What makes a video game fun:

An investigation into the expectations of playing First Person Shooter video games.

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Abstract

There are over 2,000 new video games created each year, so it is therefore important for video game developers to fully comprehend the video game market before they undergo the production of new offerings in order to stand out from their competitors. Understanding gamer wants and expectations will help developers to better produce an offering which satisfies these customer needs resulting in enhanced financial success for the developer. This study investigates the expectations of gamers in the First Person Shooter (FPS) genre of video games and endeavours to understand what components make up a good FPS from the perspective of both ‘hardcore’ and ‘casual’ gamers.

Through the use of an online discussion, this study collected the detailed perspectives of 29 ‘hardcore’ and ‘casual’ gamers, regarding the topic of FPS video games. It investigates what the gamers want in a FPS by means of an online discussion which builds on the benefits of both ethnography and focus group methodologies. Since the study’s main goal was exploratory, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate; in addition to this, the method used to collect the data was done within a grounded theory framework.

This study finds that, though graphics have historically been a major factor in driving the success of a FPS video game, this is no longer the case. Gamers expect there to be a balance between the different components, with a more holistic gaming experience desired, and that too much focus on one component at the expense of another will result in an unsatisfactory video game experience. This can be seen in comments given by the participants indicating too much emphasis of the graphics quality in a FPS and not enough on story or the multiplayer aspects results in a video game which is neither fun nor praiseworthy. The latter is perceived significant as with such an oversaturation in the video game market, developers rely heavily on positive word of mouth to advertise their games.

This study’s main goal was to develop a better understanding of the expectations of gamers regarding FPS; in doing so, it has laid out the basis for producing a ‘magic formula’ for a great FPS video game. It has also highlighted several other areas which need further investigation in order to better understand the behavioural motives and actions of gamers from both ‘hardcore’ and ‘casual’ communities.
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“There’s no sense crying over every mistake; you just keep on trying until you run out of cake”

-GLaDOS
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 1

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................. II

Situation analysis ................................................................................................................................. 4

Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 6

Literature review ................................................................................................................................. 8
  History of video games: a definition of video games and the genre of FPS ................................... 9
  Violence in video games: ‘links’ between violence and aggressive behaviour .............................. 10
  Video game ratings .......................................................................................................................... 12
  Subcultures and Community .......................................................................................................... 15
  Authenticity ....................................................................................................................................... 16
  Gender roles and perceptions in video games ............................................................................... 18
  The addictive properties of video games ....................................................................................... 20
  Summary .......................................................................................................................................... 21
  Key points from the literature review: ............................................................................................. 21

Methodology ......................................................................................................................................... 23

Research objectives ............................................................................................................................ 23

Justification for the research approach ............................................................................................. 23

Justification for the research method: Online discussion ................................................................. 24

Summary of advantages for this study’s method: .............................................................................. 25

Research ethics .................................................................................................................................... 25

Data collection ...................................................................................................................................... 26
  Sampling: Snowball .......................................................................................................................... 27

Participants .......................................................................................................................................... 27

Research Method ................................................................................................................................. 28

Thematic Analysis ............................................................................................................................... 30
Situation analysis

There are over 2,000 new video games created each year, resulting in, the video game market facing an oversaturation of games for several genres, including First Person Shooters (FPS) (Martin 2011; Steinberg 2007; Laramee 2005). It is, therefore, important for video game developers to fully comprehend the video game market before they undergo the production of new offerings. Understanding consumer expectations of their video games will help developers to better produce an offering which will both satisfy the consumer’s needs and provide financial success for the developer.

The USA and Japan hold the majority of the video game market, and these two markets are a good indication of the state of the video game industry as a whole (Steinberg 2007; Laramee 2005; Education Database Online 2011). In the USA, the average gamer is 32 years old and 40% female of gamers are; the old stereotypical image of the spotty-faced teenage boy gamer is a thing of the past. Though there is still a small group of gamers who are under 18 years old, this group is only 25% of the market (ESA 2011; Education Database Online 2011). In addition to this change in gamer demographics, there has also been a shift in the gamer psychographics, with the average gamer having 12 to 15 years of video game experience and knowledge (ESA 2011). This maturing of the consumer segments is understandable, since the teenagers who were playing video games 20 years ago are now adults, often with children of their own. As 48% of parents play video games with their children on a regular basis, and over half of parents (64%) feel that video games have a positive impact on their children’s lives (ESRB 2011). Video games are gaining more mainstream acceptance, with gamer segments continuing to grow and diversify; from students to seniors, white collar workers to blue collar workers, military troops to stay at home mums & dads (ESA 2011).

