to purchase additional items, bonuses or services within the game itself for a real-money fee”, and can be divided into “cosmetic microtransactions”, “pay to win microtransactions”, and “loot boxes”. (Zendle, Meyer & Ballou 2020). One notable controversy related to microtransactions occurred in 2017 when the company EA announced that their newest multiplayer video game *Star Wars: Battlefront II* would include a “loot box system” in addition to its 60-80 USD retail price. The system was criticized for many weeks as it was compared to gambling. EA eventually “temporarily removed the in-game purchases” and promised to only include them at a later date after some changes had been made to the game. (Park 2017.) The situation was so worrying that Belgium’s gambling authority investigated the microtransaction system in the game, alongside *Overwatch* – another multiplayer video game (Moon 2017).

Delaying the release of video games has also become more and more commonplace. An empirical study conducted on delayed video games on Steam found that the sheer number of delays has “increased from 28% (882 games) in 2016 to 53%-55% (approximately 3000 games) in 2018, 2019, and 2020” (Grewal, Doucet & Bezemer 2022, 10). The same study also discovered that games with non-concrete release dates were less likely to be delayed, except if those release dates specified a quarter or a year (Grewal, Doucet & Bezemer 2022, 20).

As delays have become more commonplace, certain releases have also become quite controversial. Such a thing occurred in the year 2020 with the release of Polish video game developer CD

Projekt Red's *Cyberpunk 2077*. The game had been first announced in 2012 and was originally supposed to be released in April 2020, but went through three separate delays in the same year (Favis & Klimentov 2021). Eight million players had pre-ordered, and thus paid for, the game before its release on 10th of December, but when people were finally able to try the game for themselves, they found out that it was a faulty product upon release and suffered from a multitude of glitches, crashes and bugs. Eventually Sony removed the game from its digital PlayStation store "and offered refunds to anyone who'd purchased it" on the PlayStation console in an extremely rare event that had only ever occurred once before. (MacDonald 2020.)

Another aspect of the industry that is directly linked to development delays is the concern for working conditions for developers. People working in video game development teams are most likely well-known with the concept of "crunch", referring to "a period of extended working hours meant to speed up lagging projects" and to meet deadlines (Cote & Harris 2020) – it is a common practice in the industry, and has in recent years become a great source of criticism due to discussions about employees' quality of life, as well as the very real costs of such practices. Video games throughout time have suffered from development crunch, and recent examples released by major publishers include *Fortnite* (Campbell 2019), *Red Dead Redemption 2* (Schreier 2018), *The Last of Us Part II* (Schreier 2020) and *Cyberpunk 2077* (Favis & Klimentov 2021).

Crunch has been a large part of United States' video game development process in particular, simply because the country's laws allow it to occur; "computer professionals who earn above a net annual salary – the exact figure varies from state to state – are considered exempt from overtime laws" and thus do not have to be paid for overtime hours (Thomsen 2021). One of the first instances of employees seeking unpaid overtime for working on a video game occurred in 2004 when Jamie Kirschenbaum filed a lawsuit against Electronic Arts, after hundreds of artists working on *The Sims 2* had been denied overtime pay (Frauenheim 2004). In Europe, working overtime or working for unpaid hours is much less common, and employers in countries in the European Union are held to stricter standards. In 2019, the European Court of Justice ruled that there has to be a system set up by every employer in each EU country that measures "the time worked every day by each worker to ensure compliance with labour laws". Though each European Union country must implement their own version of the system, the ruling nevertheless inhibits companies' abilities to exploit their workers. (Moulson 2019.)

The sources of crunch in game development are many, and often external rather than internal – for an example, "publisher demands or technological challenges". The game's publisher may demand a fixed deadline that cannot be moved, or for the game to be released in multiple regions, or for a wide range of marketing materials that the development team is not ready to prepare. Other times,

the development team may face technological hurdles, sometimes due to “console producers [failing] to share development kits efficiently”, or when “changing from one set of technologies to another” is highly time-consuming. When games for specific regions and/or consoles require very specific skillsets, the development can be slowed down even further. (Cote & Harris 2021.) Development crunch has effects on the company, its employees, and the project involved. The most important negative impacts are, however, on the people involved in crunch, as it can cause stress, burnout, and extreme pressure. Employees are more likely to be sleep deprived from carrying out “all-nighters and weekends at the office”, and work-life balance, along with quality of life, suffers. Development teams that have to crunch are more likely to have lower morale and lose passion for the project they are working on. In many cases, it may also lead to an increase of faults and bugs in the game. (Edholm, Lidström, Steghöfer & Burden 2017, 50-51.)

Another characteristic of the video game industry that pertains to its employees is the lack of crediting that large video game companies, particularly those in the United States, take part in. It has been a problem in the industry ever since video games became more accessible in the 1970s and 1980s, and “when Atari prevented its programmers from publicly claiming authorship for games they had developed”. The importance of crediting in video games is three-fold. Firstly, the people that have worked on the game can claim professional experience which helps them in their career. Secondly, studios and publishers of the video games “can signal cultural prestige of their products and serve as promotional tools” especially when an industry-famous person has worked on their video game. Thirdly, the overall credits of a video game provide information and transparency for the video game’s players. Despite the significance of crediting, certain “categories of developers” are still being “systematically left out from credits”. (Švelch 2021.)

The issue with crediting in the video game industry is that there are no clear guidelines or standards for it, and no organization or unions – at least in the United States – that can watch over the process. The issue affects every person working on the video game, ranging from contractors to workers directly employed at the company, and often companies can even “withhold credits from workers who left before a project’s completion”. (Yarwood 2021.)

Beyond “crunch” and crediting issues within the industry, certain companies have also been increasingly criticized for the negative work environments they foster, especially towards women. Examples of this have increasingly become a topic of discussion in the media, especially in light of the “#MeToo movement” that had the purpose of highlighting the sexual harassment and abuse that women experience in the workplace.

From 2021 to 2022, Activision Blizzard – one of the video game industry’s largest companies – was faced with multiple lawsuits relating to its workplace conditions. The company was first sued

by California's Department of Fair Employment and Housing in July of 2021 "over allegations that the company systemically discriminated against female employees and failed to address a 'pervasive 'frat boy' workplace culture'" – a culture which prompted multiple women to leave their jobs at Activision Blizzard, and which may have been a factor in a female employee's suicide (Shepherd 2021). Other notable, similar examples include the employee walkout at Riot Games due to sexual harassment allegations and their policy of forced arbitration, the sexual harassment and toxic work allegations made against Ubisoft, and the accusations of a "toxic work environment rife with fraternity-like culture" against NetherRealm – all incidents which occurred in 2019 alone. (Lanier 2021.)

3 Research Methods

The aim of this thesis is to find out how video game industry controversies affect young people's purchase intentions by investigating young adults' views on different types of controversy. This chapter explains all the different types of research carried out for this thesis, how information and data was collected, and outlines the overall design of the research.

3.1 Research Design

The research design of this thesis, as illustrated in Figure 1, is a sequential and mixed methods research design. This type of research involves multiple phases of data collection and analysis, and in a research design that follows the mixed methods discipline, "the researcher will follow the use of one method with another in order to expand or elaborate on the initial set of findings". The type of mixed methods research design outlined in Figure 1 where quantitative research is followed by qualitative research is called a sequential explanatory research design. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, 182.)

The most common reasons for a mixed methods approach are methods triangulation, referring to how a "convergence of the data collected" can ultimately fortify the research conclusions, and complementarity, which allows for a fuller understanding of the research question and its results by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data and thus understanding the "social story in its entirety". The mixed methods approach is also useful when one phase of the research aid in the development or understanding in another; in other words, where a quantitative research method may help in developing the qualitative phase of the research process, or vice versa. (Hesse-Biber 2010, 3-5.) Such reasoning is relevant to this thesis as well, since the aim of the mixed methods approach is to gain the most relevant, applicable, and in-depth information accessible.

Figure 6 illustrates how the different phases of research are related to the investigative questions and the main research question. The survey was conducted first to gain surface-level information that pertains to the investigative questions, and the interviews were carried out after the survey to gain more in-depth information from respondents. This ensures that the overall results of the thesis consider both an overall, more general perspective, as well as a much closer, more detailed perspective.