Within the AAA video game market, there are three main non-portable console providers; Microsoft’s Xbox 360, Nintendo’s Wii and Sony’s Playstation3 (these three brands also produce portable gaming devices such as the DS and PSP), and, in addition to video game consoles, there are also computer games (Education Database Online 2011). Understanding of the target market is important not only to provided a gaming experience which will fit the wants and needs of the consumer but also in understanding which devices to release the game on. For the three main console providers, there is a roughly even split in popularity for male gamers. However, female gamers greatly favour Nintendo’s Wii (80%), with Xbox and Playstation3 considerably further behind with 11% and 9% respectively (Education Database Online 2011). This is interesting because globally the Wii has sold 65.32 million consoles which beats Xbox’s 37.14 million and
Playstations3’s 31.59 million (ESA 2011; Education Database Online 2011), the increase in female gamers reflects and possibly drives, this finding. In the USA alone, the video game industry made $18.58 billion in 2010 (Wikia Gaming 2011). Around $10 billion of that was from software sales (NPD Group 2010).

With such a diverse target market, choosing the best consumer segment(s) is a tricky task. Fracturing consumer groups mean that a mass-market approach will not work, game developers must now also be a part of the consumer communities they wish to market to in order to develop and maintain a clear understanding of what their consumers want in a video game (Steinberg 2007). This study aims to explore the expectations of gamers regarding FPS to contribute to that understanding.

There are two reasons I have chosen to conduct this research, the first being that I am an enthusiastic gamer and have been playing video games for the last 14 years. I enjoy playing multiple video game genres; however, I am particularly fond of FPS. Following conversations with some individuals in the video game industry, my decision to conduct this research was reinforced. After discussing my interest in the video game industry with a production group here in Dunedin, Areo, it was suggested to me that an investigation into the importance of graphics quality in video games would be a worthwhile area of study. In addition to this, conversations with other video game industry members helped me develop a research frame which would both fulfil the requirements of this MBus thesis as well as add knowledge to our understanding of video game theory.

This thesis has been written in the first person because I am greatly entrenched in the video game culture and my insight, as a gamer, helped me better understand the participant’s comments and motivations.
Introduction

This research project seeks to gain a better understanding of what gamers expect, want and need in a First Person Shooter video game. First Person Shooters (hereafter refer to as FPS) is a genre of video game which has been popular for the last 20 years. A brief description of some of the points of differentiation for this genre, compared to others, is as follows: the player sees the video game environment from the perspective of the character, as opposed to the third person view which many other genres adopt. The main objective of all FPS involves shooting other characters within the game. These enemy characters range from aliens and monsters from hell to zombies and soldiers. This genre was chosen for this investigation because there is little research currently available which looks into the expectations of gamers who play this genre.

This thesis will provide a literature review to help frame the context in which the research will be conducted. The literature review will investigate several topics which impact the genre of FPS video games. This review will start by giving a comprehensive overview of the history of video games, with particular attention to the birth and development of FPS. One of the major topics of investigation in video game literature has been the suspected links between violent video games and aggressive behaviour in gamers. With FPS inherent violent themes, this topic is a good place to start in the framing of the research context and question. The next topic concerning video game ratings is linked to the discussions surrounding aggression and video games; this is because the rating of a video game is affected by the level of violence in the game and is again, an area of concern for FPS. The main topic of concern surrounding the ratings of video games is the question of how strict the ratings should be and how these ratings restrictions should be enforced on adolescents.

The discussion then moves away from the issue of violence and video games, and investigates the inter-workings of video game communities. It is important to understand the dynamics of video game subcultures and communities because these groups consist of the consumers of video games. The more developers know about these groups, the better they will be able to provide the desired offering to the consumer. Next the concept of authenticity will be investigated within the context of video games in general and FPS specifically. Authenticity is hard to define within marketing literature since the topic is so context specific; nevertheless, it is important to determine how it affects the gamer’s perspective of individual video game titles as well as video game developer brands. The issue of gender representation in video games and within video game communities is a popular point of discussion in academic literature. How women, in particular, are depicted in many video games is seen as demeaning by many groups. It is therefore
an important issue to investigate since this study intends to include female gamers in the primary research, and it is interesting to see how they view the debate compared to their male counterparts. Finally, the addictive properties of video games will be investigated and discussed in relation to FPS video games. This issue is highly disputed by different academics since there is currently no accepted method for determining video game addiction.

Following the literature review is the methodology chapter in which the research objectives will be outlined and followed by an explanation of the methods to be used in this research project. This will also include a justification as to why Grounded Theory was used as the research method, and why the data collection method of an online discussion was used. This will be followed by an explanation as to the advantages of adopting a qualitative research approach for this research project as well as the limitations of the methods employed. Copies of the ethics consent forms are provided as well as an overview of the participants who contributed to this study. Details as to how the data collection was conducted will then be given as well as what precautions were taken to ensure a reliable data sample.

The findings of the data analysis will then be presented. This will include an overview of a thematic content analysis which was used to develop the emergent themes from the online discussion. Analysis stages included immersion with the data, producing codes and bundling these codes into groups to form themes and sub-themes. After the thematic content analysis has been discussed this chapter will provide an overview of the conversations which took place in the online discussion.

The following chapter of this thesis will discuss in detail the findings from the primary research, using the topics covered in the literature review as a basis to investigate the themes and issues that emerged. This chapter will also endeavour to answer the research question and determine if there is in fact a ‘magic recipe’ for developing and marketing the perfect FPS video game.
Literature review

One of the difficulties faced by grounded theory research is that the research project should create a theory from the data without the influence of the academic literature. However, it is impossible to enter into research without any prior knowledge of the topic about to be researched (Urquhart et al. 2010). That being said, there are also no set guidelines as to how much literature should be reviewed before conducting a grounded theory study (Ng et al. 2008). Ng et al. (2008) do explain that conducting the literature review after the data has been collected and analysed is one of many possible methods within a grounded theory study. Researchers may do a limited review of the literature before collecting their data, to help frame the issue which they will be studying. For this project, an initial literature review was undertaken to provide a contextual framework for the topic being studied, and further developed after the data was collected and analysed. As an active member of the gaming community under research, I am already aware of current trends regarding my chosen topic. However I felt it was still important to detail the context of the findings for those who may not be as familiar with the gaming industry.

The research question which this study seeks to address is: ‘an investigation into the key components for a First Person Shooter video game, which will fulfil the expectations of both ‘hardcore’ and ‘casual’ gamers.’ This expectation refers to both the gameplay of the video game as well as the overall experience the FPS provides the gamer. In order to better understand the context in which this question is being asked, this literature review will begin by providing an overview of how video games, and FPS specifically, began. This will be done through a brief history of video games and a definition of the genre of FPS. The impact video games have on gamers, and, particularly effects related to violence and aggression, is one of the most discussed issues in video game literature, therefore a discussion of the issues is also included. Next the connotations surrounding community collectives and video games are discussed, particularly what kind of collectives gamers create and why. The issue of authenticity is also an interesting concept to consider in the video game context, and will be discussed in relation to how it can affect a gamer’s perception of a video game. With the increase in female gamers, it is important to investigate how female gamers perceive FPS as well as how women are portrayed in video games. Finally, a short investigation of the much discussed addictive properties of video games is summarised, and implications for game developers are discussed.
History of video games: a definition of video games and the genre of FPS

A video game is broadly defined as a form of electronic entertainment played through a computer, with a game console and television, on a hand-held gaming device, or a cell phone (Berger 2002). However, for the purposes of this study, the main focus will be on games played using computers and consoles. This is because the majority of the gamers recruited for this study play video games on one or both of these two media and FPS are most often found on these two devices. Though video games have been around since the late 1950’s, the entertainment form didn’t gain popularity amongst consumers until the release of Pong in arcades in 1972. Though Pong was not the first video game ever, it was the first video game to be widely available to consumers in addition to being commercially successful (Tyson 2011). Traditionally one of the main indicators of excellence for video games was based on the quality of the game graphics, leaders in the video game industry were also the leaders in graphics quality. Now, however, the advances in graphics quality in video games are marginal and often not even noticed by gamers (LaViola 2008).

The genre of FPS had its debut in the mid 1970’s with Maze and Spasim. However, the title of FPS was only given to these earlier games retrospectively, it wasn’t until 1992/93 that FPS were established as a separate genre from action and adventure games (Berger 2002; Infoplease 2011). First Person Shooter video games “... mainly consist of running down corridors, dungeons, and other environments and shooting everything that moves with big guns” (Järvinen 2001: 69). FPS were officially recognised as a separate genre to ‘action’ games with the release of Wolfenstein 3D in 1992, and the genre soon had its ranks bolstered with other iconic tiles such as; Doom (1993), Duke Nukem 3D and Quake (1996) and Half Life (1998) (Schneider et al. 2004; Järvinen 2001). The genre didn’t become popular, however, until after the release of id’s Doom, a game which involved, as Järvinen (2001) describes above, ‘running around and shooting monsters with big guns’. Many titles released after Doom were very similar regarding plot and context namely, big guy saves world by killing monsters with a big gun. However, with the release of Half Life in 1998 the genre found it could also support detailed story based-plots as well as ‘big gun and monster’ plots (Policarpo et al. 2010; Berger 2002). Unlike Doom, the hero of which is a battle-hardened soldier fighting monsters from Hell, the hero of Half Life is a physicist, fresh out of MIT with his PhD, who fights aliens (from a different dimension) and government soldiers (Berger 2002). Schneider et al. (2004) explored the impact on gamers’ emotions with the addition of story to a FPS. They found that emotional involvement (and in most cases investment) was considerably higher for those playing story-based FPS (such as Half Life) compared to those playing ‘big gun
and monster’ FPS (such as *Doom* or *Quake*). Schneider et al. (2004) concluded that the use of story in FPS could be used as an effective marketing tool.

For a video game developer wanting to produce FPS video games it is important to understand what components of the gameplay and overall video game experience encourage consumer loyalty (Kazmi et al. 2010; Nacke et al. 2010). Faced with increasing market saturation, video game developers must endeavour to better understand what gamers seek out in a video game (Martin 2011). This study will only focus on FPS, because very little research has been conducted to determine what components of FPS video games make them desirable to gamers. In order to better understand gamer expectations, the societal and cultural environments which gamers inhabit needs to be investigated.