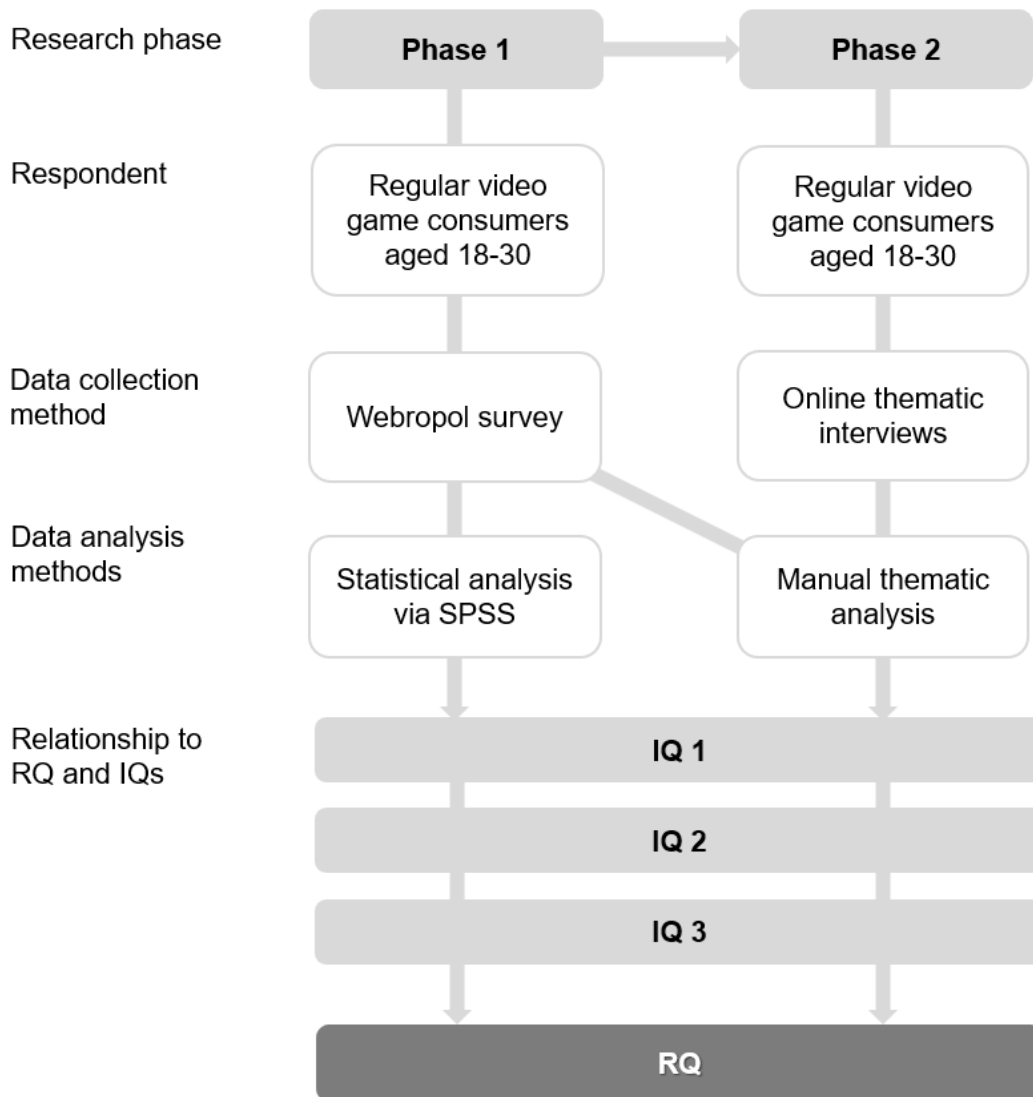


Figure 6. Illustration of the research design

3.2 Population and Sampling

The sample was defined as follows: 18-30 year old young adults who play video games on either a PC or a console, and who play video games for at least one hour per week.

The sampling method used for the quantitative research phase was non-probability sampling mainly due to reasons of convenience and ease of access to participants, meaning that the sample was selected in a way that often includes “an element of subjective judgment” (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, 315). The research process utilized snowball sampling, where respondents close to the researcher were asked to identify possible further respondents for the survey, and so on. This type of sampling is useful for “populations that are difficult to identify”. The research process also

utilized self-selection sampling, where each individual is allowed to “identify their desire to take part in the research”, and the research was thus publicized on different online channels where respondents volunteered to take part in the survey. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, 323.) The survey was sent to participants through personal messaging platforms, and it was also posted on multiple social media websites such as Instagram, Facebook, and Reddit.

For the qualitative research phase, suitable participants were identified through a method of self-selection sampling. The survey had a non-mandatory section where participants could leave contact details to volunteer for the interviews. A method of convenience sampling was also utilized, where suitable participants were identified because they were close and accessible to the researcher.

3.3 Data Collection

As shown by Figure 1, data was collected through a mainly quantitative method (a survey) in the first phase of research, and through a qualitative method (interviews) in the second phase of research. The survey included one open-ended, qualitative question, the answers to which were also analysed.

The survey questions were developed and revised in order to ensure a short and easily answerable structure. After this, the survey was completed and published on the Webropol platform on 8th of March 2023 through a public weblink. The answers were collected for the following month, until the survey was closed on 11th of April 2023. The data was automatically and securely stored on the Webropol platform, ensuring that no-one but the researcher had access to it. A total of 95 respondents started answering the survey, out of which 72 respondents were considered valid and applicable for investigation.

The interview questions were being designed and written as the survey was still open to respondents. After the survey was closed, the interview questions were reviewed and updated according to the results gained from the survey; for an example, some topics needed more emphasis and clarification, so the necessary changes were made. The interview questions were then finalized, and interviews were carried out between the 27th of March 2023 and the 10th of April 2023. The interviews all took place online through the Microsoft Teams platform, and each interview was recorded and transcribed. Online interviews were preferable over face-to-face interviews as the participants were often located far away from the researcher, so meeting was not a possibility.

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

Since the research design for this thesis concentrated on a mixed-methods approach, the data analysis methods carried out were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The main analysis tools used during research were Webropol, Microsoft Excel, and IBM SPSS Statistics (or simply SPSS).

For quantitative analysis, Webropol was used mainly for the storing of survey results. The data gathered was then transferred to Excel, where background variables could be more easily studied and illustrated. Analysis of more complicated relationships between, and illustrations of, variables was carried out using SPSS. The overall results of Likert-scale questions were illustrated with an average value (mean). The Spearman's correlation test was utilized to study the relationships between ordinal and scale variables.

For the qualitative portion of the research process – that is to say, the open-ended question of the survey and the four in-depth interviews – the answers to questions were laid out in an Excel sheet. From there, common themes and patterns were analysed and highlighted.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

After finishing the survey, its validity was pre-tested with a small group of respondents belonging both inside and outside the target group to make sure that each question and phase of the survey worked as it was supposed to. This pre-test also ensured that each question could be answered as long as the participant belongs in the target group, and questions were amended to ensure that they were understandable. The survey was designed to be simple, in logical order, and following a clear topic. Finally, the survey was also checked by two senior lecturers.

Similarly to the survey, the questions in the semi-structured interview were also checked throughout the writing process. The thesis supervisor was consulted when designing the interview structure and adjusted accordingly. The interview was also pre-tested once prior to conducting the actual interviews.

4 Results

This chapter outlines the data and insights gained from quantitative and qualitative research. The respondents are introduced first, followed by the results gained for each investigative question.

4.1 Introduction to Respondents

A total of 72 valid responses were gathered from the survey and consequently analysed. Although a total of 95 respondents started answering the survey, 23 respondents were removed during the screening stage, so their answers were not included in data analysis.

By far the largest age group of respondents were those between 21 and 23 years old – they made up 51.4 percent of total respondents. The next largest age group were those aged between 24 and 27 years old, making up 25 percent of respondents, followed by those aged between 28 and 30 years old at 15.3 percent of respondents. The smallest percentage, or 8.3 percent of respondents, stated to be between 18 and 20 years old. (Figure 7.)

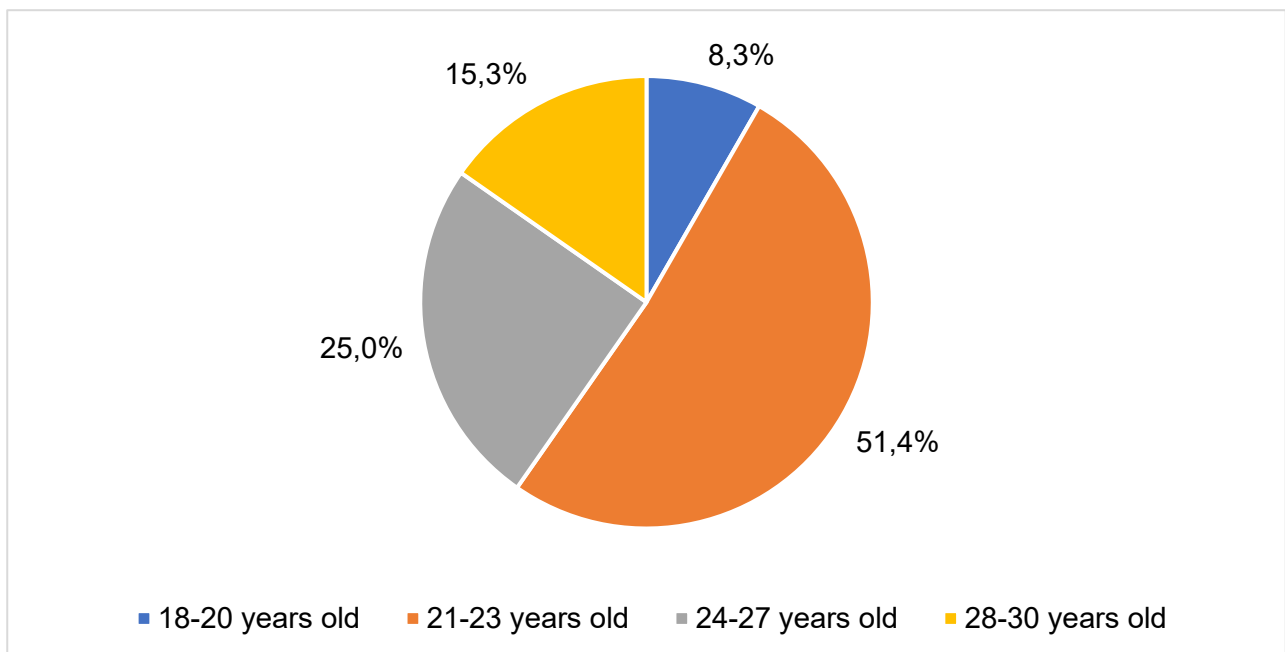


Figure 7. Age distribution of respondents (n = 72)

Respondents were also asked what gender they identified as. The largest percentage of respondents, 63.9 percent, stated that they are male, while 31.9 percent stated that they are female. 2.8 percent chose the non-binary option, and 1.4 percent chose not to specify their gender.

When asked to specify which platform respondents used to play video games, a larger percentage of respondents stated that they use a personal computer or PC at 56.9 percent. Others, or 43.1 percent of respondents, stated that they use a gaming console (such as a PlayStation, Xbox, or Nintendo Switch).

When asked how much time the respondents spend playing video games in one week, the majority of respondents answered with either 1-4 hours or 4-8 hours – 36.1 percent and 31.9 percent of respondents, respectively. A smaller percentage of people picked higher numbers of hours played per week – 8-12 hours played was chosen by 15.3 percent of respondents, and more than 12 hours played was chosen by 16.7 percent of respondents. (Figure 8.)