The following is a brief outline of the important events which have helped shape the FPS genre into what it is today:

- 1972: release of *Pong*, the first commercially successful video game.
- Mid 1970’s: release of *Maze* and *Spasim*, the first FPS video games.
- 1992: release of *Wolfenstein 3D*, the first commercially successful FPS video game.
- 1993: release of *Doom*, which saw the dramatic increase in popularity of the genre.
- 1998: release of *Half Life*, first FPS to have a detailed narrative.

**Violence in video games: ‘links’ between violence and aggressive behaviour**

The main question discussed to date in the literature regarding video games is related to the physiological impact violent video games have on gamers, especially adolescent gamers. The impact other violent media (such as television) has on individuals has already been well-documented over the last 50 years (Anderson & Bushman 2001; Anderson et al. 2010; Ferguson 2007a; Sherry 2001; Griffiths & Hunt 1995). According to some research, there is a statistically significant link between exposure to violence on television and aggressive behaviour in adolescents (Anderson et al. 2010; Sherry 2001). Nevertheless, a similar link between violent video games and aggressive behaviour in adolescents (or adults) has yet to be found. This is a particularly important issue for the genre of FPS because most, if not all, FPS could be regarded as violent. The following section provides an introduction to this highly controversial issue.

Between the publicised arguments of Anderson (2001, 2004 & 2010) and Ferguson (2007a, 2007b & 2010), several meta analyses’ have been undertaken to better understand whether or not video games have a negative impact on gamers’ behaviour. My own perspective as a gamer makes me
naturally biased in the discussion, as I feel my personal interactions with violent video games do not make me more prone to aggressive behaviour. However, the research is where the decision should be made, and as Ferguson (2010) highlights, the journals which have completed primary research in order to answer the question of violence and video games have not produced significant results. Many of the research projects have used correlations to determine if there is a relationship between violent video games and aggressive behaviour (Anderson 2010). There are two main problems with this; firstly the r values which these projects are producing are below the .30 minimum which social sciences generally adhere to (Choudhury 2009). Results such as .15 (Anderson 2010) are non-significant results, they indicate that though there is a very small correlation between the two variables there is not a tangible relationship between them (Ratner 2011; Ferguson 2010; Answers Corporation 2011; Choudhury 2009). The second point which should be made is that correlation is not causality; however authors in this debate are often treating the results as if they are. Interestingly, these correlations could be indicating the reverse effect; that more aggressive individuals naturally gravitate towards violent video games, not that violent video games make gamers more aggressive.

In their book ‘Grand theft childhood’, Kutner & Olson (2008) suggest that much of the evidence which supports the assumption that violent video games cause aggressive or dangerous behaviour is weak or misinterpreted. Indeed, it could be a case of the ‘Tinkerbell-effect’ (Stewart 2004), in which popular hearsay and rumour is used to elevate a concept from speculation to fact, even when there is little or no hard evidence to support the assumption. This certainly supports the opinion of Ferguson (2007a, 2007b & 2010), namely that most of the evidence produced on this topic is weak or collected under variable conditions. Many other reports are in agreement with Ferguson’s view that there is currently no reliable evidence to support the claim that violent video games cause aggressive behaviour (Sherry 2001). Sherry’s (2001) meta-analysis of the issue investigates both sides of the argument (that there is hard evidence to support a strong link and that there isn’t any link at all) in-depth, pointing out the failings of both sides. Sherry (2001) concludes that considerably more research needs to be undertaken before definitive conclusions can be made. Despite this, the two leading authors in this debate, Anderson and Ferguson, continue to produce meta-analyses rather than conducting statistically valid experiments to add to the body of knowledge.

Anderson (2010) opens his most recent meta-analysis with his personal opinion that there is a connection between high school shootings in the US and violent video games. However, it is very hard to attribute an activity as prevalent as playing video games to such aberrant behaviour as shooting your classmates (Kutner et al. 2008). Several authors have made links between violent
video games and school shootings in the US, again using correlation analysis; variables such as family environment and easy access to guns are, however, left out of the equation (Ferguson 2007b). Another concern that is part of the violent video game debate is the potential effect violent video games have on children compared to the potential effect of violent video games on adults. Social status quo suggests that children should not be exposed to R rated entertainment (for example pornography) so why is this social status quo not present for R rated video games? There is a growing body of research being conducted on the impact of violent video games on children, but the simple point that children should not be exposed to these R-rated games seems lost in the researchers’ conclusions (Scharrer et al. 2008).

Ferguson (2007a) suggests that the focus of the debate around the impact of video games should be moved from ‘is there a relationship between video games and aggression’ to ‘what are the pros and cons of playing video games?’. One argument is that violent video games provide an avenue for adolescent males, in particular, to shape their identity in a safe and non-judging environment (Jansz 2005). Consequently it could be argued that video games are a necessary tool in the growth and development of young males. This concept of video games being a part of young males process of self discovery and understanding would indicate that video games are an appropriate form of entertainment for young men (and, in some cases, young women) as it helps them to grow and develop into well rounded adults in a safe and non-physical virtual environments.

FPS, by nature, are violent, the theme of shooting other people or creatures is the main focus of this genre, therefore the issue of how this violent content affects gamers is an important consideration for this study. When horrific antisocial behaviour, such as shootings, takes place, groups who support Anderson’s perspective are able to voice their concerns more confidently and loudly. Anderson often uses the example of the Columbine High School shooting in the beginning of his articles to justify the need for the study. Indeed, when horrific events such as terrorist attacks take place, retailers feel the pressure from some groups to remove FPS video games from their shelves, as was the case in Norway recently (Hughes 2011). This issue of associating/attributing real life shootings with the FPS genre will, in all probability, continue for some time, and is therefore an important issue which needs to be considered when developing new games in this genre.

**Video game ratings**

The issue of video game violence causing aggressive behaviour is very closely linked to the rating systems which are used in the labelling of video games. There are two main classification groups
which rate the majority of video games in the US and the UK namely PEGI (Pan European Game Information) and ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) (PEGI 2011; ESRB 2011). Both these groups are self regulating boards which are not-for-profit and game producers voluntarily submit their games to the boards in order to have the group’s rating label put on the video game case (McCann 2009; Sithigh 2010). This is as much a benefit to the producer as it is to the consumer as retailers will not stock an unrated video game (Anders 1999). Unlike groups such as BBFC (British Board of Film Commission), the ratings provided by PEGI and ESRB are not enforceable by law, therefore retailers do not have to restrict who they sell M/R rated video games to (Sithigh 2010). However, some retailers will still attempt to restrict M/R rated video game purchases to those who are old enough, in response to watch groups pressure (Anders 1999). Retailers are in the sometimes difficult position of conforming to consumer demands while also conforming to community ‘watch-dog’ groups who may wish restriction or even removal of certain games from the shelves (Hughes 2011; Anders 1999).

There are two main issues associated with rating systems and video games. The first, in turn, consists of two problems, namely, lack of parental involvement in the buying process of video games for children and lack of understanding, on the parents part, as to how the rating systems work (McCann 2009; Becker-Olsen et al. 2010). Inability to properly comprehend the rating labels on a video game has been found to be a prevalent problem for parents when determining if a video game is appropriate for their children (Anders 1999; Becker-Olsen et al. 2010). Some academics believe that a universal rating system needs to be developed to cover all forms of entertainment, (video games, film and television) and that this would, in turn, solve the problem (McCann 2009). Others, though, feel that educating the parents on the matter would be more effective. However, in order to educate parents, the initial problem, i.e. lack of parental involvement in the decision buying process, needs to be addressed (Becker-Olsen et al. 2010). Becker-Olsen et al. (2010) found that parents were confused by terms such as ‘animated violence’; instead of identifying this term with violent images, they interpreted it as ‘cartoon-type’ violence. Since the parents may not actually play video games themselves, they are unaware that animated violence simply means that the characters in the game are computer generated, and that graphic images of blood and gore can be achieved through this computer generation. Becker-Olsen et al. (2010) concluded that:

“Given that the evidence across these two studies shows (1) there are significant differences in ratings processing among parents and children, (2) parents do not always monitor or control video game choice, and (3) even if they do monitor choice via rating on box covers, they do not necessarily understand the various ratings and content descriptors,
it is important to re-evaluate the rating system and ensure that it meets the needs of parents as well as younger consumers.” (Becker-Olsen et al. 2010:91)

The second issue concerning video game ratings is the ‘forbidden fruit’ effect some ratings have on younger children. That is, if the game is rated as violent and only appropriate for those 16+, those under the age restriction will want to play the game more so than if there was a lower rating or no rating at all (Bijvank et al. 2009). Bijvank et al. (2009) concluded in their study that PEGI should be aware that its rating system, designed to protect children from inappropriate material, could be having the opposite effect. Unfortunately no constructive suggestions were offered as to how to solve this issue.

This concept of ‘forbidden fruit’ is similar to the concerns surrounding violent content in video games adversely effecting children. Anders (1999) argues that this attraction to violence is a culturally established want brought about through decades of media influence.

“Video games, violent or otherwise, would not be created and sold if there was no demand for them. The gaming industry is not the only seller of violence. Many argue that the entertainment industry, specifically film and television, was showing blood and gore when video games consisted of bouncing white balls.” (Anders 1999:273)

Anders (1999) makes a valid point, that is, before video games became graphically violent, films and television were exposing viewers to bloody violence. However that isn’t to say that the video game industry is exempt from responsibility, and regulation as to who is exposed to video game violence is still an important issue (Becker-Olsen et al. 2010; McCann 2009; Sithigh 2010; Bijvank et al. 2009).