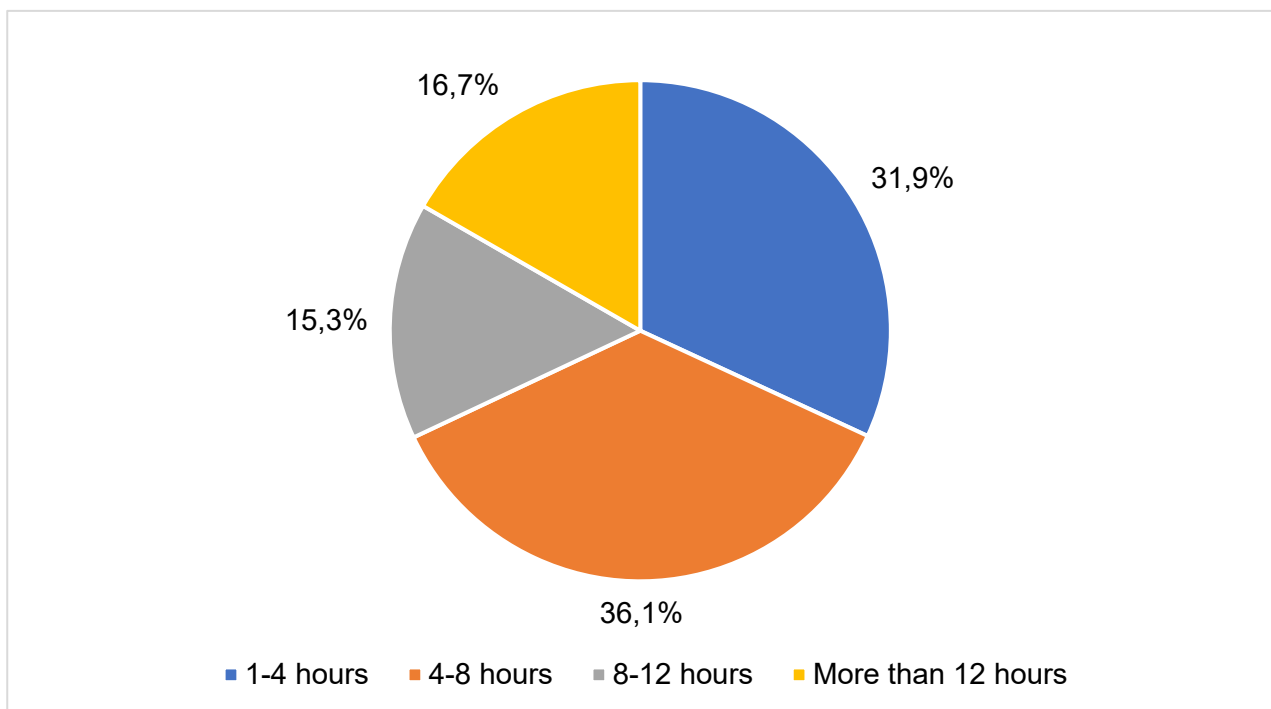


Figure 8. How much time respondents spend playing video games in one week (n = 72)

Survey respondents also stated to buy video games at different time intervals out of a set of four different options. The most commonly picked option was “once every three months”, at 37.5 percent, followed by “less than once every six months”, at 30.6 percent of respondents. The last two options were both picked by smaller percentages of respondents – “once every six months” was picked by 16.7 percent, and “once a month or more was picked by 15.3 percent of respondents. (Figure 9.)

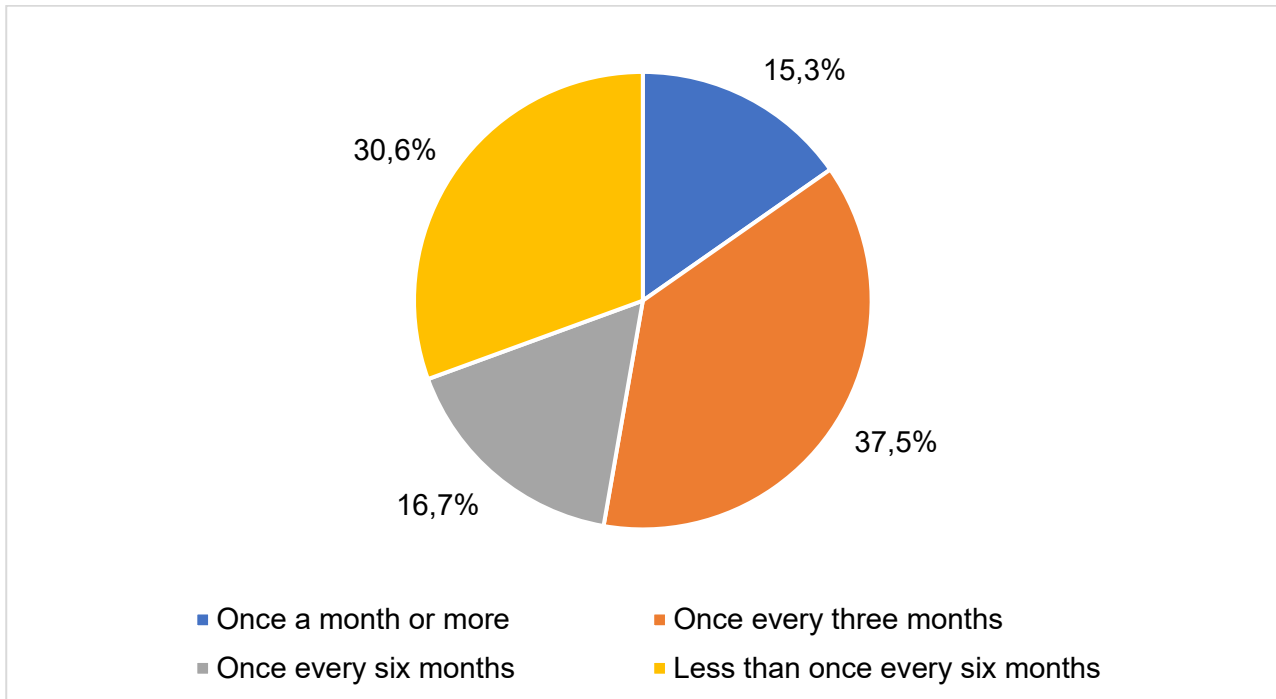


Figure 9. How often respondents buy video games (n = 72)

For the qualitative portion of research, four individuals were interviewed. All identified themselves as video game players; however, each interviewee stated to consume video games in a different way. Two of the people interviewed said that they play mostly on PC, while two others said that they play mostly on a video game console. Each interviewee said they focus on different genres of video games: one person said to play mostly first-person shooter games, role-playing games and strategy games, another said they play casual games, another said to play mostly arcade and strategy games, and finally, one person said that they play mostly story-based single-player games. Each interviewee also described to spend different amounts of time per week on video games, ranging from casual, occasional video game play to more intensive video game play where the individual described to spend multiple hours on video games per day.

In addition to the interviews, the survey included an open-ended, optional question, meant to give respondents the possibility to explain which types of controversy would affect their likeliness to purchase a video game, and give examples of specific companies or video games. A total of 30 responses were gathered from this question, and consequently qualitatively analysed.

4.2 How Views of Controversies Related to Video Game Content Influence Purchase Intentions

For this investigative question, the survey included a question with a set of six statements. The respondents were asked to state whether they agree or disagree with the statements, on a scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The aim of this question was to gauge the respondents’ opinions or attitudes about a variety of common controversies regarding video game content. The question also included an option named “no opinion”.

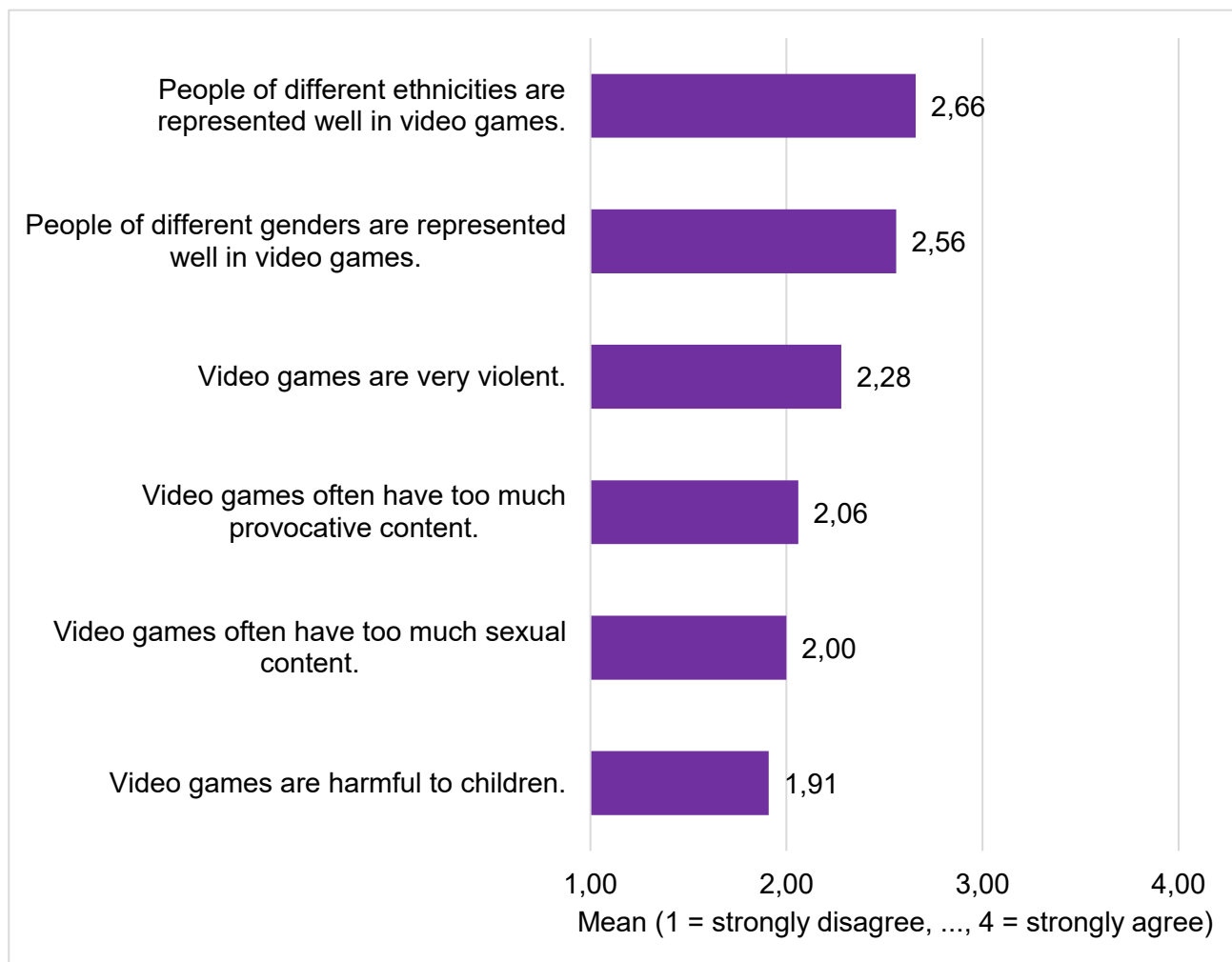


Figure 10. Respondents' answers to statements regarding video game content (n = 72)

The average mean, at 2.66, was given for the statement “People of different ethnicities are represented well in video games” – followed very closely by “People of different genders are represented well in video games”, at 2.56. These two statements were the only ones where the average was closer to “agree” than “disagree”. The next statement, “Video games are very violent”, received a mean of 2.28. The rest, which were “Video games often have too much provocative content”, “Video games often have too much sexual content” and “Video games are harmful to

children”, each had a mean of around 2.00, a value which overall represented the option “disagree”. (Figure 10.)

In the survey, respondents were also asked the following question: “How likely would it be for you to avoid buying a video game with controversial content? (For an example, if it was notorious for being extremely violent, or included disturbing themes.)” The majority of respondents, 37.5 percent, answered this with “not at all likely”. 26.4 percent of respondents answered with “somewhat likely” and “likely”. A small portion of respondents, 9.7 percent, answered with “I don’t know”. (Figure 11.)

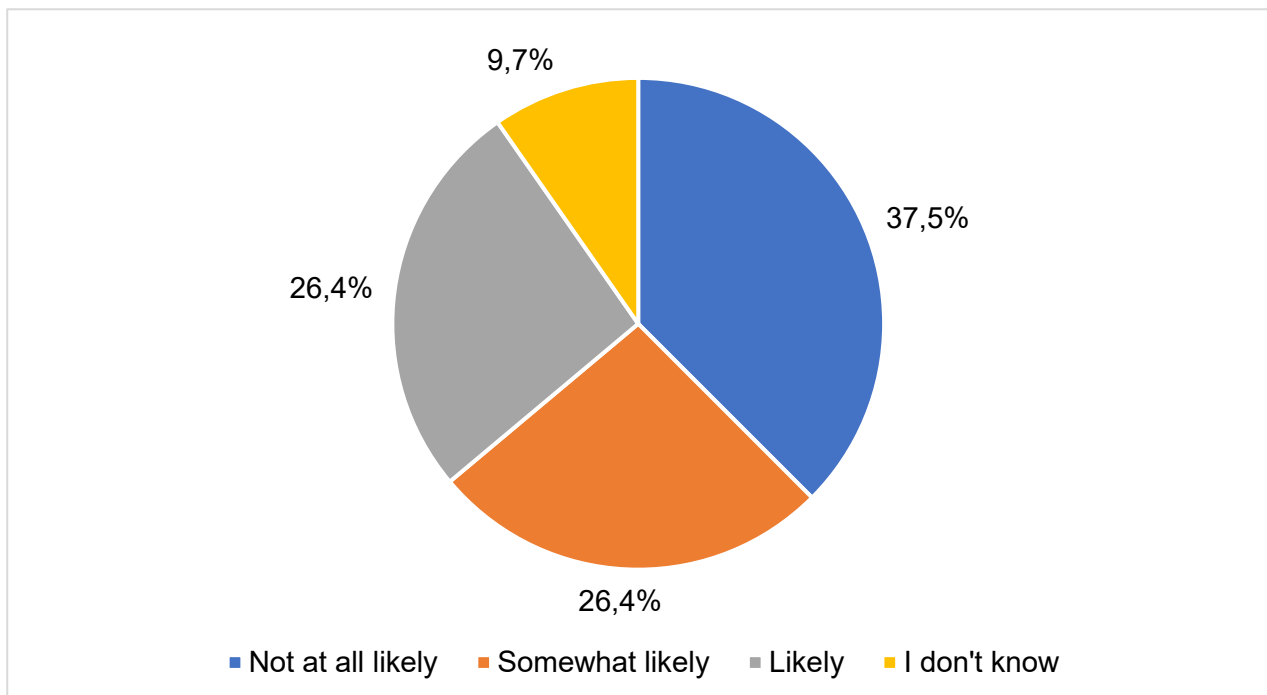


Figure 11. Respondents' likelihood of avoiding purchasing a video game with controversial content (n = 72)

The relationships between the statements were consequently also analysed. A Spearman’s correlation test was conducted which showed that the statement “Video games often have too much provocative content” had a moderate, direct relationship with the respondent’s likelihood of avoiding purchasing a video game with controversial content ($r = .443$, $p = < .001$). Similarly, a low, direct relationship was found between the statement “Video games are harmful to children” and the respondent’s likelihood of avoiding purchasing a video game with controversial content ($r = .307$, $p = .014$). (Appendix 3, Figure 1.) In other words, respondents that agreed with the statements were also likely to avoid purchasing a video game with controversial content.

Towards the end of the survey, respondents were given the option to explain what types of controversial video game content would affect their likelihood of avoiding purchasing a video game. Out

of all the responses, very few mentioned controversial content, but the ones that did, featured three specific patterns. The first observable pattern showed that respondents stated that controversial content or themes would not deter them from purchasing a video game at all; for an example, one respondent explained that they would “buy a game because it’s good, with or without controversial content”. Another respondent dismissed such content entirely by saying that they “don’t particularly care about controversial content”.

The second observable pattern, however, was illustrated in that respondents would only be deterred from purchasing a video game with controversial content if the content featured in the video game would be of a specific type. One respondent stated the following:

“It’s hard to say, as it all depends on the context. I’m not for example opposed to violence in video games, gore, sexual themes, narcotics, etc. so that wouldn’t be an issue for me. But if the controversial content in question were to be, say, sexual assault, then I might very well reconsider my purchase of a game.”

Lastly, the third pattern of responses were those that demonstrated examples of controversial content as a factor in purchasing behaviour. The video game series *Call of Duty* was mentioned by multiple respondents as something that features controversial content, and thus as something they would not be likely to purchase. One respondent directly states: “For an example, *Call of Duty* encourages violence.”

Beyond the survey results, the semi-structured in-depth interviews gave an opportunity to discuss controversial content in much more detail. When asked what kind of content the interviewees found controversial in video games, each person mentioned violence. Two interviewees in particular considered violence to be an “adult theme” in video games and were especially concerned with how it would affect young children that have access to video games featuring this type of content; one stated that despite the implementation of age rating systems people under 18 years of age “will always find a way to play” violent video games which could “definitely have an impact” on them, while the other interviewee said that violent video games tend to be “a concern for parents”. The two other interviewees, on the other hand, focused on a specific type of violence – “sexual violence” or “sexual assault” were mentioned by both as topics of particular concern. Furthermore, each respondent mentioned other types of content that could be said to be controversial: racist content, sexual themes and drug use.

Interviewees were also asked whether video games could contain too much violent or sexual content. All of the interviewees indicated that there can definitely be too much violence in video games. For an example, one interviewee stated that too much violent content in video games can encourage to “normalise it” and promote “anti-social behaviour” as well as “reinforce negative

stereotypes” – similarly to this, another interviewee directly stated the following: “I do believe that games can be too violent to the point of being distasteful”. Furthermore, all interviewees acknowledged the existence of sexual content in certain video games, and two interviewees expressed that as long as sexual themes are handled in a mature and respectful manner, they would likely not be an issue.

When asked about video games’ effects on children, each interviewee stated that video games do have the capacity or potential to be harmful. Three interviewees stated their belief that video game usage should be carefully monitored by all children’s parents – two interviewees, in particular, mentioned the age rating system in place for video games, and how it should be followed similarly to films and other types of media. One interviewee stated the following:

“In theory, [the age rating system] should be preventing kids from accessing games that would cause them problems because they’re too mature, but I think there definitely needs to be more done to ensure that underage kids don’t have access to these harmful and violent video games.”

Finally, the interviewees were asked how well they believe that different genders, sexualities, and ethnicities are represented in video games. Three out of four interviewees stated that although overall representation has improved, it is still lacking in current video games. One person described their observation that “a low number of people of colour have a major role in games” – this sentiment was shared by another interviewee who stated that they felt like companies will include representation in their games but that these characters “might not be all that important to the game” or play a big role in its story. Another interviewee noted the lack of LGBT people in video games. One interviewee’s opinion differed from the others’ entirely, however, stating that representation of different genders, sexualities and ethnicities has become “pretty much normalised” in the industry, that it is “very common”, and that companies in the industry are making a genuine effort at including everyone in their video games.

At the end of the interview, the interviewees did not consider video game content to be a major factor when making the decision to purchase or not to purchase a video game.

4.3 How Views of Controversies Related to Video Game Culture Influence Purchase Intentions

For this investigative question, the survey included a question with a set of four statements. The respondents were asked to state whether they agree or disagree with the statements, on a scale

ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The aim of this question was to gauge the respondents’ opinions or attitudes about a variety of common controversies regarding video game culture. The question also included an option named “no opinion”.