The ratings assigned to most FPS have some level of age restriction recommendation, e.g. R15, R18, and M. As such, FPS will always be impacted by any changes in law regarding rating systems as well as any changes to the rating systems that, PEGI and ESRB, might make. Video game developers may find rating systems difficult because they don’t target their offering to consumers by age group; consumers are segmented by gaming behaviour, therefore developers are forced to conform to a system which doesn’t match their own segmentation methods (Anders 1999). If a video game is given an AO (Adults only) rating, for example, many retailers will not sell the game due to the hassle and complication of restricting those who can purchase it (Anders 1999). Therefore, if the rating systems become more stringent in grading the games, more FPS developers could find their product being rejected from mainstream distribution channels.
Subcultures and Community

Subcultures, Subcultures of consumption and Brand communities are three of the main classifications for consumer community/collectives (de Burgh-Woodman et al. 2007). Though each group classification has its own individual traits which provide some differentiation, they are all fairly similar in definition, that is they can all be broadly defined as a group which is distinct from society as a whole/ the mainstream (Solomon 2004; de Burgh-Woodman et al. 2007; Shankar 2006; McArthur 2009). How these groups differentiate from the mainstream is where the classification differences lie; brand communities, for example, are distinct in that they form around a specific brand and are an example of extreme brand loyalty (Muniz et al. 2001). Examples of consumer collectives which can be classified as a brand community include Harley Davidson and Apple; both these groups have a shared consciousness and uphold traditions and rituals associated with their chosen brand, which very clearly fit into the classification description of a brand community (de Burgh-Woodman et al. 2007; Muniz et al. 2001). Not all consumer collectives fit definitively into one classification, and gamer communities are such an example, those communities can fall into one or more of the classifications.

A brand community is often solely based around a brand; though the community may be run by customers (fans) of the brand, there is often still a fair amount of input from the company. A subculture of consumption is similar in that the consumption of a collection of brands or products is the ‘glue’ which keeps the group together (de Burgh-Woodman et al. 2007). Video game communities often fall into this classification because the consumption of the video game is the point of commonality between the community members. One of the key points of difference for a subculture of consumption and the other two groups is the non-interference with mainstream norms; this differs from a brand community which encourages, and sometimes even embraces, the mainstream norms and subcultures which often go against or reject mainstream norms (Ang et. al. 2020). Subcultures of consumption operate within the mainstream social status quo, a behaviour which many gamer communities follow, this is because most gamers do not fall into the stereotypical ‘geeky outcast’ personification.

One of the more prevalent consumer collectives is subcultures; a very common behaviour for this group is rebellion against the status quo (Shankar 2006). Of course, rebellion against the mainstream culture will not always be the main reason for the subculture’s creation, rather social ties such as similar interests and hobbies are more often the reason for the group’s continued cohesion (McArthur 2009). For many gamer communities, similar interests and hobbies, namely playing video games, are the main driving force for the group’s creation, though some adolescent
gamer communities probably do form around rebellious behaviour. Subcultures usually form around consumption of a broad offering category; for example an entire music genre opposed to a specific band or group (de Burgh-Woodman et al. 2007). Subcultures are not bound by physical locations; some cultures can in fact exist exclusively in an online environment with members never meeting in real life (McArthur 2009). This is the case for video game communities which have formed around MMOFPS\(^1\), where members don’t need to know anything about other members other than their username and gamer score.

Gamer communities vary widely; as such it is impossible to describe gaming culture through one definition of community. The communities formed around MMORPGs\(^2\) such as *World of Warcraft* are very different for the online communities which form around MMOFPSs\(^1\) such as *Call of Duty*. Though both communities are drawn together for similar reasons (to play a video game online with other gamers), the fundamentals which these communities are based on are as different as the genres of the games which the members play. In fact within marketing literature, consumer communities have yet to be defined by one set of standards due to the ever changing nature of the communities they are classifying (Solomon 2004; Shankar 2006).

Given how hard it is to classify consumer communities, due to their ever-changing social and cultural dynamics, it is important for game developers to interact with the communities which form around their games. In addition to this, the oversaturation of the FPS market means that game developers must maintain a presence in their consumers communities, to show that they are listening to consumer feedback and taking action on suggestions (Martin 2011). With better understanding of the community’s dynamics and behaviour, the developers can better produce an offering which best suits the needs of their consumers (Steinberg 2007).

**Authenticity**

Within the marketing literature, the term authenticity has been defined in a range of ways; authenticity can refer to the manufacturing process, the location the offering originates from, the age/heritage of the brand or even the content/makeup of the offering (Grayson et al. 2004; Beverland et al. 2008). This vagueness is similar within most consumption related literature with the concept’s definition being unclear and contested between different academic groups.

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\(^1\)Massive Multiplayer Online First Person Shooter

\(^2\)Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game
(Beverland et al. 2010). Though there is much ambiguity as to what authenticity is, the following definition is useful for this thesis’s purposes;

“... authenticity is associated with evidence and truth, and that consumers’ evaluation of cues for communicating ‘truth’ and ‘evidence’ is at the foundation of the dialogue between marketers and consumers over what is (or is not) authentic” (Jen-Yuan Liu et al. 2009:44).