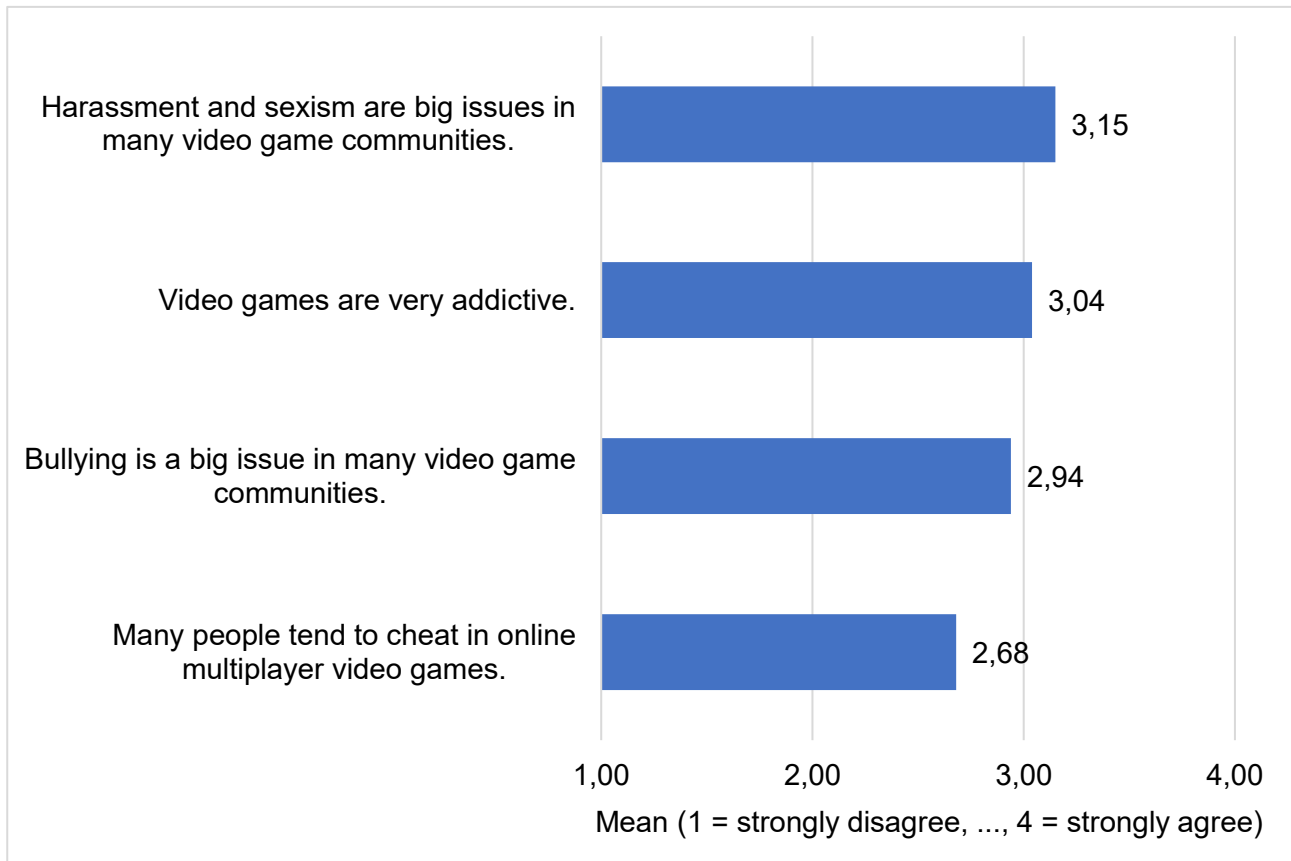


Figure 12. Respondents’ answers to statements regarding video game culture (n = 72)

The highest mean, at 3,15, was given to the statement “Harassment and sexism are big issues in many video game communities”. The next two statements, “Video games are very addictive” and “Bullying is a big issue in many video game communities”, both had only slightly lower means of 3,04 and 2,94, respectively. While each of the four statements do trend towards the overall value of 3,00, representing the option “agree”, the last statement, “Many people tend to cheat in online multiplayer video games”, showed the lowest mean of 2,68. (Figure 12.)

Respondents were further asked whether they had any kind of experience of video game addiction. The majority of respondents, or 58.3 percent of respondents, answered this with “no”. 38.8 percent of respondents, however, did state to have experience with video game addiction. Of this number, 22.2 percent said the experience to relate to themselves, and 16.7 percent said the experience to relate to a friend, family member, or someone else they know. Only 2.8 percent of respondents preferred not to answer the question. (Figure 13.)

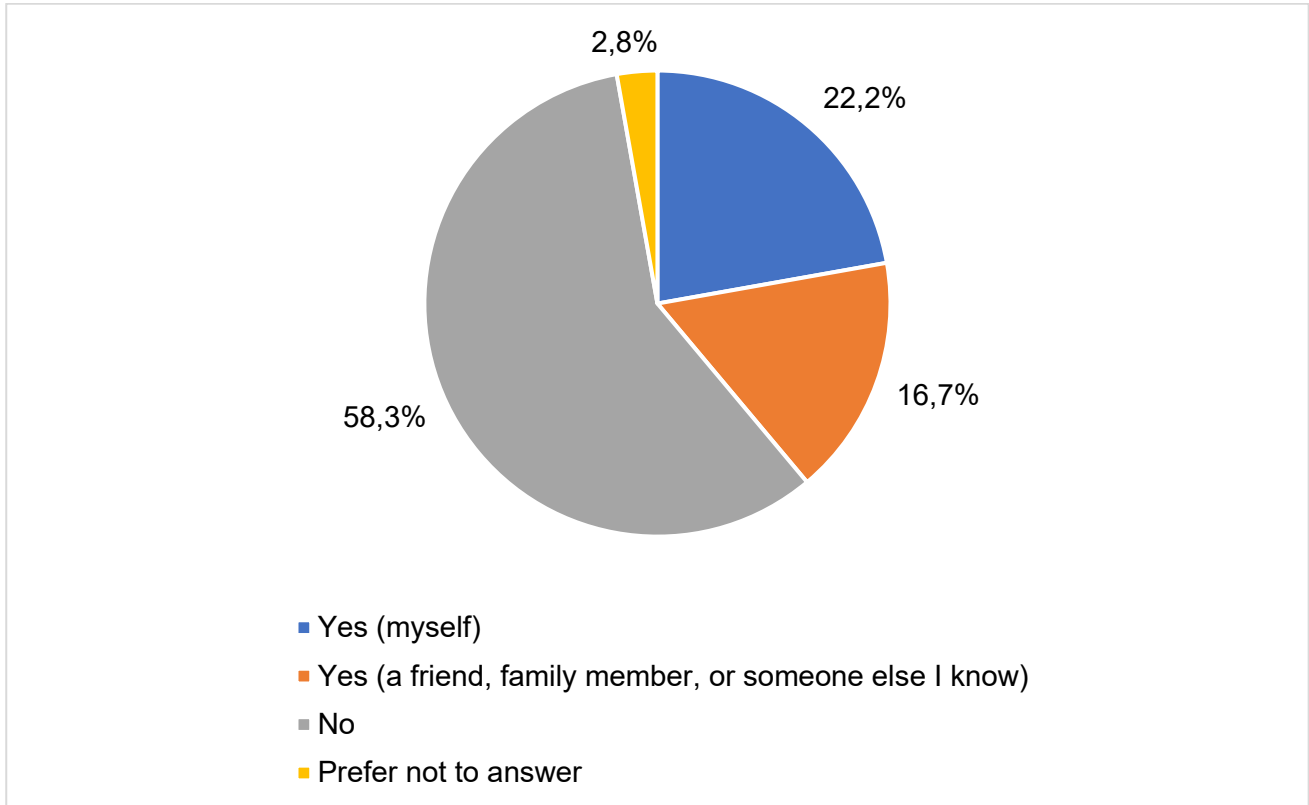


Figure 13. Whether respondents have experience with video game addiction (n = 72)

The respondents were also asked the following question: "How likely would it be for you to avoid a video game with a community that has a negative reputation? (For an example, if some of the game's players are known to bully other players.)" The majority of respondents, at 43,1 percent, stated that they would "likely" avoid such a video game. A slightly smaller percentage, 34,7, chose the option "somewhat likely", and 19,4 percent of respondents chose "not at all likely". A very small portion of only 2,8 percent of respondents chose the option "I don't know". (Figure 14.)

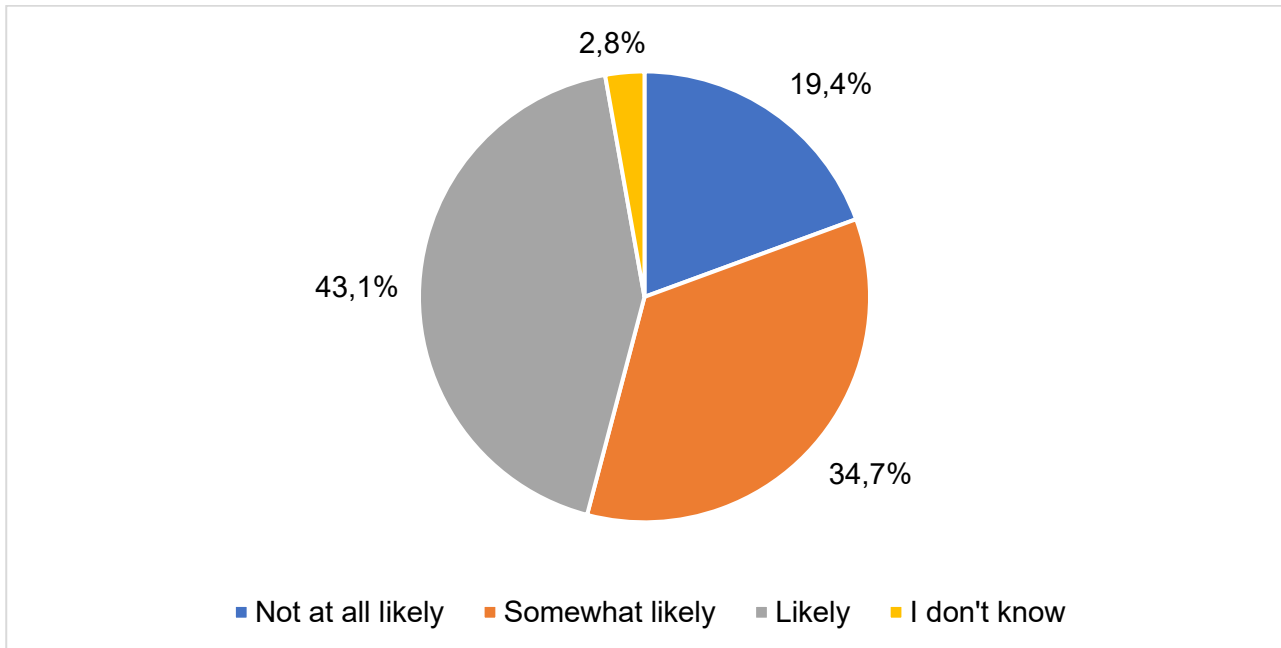


Figure 14. Respondents' likelihood of avoiding a video game with a community that has a negative reputation (n = 72)

The relationships between the statements were consequently also analysed. A Spearman's correlation test was conducted which showed that the statement "Harassment and sexism are big issues in many video game communities" had a moderate, direct relationship with the respondent's likelihood of avoiding a video game with a community that has a negative reputation ($r = .391$, $p = .001$). Similarly, a low, direct relationship was found between the statement "Bullying is a big issue in many video game communities" and the respondent's likelihood of avoiding a video game with a community that has a negative reputation ($r = .267$, $p = .028$). (Appendix 3, Figure 2.) In other words, respondents that agreed with the statements were also likely to avoid video games with communities that have negative reputations.

Towards the end of the survey, respondents were given the option to explain what types of controversy relating to video game culture would affect their likelihood of avoiding purchasing a video game. More than a third of respondents expressed their view that the negative reputation of a video game community would deter them from purchasing or playing the video game in question. This applied especially to multiplayer or online video games; as one respondent stated, "The reputation of a gaming community is very important for online games but does not matter in single player games". A female respondent also mentioned that they would not wish to play a video game where they get harassed, which "happens to women in particular in multiplayer video games", and many others demonstrated their knowledge of certain video games with "toxic" communities – these included, for an example, *Call of Duty*, *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*, *Valorant*, and *League of Legends*. One respondent in particular described how they "wouldn't want younger

children in [their] family” to play Call of Duty until they are older due to the game’s community. Overall, the answers regarding video game communities leaned towards a similar trend: a negative view towards community reputation also meant that the respondent would likely be deterred from consuming the video game in any degree.