Therefore, authenticity in the academic marketing context can be described as cues which indicate, to the consumer, that the marketer is being truthful about the origin/makeup of the offering. It is then plausible to suggest that these cues add value to the offering, in some instances, as perceived by the consumer. Depending on the context of the offering, the perceived value of the offering is consequently greater for the consumer than if the offering was without the authenticity cues. The desired depiction of authenticity, which the marketer endeavours to portray to the customer, can be hindered or even destroyed through the advertising and promotion used for the brand (Daschuk 2011; Beverland et al 2005). For example, Beverland et al. (2005) suggest that mass advertising methods, such as intense television campaigns, have a negative effect on some brands, especially those with a brand image related to or targeted at sub-cultures. The association of ‘mainstream’ can hinder or remove the peer-established authenticity cues which the brand had been previously displaying. Authenticity is a cornerstone concept. For many subcultures, for example, within youth punk culture, there is the concept of ‘selling out’ when brands associated with the culture use ‘mainstream’ methods in advertising and publicity (Daschuk 2011).

MacCannell (1973) contends that the concept of authenticity can be applicable to both the original object/event and a reproduction/re-creation of it, depending on the context of the object/event. For some consumer communities, authenticity is one of the main drivers in constructing community experiences; this also applies to gamer communities (Handler et al. 1988). More ‘hard-core’ gamers may seek authenticity in their gaming experience with gameplay details such as cross-hairs on the screen or for the enemy characters to react appropriately to player actions. For example, shooting another character in the head should result in the head being reduced to a bloody mess. However, this authenticity has limits; gamers do not want to play a WWII game in which they spend the game sitting in a cold, wet trench picking lice out of their hair. Beverland et al. (2010, 2008 & 2005) describes authenticity as a historical concept, suggesting that firms with older brands are wise to draw on the heritage of the brand to highlight its perceived authenticity. He gives an example of clothing brands which have been established for 100 years promoting their lengthy heritage. This, in turn, highlights the authenticity cue which is established with the idea that an older brand must be good if it has been around for this long.
Though there are understandings of authenticity in marketing literature, a game’s heritage will most likely not have much impact on the consumers’ video game experience, due to the industry’s relatively short history. However, the perceived authenticity of gameplay within a video game is of concern for many FPS games. Since the gameplay of a FPS is very similar to the real life activity of shooting a gun, gamers may have an expectation as to how the gameplay should function. The level of required authenticity in a FPS is a very important consideration for a games developer.

**Gender roles and perceptions in video games**

Another research focus related to video games is the imbalance in female gamers to male gamers and the skewed representation of female characters in games themselves (Schott et al. 2000; Hartmann et al. 2006). In the past, playing video games was seen primarily as a pastime for boys, however with demographics of gamers slowly moving towards a more equal split between the genders, this assumption is no longer valid (Hartmann et al. 2006). Though more males proportionally still play video games than females, the size of the difference is declining. Thornham (2008) found that males will play for longer periods of time and have more play sessions per week compared to females, she also found that the women in her study would actively involve others in their gaming experience more so then males. This was shown in how female participants would ask for input from those in the room with them, mainly in the form of advice as to how to proceed or questions as to how to perform an action. This was in contrast to the male participants in the study who did not ask for advice or comments from others in the room, and Thornham (2008) suggests that since men are more competitive in their gaming behaviour that they prefer to not show ‘weakness’ in their gaming abilities.

Hartmann et al. (2006) investigated the in gender differences in gamers in Germany compared to similar studies of gender differences of gamers the US. They observed that female gamers prefer a less competitive gaming experience, picking games such as Myst which has a puzzle solving focus rather than a competitive one. Schott et al. (2000) also found that female gamers seek out games which are less competitive, as well as having a tendency to prefer games of a role playing nature or which involve playing as an animal character.

Eastin (2006) provided some interesting conclusions regarding the differences in aggression levels in women when playing as a female character compared to when they were playing as a male character. Eastin (2006) found that women did in fact exhibit more aggressive tendencies (especially toward other women) after playing a FPS as a female character but that, when playing as a male character, aggressive tendencies decreased considerably. Schott et al. (2000) made an
interesting point that due to gaming’s masculine association, many women chose to play outside ‘male-dominate environments’ as they found it more rewarding without the male influence. They go on to explain that many of their female gamer participants showed an interest in playing as female characters instead of just male characters. Both Eastin (2006) and Schott et al. (2000) conclude that providing a female character option to female gamers could increase female gamer’s desire to play video games. Schott et al. (2000) commented that “for adult gamers it would seem that male gaming habits compete with other activities while girl gamers’ gaming is often consigned to second place following housework” (2000: 49). This finding contradicts the findings of Thornham (2008) who suggests the opposite behaviour in her research. As a female gamer I would agree with Schott et al., I have found that I view playing video games as a ‘special treat’ where as my partner will play games whenever he feels like it.

Many in the literature believe that females desire, and perhaps require, different styles of video games than those favoured by men (Dickey 2006; Schott et al. 2000). Schott et al. (2000) found this in the comments made by their female participants regarding the lack of playable female characters within games. Dickey (2006) investigated the issues from the perspective of creating educational video game material specifically for girls. He concluded that since leisure video game tastes were different between girls and boys, educational video games should also be presented differently.