Beyond the survey results, the semi-structured in-depth interviews gave an opportunity to discuss controversies regarding video game culture in much more detail. When asked what the interviewees knew about the topic in general, all four expressed to be aware of the generally negative perception towards video game communities. The responses from the interviews mention similar aspects and opinions as the answers from the open-ended survey question – they are also emphasized the negative views towards multiplayer video game communities in particular. All interview responses mentioned how misogyny has manifested in video game communities in different ways. One interviewee stated:

“For an example, League of Legends, Overwatch, Counter-Strike, and Call of Duty have a very big problem with sexism in my opinion, especially when it comes to voice chat, because most of these games are very fast-paced, so you need to be able to communicate as quickly and efficiently as possible. In those cases, obviously using the voice chat and microphones is the way to go, especially in the competitive scene.”

A female interviewee stated that she has not tried multiplayer video games because she has been “afraid of the toxic treatment” she would receive; another interviewee also described to have seen mistreatment towards female video game players “several times”; furthermore, a third interviewee saw misogyny manifest in online spaces as a phenomenon as a result of “Gamergate”.

Beyond sexism and harassment in video game communities, two interviewees described their knowledge of racism within the gaming sphere. One interviewee had seen racist treatment, as well as the use of racial slurs, in multiplayer video games, while another had witnessed it in online groups.

All four interviewees also acknowledged that bullying can be a repeating issue in video game communities. In regard to this theme, two interviewees cited possible age differences and immaturity in certain player bases as possible background reasons based on their own experiences. However, three interviewees also expressed their belief that companies have improved the measures to combat bullying; one interviewee stated that “moderation in games has become a lot more strict”, and another described how the ability to bully others has been diminished “due to the restrictions and punishments implemented in games”.

Two of the interviewees expressed concern over how video game communities could affect children in particular. One person stated the belief that “games can change how children view the world” or “can make them believe certain things even through the game itself or the communities” surrounding video games that children may be exposed to. Similarly to this, another person said that parents should follow their children’s video game usage “especially if it’s an online game where they can be influenced by other people, because that can be dangerous”.

When asked about their personal experiences within video game communities, the interviewees gave a wide range of answers. One interviewee said that they tend to avoid video game communities altogether, so they could not answer. On the other end of the spectrum, another interviewee described an unfortunate experience of becoming a target of doxing – a very serious form of cyberbullying where personal information of the victim, such as addresses and names, are searched and released to the public without their permission (Perreault & Vos 2016). The other two interviewees had experiences of bullying from an earlier point in their lives; one person described how certain players would “say anything they could to hurt someone’s feelings”.

The interviewees were also asked how addictive they believe video games are. Each interviewee stated that video games do have the capacity to be addictive, and all four expressed the belief that video game design, in particular, is a significant contributor to how addictive the video game will be. One interviewee said the following:

“They can be pretty addictive. I think the way games are made, especially today, is very much about player retention. You know, we have a lot of live service games that are meant to keep a big player base for long as possible. So I think they’re kind of designed in that way.”

Two interviewees did consider the fact that the degree to which a game will be addictive to a person will, to some extent, depend on the person themselves. One interviewee likened playing video games to other hobbies like watching television or reading books and that – just like with other hobbies – video games should be consumed “in moderation”, while the other stated that “some [people] are more prone to addiction than others”.

At the end of the interview, two of the interviewees mentioned that controversies regarding video game culture would actually influence their purchase decisions. One of the interviewees in particular stated that they “avoid multiplayer games in general” due to their gender and the misogyny they have perceived in video game communities.

4.4 How Views of Controversies Related to Video Game Industry Practices Influence Purchase Intentions

For this investigative question, the survey included a question with a set of five statements. The respondents were asked to state whether they agree or disagree with the statements, on a scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The aim of this question was to gauge the respondents’ opinions or attitudes about a variety of common controversies regarding practices in the video game industry. The question also included an option named “no opinion”.

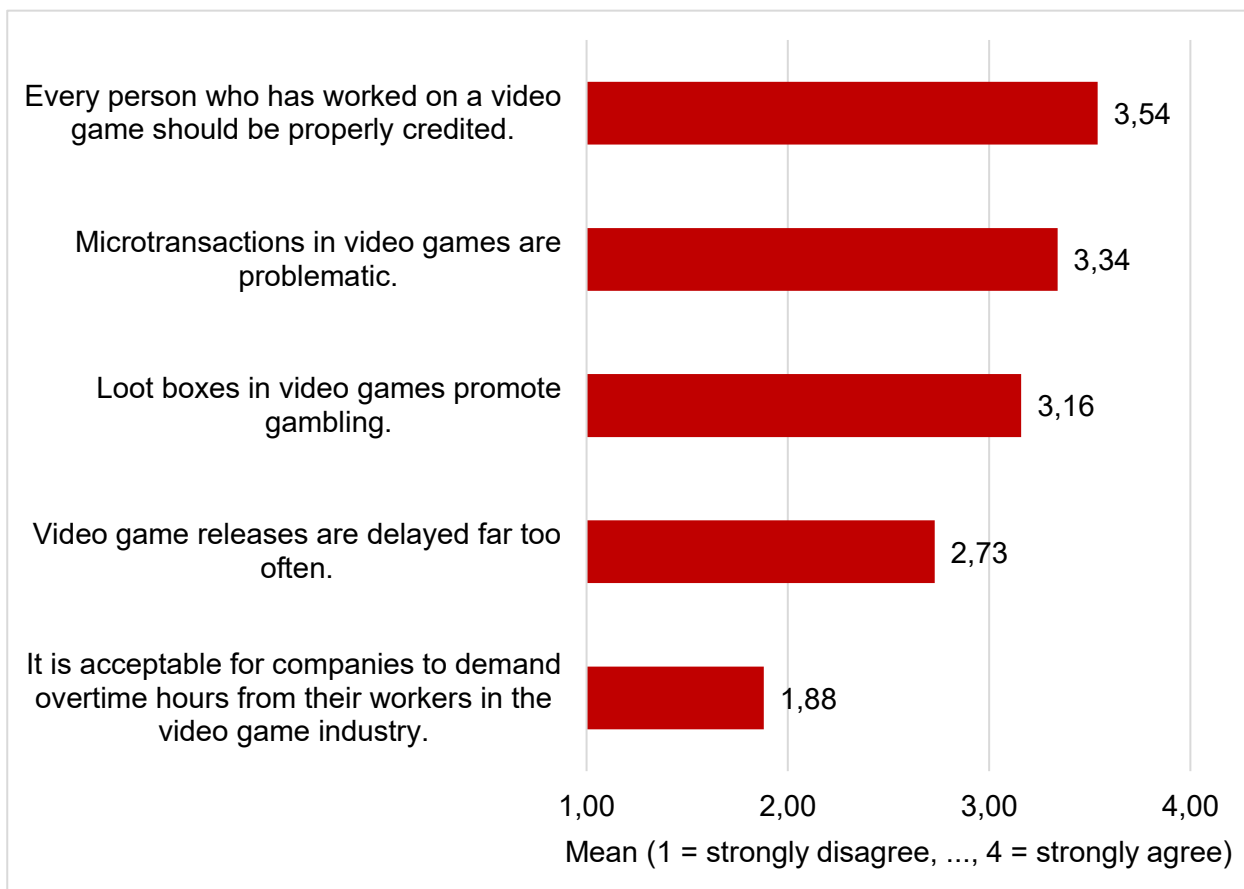


Figure 15. Respondents’ answers to statements regarding video game industry practices (n = 72)

By far the highest mean was given for the statement “Every person who has worked on a video game should be properly credited” – it received a value of 3,54, which trends towards “strongly agree”. The next two statements, “Microtransactions in video games are problematic” and “Loot boxes in video games promote gambling”, received means of slightly over 3,00. The next statement – “Video game releases are delayed far too often” – received a slightly lower average at 2,73. The very last statement, reading “It is acceptable for companies to demand overtime hours from their workers in the video game industry”, received the lowest mean by a significant degree: at 1,88, the majority of the respondents picked the option “disagree”. (Figure 15.)

Respondents were also asked the following question: “How likely would it be for you to avoid buying from a video game company with a very negative reputation? (For an example, if their games have often been delayed, or the company has been accused of bad work-place practices.)” The vast majority of respondents, or exactly half of them, answered with “likely”. The next options were picked at similar rates – “somewhat likely” was chosen by 19,4 percent and “not at all likely” was chosen by 20,8 percent of respondents. A small percentage of respondents, 9,7 percent, picked the option “I don’t know”. (Figure 16.)

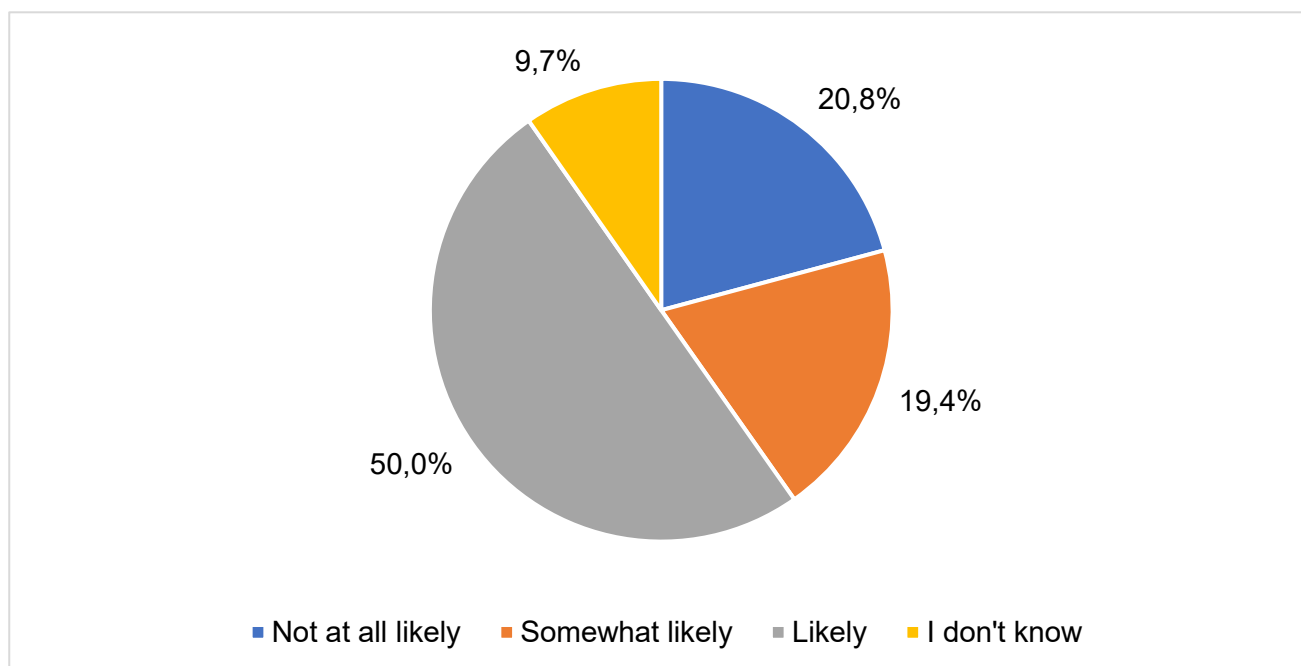


Figure 16. Respondents' likelihood of avoiding purchasing a video game from a company with a negative reputation (n = 72)

The relationships between the statements were consequently also analysed. Similarly to previous analysis, the Spearman's correlation test was once again conducted. However, no significant direct or inverse relationships were found. (Appendix 3, figure 3.)

Towards the end of the survey, respondents were given the option to explain what types of controversy relating to video game company practices would affect their likelihood of avoiding purchasing a video game. Out of the 30 responses for this question, over half – or two-thirds – expressed that a company's reputation would be a factor when considering whether or not the respondents would purchase their video games. When making the decision to avoid a certain company, many respondents referred to “labour issues” and “workers' rights” as their main motivator. Multiple respondents stated not to care too much about controversial content nor video game communities; however, if the company has a bad reputation with the treatment of their workers, the respondents would be deterred from purchasing their products. One respondent stated the following:

“I believe in voting with my wallet. I actively encourage developers and studios that are morally good (no crunch, pays their staff well, also cares about player needs and satisfaction. Example: Ghost Ship Games), meanwhile I have completely stopped giving money to the companies doing the opposite (Example: Activision Blizzard).”

Examples of companies respondents considered to have a bad reputation specifically due to negative workplace practices included Activision Blizzard, Electronic Arts, Gearbox, CD Projekt Red, and Ubisoft. The negative practices in these companies cover periods of overtime work or “crunch culture” as well as allegations of sexual harassment or misconduct. On the topic of overtime work, a respondent stated that if they were aware of “video game companies that overwork their employees”, they would be “less likely to buy games from that company”.

Respondents also considered delays in video game purchases to have an effect on their trust towards a company, and would make them reconsider purchasing from them in the future. One respondent described a “bad experience” where a video game they had been anticipating had been delayed for “years” and how such delays were “frustrating”; another stated that they would be “wary about a game coming out with a company that has delayed its games”. Similarly, respondents described that if a video game company has released “unfinished” video games in the past, they would be less likely to purchase their video games in the future. Here, multiple respondents brought up the example of *Cyberpunk 2077*; one respondent described how “an unfinished game was released because of bad time management”. Another company example given was Electronic Arts; one person viewed their games as “rushed to launch” and “full of bugs” at the time of their release.

Beyond the survey results, the semi-structured in-depth interviews gave an opportunity to discuss controversies regarding video game company practices in much more detail. When asked what the four interviewees knew about negative practices in the video game industry in general, two interviewees mentioned negative aspects of video game design, while the other two talked mostly about the industry’s negative workplace practices.

All four interviewees were aware of the term “crunch” in video game development, and expressed that the entire industry is quite well known for periods of overtime work. One interviewee said that crunch occurs as “people are pressed to work harder” in order to “meet deadlines” which is “how an unfinished products really gets released” – they explained that “everyone loses” whenever this happens. Another interviewee mentioned multiple examples of companies well-known for crunch culture, such as Rockstar Games, CD Projekt Red, Nintendo, and BioWare. Additionally, three interviewees mentioned how “sexism” and “workplace harassment” are widespread issues in the industry, and mentioned Riot Games, Activision Blizzard, Ubisoft and Quantic Dream as companies.

Certain aspects of video game design were also discussed in the interviews. All interviewees gave negative opinions towards microtransactions and loot boxes implemented in video games – one person in particular described this practice as “disgusting”, and another likened loot boxes to gambling. The tendency of certain video game companies to design their video games around “player retention” – or “keeping the player engaged as long as possible” – was also criticized, manifesting in the form of “infinite side quests” in the case of single player video games, and “seasonal updates” and constant prizes in the case of multiplayer video games.

Companies’ tendency to delay the release of video games was seen as a moderately negative aspect of the industry. One interviewee described delays to be “extremely common” and said that video games are likely to be “delayed at least once”, and another person mentioned that “so many games get delayed these days that it wouldn’t be difficult to find examples”. When asked about video games that the interviewees knew of that had been delayed, the answers included *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, *Starfield*, and *Cyberpunk 2077*.

At the end of the interview, when asked which of the themes discussed would influence the interviewees’ purchase decisions, their views of companies as well as their workplace practices were cited by each person as the most significant factor. One interviewee said the following:

“Voting with my wallet is very important to me. I don’t buy Blizzard products anymore, Activision products anymore, even though I really like the new Call of Duty for an example. I will not buy it because I don’t want to support that kind of development and that kind of attitude and environment. Also, what really keeps me back is predatory monetization – if I want to pay for a product, I also want to have the product.”

All of the interviewees also expressed their support for developers and other workers in the video game industry. The general pattern in their answers could be summarized in a single quote from one interviewee, who said that if the people who worked on a video game were mistreated, they “wouldn’t want to support that company” because they “care mostly about the people working on games”. If a company has been continuously accused of “crunch culture” or has faced accusations of workplace harassment and misogyny, the interviewees would very likely not want to purchase their video games.

5 Discussion

This chapter presents the conclusions of the thesis. The first chapter presents the key findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis, followed by recommendations for businesses, followed by recommendations for further research, and finally, the author's reflection on learning during the thesis process.

5.1 Key Findings

The research objective of this thesis was to understand how video game industry controversies affect young adults' intent to make a purchase. Three investigative questions were created to support the research question, each studying the effects of a specific type of controversy. During research and analysis, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. Both respondents to the survey and the people interviewed were of a variety of backgrounds both in terms of demographics and in terms of their typical video game consumption patterns.

The aim of the first investigative question was to understand how controversies related to video game content would affect consumers' intent to make a purchase. While it was clear from the survey that video game consumers do hold varying attitudes towards different types of controversial content in video games, such content is unlikely to actually deter consumers from making a purchase. Furthermore, the respondents' tendency to agree with statements regarding controversial content was seldom high, indicating that they did not hold the views that such content actually is highly controversial in video games. The only exceptions were the statements regarding representation of different ethnicities and genders in video games – however, the averages for overall responses for these statements were around the mid-point of the measurement scale. This demonstrates that the opinions relating to representation in video games in the group of respondents can vary to a great extent.

There was a moderately substantial percentage of respondents who stated that they would be less likely to purchase a video game if it featured controversial content. However, when asked to elaborate on this view, only a very small number of respondents referred to controversial content being a determinant in deciding not to purchase a video game. There are a few possible reasons for this lack of follow-up. Consumers' tastes and preferences are not homogeneous, and the respondents that stated to be less likely to purchase a video game featuring controversial content could simply not be interested in the types of video games that tend to include, for an example, violence or sexual themes. Furthermore, the section where respondents were asked to describe why or why not

they would be less likely to purchase a video game featuring controversial content was answered by less than half of the total respondents from the entire survey, since the question was optional. Thus in addition to consumers' tastes not necessarily being very similar, more qualitative data is needed to make comprehensive deductions for this type of study.

The results from the interviews were slightly different than from the survey, but nevertheless followed a similar final pattern. They gave an opportunity for the people interviewed to give much more in-depth answers than could be given in the survey. Overall, while the interviewees viewed certain types of content to be controversial, they were concerned more with how that content could affect people rather than its inclusion altogether. Similarly to this, the inclusion or lack of representation was also acknowledged, but was not stated to affect purchasing patterns. This meant that none of the interviewees considered controversial content to be a major factor when making the decision to purchase or not to purchase a video game.

The aim of the second investigative question was to understand how controversies related to video game culture would affect consumers' intent to make a purchase. The results for this section were considerably more straightforward. For statements regarding video game culture, the overall trend was to agree with each of them, indicating that the majority of respondents do perceive controversy to exist in video game communities. Respondents' likelihood of avoiding a video game with a community that has a negative reputation was quite high – the majority of respondents were either likely or somewhat likely to do so. A large number of respondents also placed great importance in video game communities and for many, the negative reputation of a video game community was cited as a major reason for avoiding a video game. This was evident especially when respondents considered multiplayer video games.

Similarly to the survey respondents, the people interviewed also considered video game communities to be controversial, mainly due to the existence of misogyny and bullying. Multiple interviewees described their personal experiences with both. All interviewees additionally stated video games do have the possibility to be addictive. Half of the interviewees did state that they considered controversies related to video game culture to influence their decision to purchase a video game. Thus it can be stated that the results from the survey and interviews combined followed a similar pattern in that a significant number, but not all, respondents would consider controversies related to video game culture to be a major factor in their purchase intentions.

The aim of the third investigative question was to understand how controversies related to video game company practices would affect consumers' intent to make a purchase. For the first four statements, the overall trend was for respondents to agree, and the last one indicated disagreement, implying that – similarly to the previous investigative question – based on the respondents'

answers to statements regarding video game company practices indicates that they do perceive controversy to exist in regard to video game companies. The largest observable number of respondents stated that they would be likely or somewhat likely to avoid purchasing a video game from a company with a negative reputation. Furthermore, when asked to explain their views, more than half of the responses indicated company reputation and their workplace practices to be a significantly important determinant when considering whether or not the respondents would buy a video game – it was, in fact, the most important reason for the majority, whether it be due to crunch culture, misogyny in the workplace, delays in video game releases, or the inclusion of microtransactions in game design. Respondents stated to care about workers' rights and their wellbeing.

The results gained from the interviews followed a very similar pattern in that all of the interviewees considered company reputation as one of the most important determinants of their intention to make a purchase. Similarly to the survey respondents, they also said to support video game workers – in addition to this, criticism was directed towards video game design, microtransactions, and workplace harassment.

The research question of this thesis was outlined as follows: “How do video game industry controversies affect young adults' intent to make a purchase?” Based on the quantitative and qualitative results gathered from this thesis, three general but tentative conclusions can be made. Firstly, young adults' negative views on controversial content in video games has a low to moderate direct impact on their purchase intentions; secondly, young adults' negative views on controversies relating to video game culture has a moderate to high direct impact on their purchase intentions; and thirdly, out of all the types of controversies considered in this thesis, young adults' negative views towards controversies relating video game industry company practices has a high direct impact on their decision to make a purchase.

5.2 Recommendations for Businesses

This thesis provides a general look at how young adult consumers view controversies in the video game industry, and also a general look at how their views will result in certain changes in their purchasing behaviour. The people interviewed and surveyed were of a variety of different ages within the designated age group, different genders, and had widely varying video game consumption patterns and preferences. While video game companies may benefit from this thesis, this study should nevertheless be deepened to a company-wide level in order to gain insights from the company's own, specific customer segments. The types and genres of video games a company typically publishes will have an effect on what customers usually expect from them. For this reason, research

regarding customers' views on video game content, for an example, may be profoundly different to the results shown in this thesis.

This thesis also considered controversial content, communities and companies in the video game industry. For this reason, it can be erroneously thought that only video game companies with negative reputations – either due to the content in the video games they publish, the communities around their video games, or the company's own practices – can benefit from this research. All companies, whether they have negative reputations amongst the general population of video game consumers or not, can benefit from insights to customers' purchasing behaviour. This thesis gives insights into what video game consumers hold important, and what positive aspects video game companies should consider when planning their marketing and customer communication models – for this reason, video game companies should emphasize directness and transparency in their communication.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

The main limitation of these research results is the small size of the population sample both for quantitative and qualitative research. In order to find clearer patterns and make more evident conclusions in how controversies relate to consumers' purchasing decisions, this kind of study should be conducted with a much larger sample size. Since customer attitudes, views and opinions are difficult to ascribe a numerical value, it would be most valuable to carry out further research in the form of qualitative research.

This study was also limited to a very specific age group – namely, those aged 18-30. Further research could concentrate on a much wider range of age groups in order to discover whether they have a large impact on consumers' views. Similarly, other demographic variables, such as location, gender, and income level could be studied to gain further insights into different segments of consumer groups.

5.4 Reflection on Learning

The overall thesis process has improved the author's knowledge and research abilities in the topics of marketing and customer communication, as well as in themes relating to the video game industry. The thesis was written with the help of the thesis planning course, which set the foundation and overall framework for the thesis topic that the author was able to build upon.

Analysing the research results and combining both quantitative and qualitative data was a very demanding endeavour, but this was aided by the author's prior experience with marketing research. Choosing to investigate a specific aspect of consumer behaviour, namely how views and attitudes affect purchasing behaviour, was also a very complex topic that posed some challenges at times.

Additionally, preparing, researching, and writing the thesis has thoroughly improved the author's time-management skills and the ability to carry out a challenging project. Since the thesis was started, the author was faced with multiple obstacles that hindered the overall process – including finding enough interviewees for acceptable qualitative data analysis and choosing the most relevant sources for the theoretical framework. However, in the end, the thesis process was an enlightening and positive learning experience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey

Investigating young adults' attitudes towards video game industry controversies

 Mandatory questions are marked with a star (*)

This survey is part of the thesis for a bachelor's degree in International Business at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. The aim of this survey is to understand young adults' (ages 18-30) attitudes towards video game industry controversies; the data will be used in the thesis, the results of which will be tailored to the area of customer communication.

All responses in this survey are anonymous, and no personal data is collected. The information is stored on the Webropol platform.

The survey takes around 5 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your participation!

If you have any questions, they can be sent to the e-mail address jenni.ihalainen@myy.haaga-helia.fi.

1. How old are you? *

- Younger than 18 years old
- 18-20
- 21-23
- 24-27
- 28-30
- Older than 30 years old

2. What gender do you identify as? *

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Other
- Prefer not to specify

3. How much time do you spend playing video games in a week? *

- Less than 1 hour
- 1-4 hours
- 4-8 hours
- 8-12 hours
- More than 12 hours

4. How often do you buy video games? (Excluding mobile games.) *

- Once a month or more
- Once every three months
- Once every six months
- Less than once every six months

5. What platform do you mainly use to play video games? *

- A computer (PC)
- A gaming console
- A mobile phone

6. Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No opinion
Video games are very violent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video games often have too much sexual content.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video games often have too much provocative content.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People of different genders are represented well in video games.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People of different ethnicities are represented well in video games.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video games are harmful to children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Do you have any personal experiences with video game addiction? *

- Yes (myself)
- Yes (a friend, family member, or someone else I know)
- No
- Prefer not to answer

8. Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No opinion
Video games are very addictive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Many people tend to cheat in online multiplayer video games.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Harassment and sexism are big issues in many video game communities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bullying is a big issue in many video game communities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No opinion
Microtransactions in video games are problematic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Loot boxes in video games promote gambling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video game releases are delayed far too often.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Every person who has worked on a video game should be properly credited.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is acceptable for companies to demand overtime hours from their workers in the video game industry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In video games, microtransactions refer to the ability to purchase additional items, bonuses or services within the game itself for a real-money fee.

Loot boxes are a type of microtransaction. They reward the player with randomized virtual items. The player cannot choose what rewards they receive, and the items can be of high or low quality/rarity.

10. How likely would it be for you to avoid buying a video game with controversial content? (For an example, if it was notorious for being extremely violent, or included disturbing themes.) *

- Not at all likely
- Somewhat likely
- Likely
- I don't know

11. How likely would it be for you to avoid a video game with a community that has a negative reputation? (For an example, if some of the game's players are known to bully other players.) *

- Not at all likely
- Somewhat likely
- Likely
- I don't know

12. How likely would it be for you to avoid buying from a video game company with a very negative reputation? (For an example, if their games have often been delayed, or the company has been accused of bad workplace practices.) *

- Not at all likely
- Somewhat likely
- Likely
- I don't know

13. Could you shortly explain your answers to the previous questions? What video games or companies were you thinking of, if any?

Appendix 2. Interview Guide

Starting questions

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself as a video game player – so, for an example, how much time do you spend playing video games, and what kinds of games do you tend to play?

Questions related to video game content

2. What kind of content in video games do you find negative or controversial?
 - Supporting questions:
 - a. Do you think games can be too violent or include too much sexual content, for an example?
 - b. How well do you believe that different genders, sexualities, and ethnicities are represented in video games?
 - c. It has been argued throughout time that video games can be harmful to children. What do you think about that notion?

Questions related to player culture

3. Could you tell me what you know about any negative aspects of video game player culture?
 - Supporting questions:
 - a. For an example, especially in multiplayer games and communities, bullying and sexism are big issues. What do you think about that?
 - b. What kind of experiences have you yourself had with video game communities?
 - c. How addictive do you think video games are?

Questions related to industry practices

4. Could you tell me what you know about negative practices in the video game industry?
 - Supporting questions:
 - a. Could you tell me what you know about the term “crunch” when it comes to video game development?
 - b. Do you know of any video games that have recently faced delays?
 - c. What do you think about microtransactions and loot boxes in games?
 - d. Have you encountered a video game or a video game company that has been portrayed negatively in the news?

Final questions

5. Do you think anything that we have discussed would discourage you from playing or buying a certain video game?

- a. Can a game have negative enough content for you to avoid it, or can a game's player base be bad enough for you to avoid it, or can a company have bad enough practices for you to avoid their game?
6. Is there anything that a company could do to change your mind?
7. What kind of message you would like to send to game companies regarding this theme?

Appendix 3. Data Analysis

		How likely would it be for you to avoid buying a video game with controversial content? (For an example, if it was notorious for being extremely violent, or included disturbing themes.)	
Spearman's rho	How likely would it be for you to avoid buying a video game with controversial content? (For an example, if it was notorious for being extremely violent, or included disturbing themes.)	Correlation Coefficient	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	65
Video games are very violent.		Correlation Coefficient	,117
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,367
		N	62
Video games often have too much sexual content.		Correlation Coefficient	,052
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,693
		N	60
Video games often have too much provocative content.		Correlation Coefficient	,443**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
		N	61
People of different genders are represented well in video games.		Correlation Coefficient	-,096
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,459
		N	62
People of different ethnicities are represented well in video games.		Correlation Coefficient	-,230
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,077
		N	60
Video games are harmful to children.		Correlation Coefficient	,307*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,014
		N	64

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 1. Spearman's test - video game content

		How likely would it be for you to avoid a video game with a community that has a negative reputation? (For an example, if some of the game's players are known to bully other players.)	
Spearman's rho	How likely would it be for you to avoid a video game with a community that has a negative reputation? (For an example, if some of the game's players are known to bully other players.)	Correlation Coefficient	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	70
Video games are very addictive.		Correlation Coefficient	,138
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,259
		N	69
Many people tend to cheat in online multiplayer video games.		Correlation Coefficient	,189
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,155
		N	58
Harassment and sexism are big issues in many video game communities.		Correlation Coefficient	,391**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,001
		N	66
Bullying is a big issue in many video game communities.		Correlation Coefficient	,267*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,028
		N	68

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 2. Spearman's test - video game communities

		How likely would it be for you to avoid buying from a video game company with a very negative reputation? (For an example, if their games have often been delayed, or the company has been accused of bad workplace practices.)	
Spearman's rho	How likely would it be for you to avoid buying from a video game company with a very negative reputation? (For an example, if their games have often been delayed, or the company has been accused of bad workplace practices.)	Correlation Coefficient	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	65
	Microtransactions in video games are problematic.	Correlation Coefficient	-,118
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,370
		N	60
	Loot boxes in video games promote gambling.	Correlation Coefficient	,021
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,873
		N	62
	Video game releases are delayed far too often.	Correlation Coefficient	-,176
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,191
		N	57
	Every person who has worked on a video game should be properly credited.	Correlation Coefficient	-,043
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,737
		N	64

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 3. Spearman's test - video game companies