The second issue relates to video games and gender is the portrayal of female video game characters. This is both in the sexualisation of women in video games and the lack of female character options. As discussed by both Dicky (2006) and Schott et al. (2000), it is becoming apparent that female gamers want to play as female characters, however, this is often not an option for them. Additionally, when there is a female character option, the character is usually personified as the ‘sexy’ generic ‘chick’ character, which is in contrast to the male characters that have more extensive character and personality depth (Chipman 2011). Chipman (2011) discusses this in his video article which reviews the debate between feminist groups, who speak out about the imbalance between male and female characters in video games, and male gamer groups who perceive the activism as an attack on their entertainment medium. The debate as to the depiction of female video game characters is an ongoing one which needs further study in order to establish exactly what the problem(s) are and the best course of action with which to resolve them.

With an increase in the number of female gamers it is important to understand the differences in behaviour and attitudes between the genders (Steinberg 2007; Martin 2011). Female gamers have different tastes and preferences in video game genres and female gamers may also perceive the offering (the video game) differently to male gamers. It is therefore important to include
female gamers in this research. When developing a FPS game, producers must consider that, even though they may not be specifically targeting female gamers, this group will still be exposed to and may play the video game. Since the female to male gamer ratio is becoming more balanced, it may not be appropriate or sensible to target a FPS solely at a male audience.

The addictive properties of video games

Some gamers find that video game realities (especially online game realities such as World of Warcraft and Counter Strike) are more ‘realistic’ and meaningful to them than their ‘real life’ in physical reality (Frostling-Henningsson 2009). This distorted sense of reality could have links to issues surrounding video game addiction, with gamers losing the ability to function in ‘normal reality’. It is still disputed as to whether video game addiction is an actual physiological condition for some gamers and whether or not it is a serious issue. There are, of course, many positive aspects to playing online video games; for example, the ability to join different people together that would have otherwise not interacted (Frostling-Henningsson 2009). Within the virtual reality of the online video game, gamers can express themselves differently from how they would in their normal physical ‘real life’, this allows for gamers to be who they want to be by expressing and representing themselves in an entirely different way from their actual ‘real life’ self (Wood 2008).

Wood (2008) and Blaszczynski (2008) both argue that the issue of video game addiction is over-emphasised in the literature due to its high profile presence in the media. Indeed, video game addiction could be another case of the ‘Tinkerbelle effect’, where popular hearsay is adversely affecting academic interpretation, just as has been seen with the discussions around video games and aggression. Tinkerbelle is suspected in this case because there are currently no standard criteria to diagnose and measure addiction to video games (Blaszczynski 2008). Though several academics have produced their own criteria to diagnose video game addiction, none of the methods have been accepted by a reputed medical group, such as the World Health Organisation (Wood 2008).

Van Rooij et al. (2010) argues that, though there is not enough agreement amongst academics in deciding on a set of criteria, there is still an issue with gamers who, for whatever reason, are playing more than may be considered healthy for them. So though the issue may not be as extreme as to be labelled an ‘addiction’, an issue may still exist; there are “cases of troubled individuals who no doubt play video games more than is good for them” (Wood 2008: 169). The majority of video games which are being directly associated with addiction are Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG), not console games (Van Rooij et al. 2010). Playing video
games excessively has yet to be classed as an addiction driven behaviour, however, it has been found to be an activity that can contribute to stress relief and relaxation (Frostling-Henningsson 2009; Van Rooij et al. 2010; Wood 2008).

Just as there is debate around the theory that violent video games promote aggressive behaviour, the unresolved issue of video game addiction is also a factor which needs to be considered by a developer for a FPS. This issue is almost exclusively linked to online gaming (MMOGs), and with many new FPS incorporating an online component into the game, this will continue to be an issue for the genre (Martin 2011). However, further research is needed before conclusive theories can be developed regarding the course of action developers can take in protecting their consumers.

Summary

Due to the fast-paced nature of the video game industry, a gap has emerged between empirical experience and academic theory. Indeed the literature is only able to take a ‘snap-shot in time’ with regards to what makes gamers tick. However, that does not mean the literature cannot help explain components of gamer behaviour, and it still provides important pieces to help understand the participation puzzle. Further studies do, however, need to be conducted regarding the effects video games have on gamers (young and old) to see if aggression and addiction are truly harmful problems or just issues which affect a small percentage of those who play video games. The following sections will show how I am contributing to our understanding of these concerns, from my perspective as a gamer, a researcher and as a marketer.

Key points from the literature review:

- While there is no evidence of a causal relationship between violent video games and aggressive behaviour in gamers it is still a heavily disputed topic in need of more empirical primary research

- Video game ratings are an important factor for parents to consider when monitoring their children’s video game activities, however many parents feel they don’t need to monitor their children’s video games or simply do not fully comprehend the rating system.

- Video game communities and subculture groups are difficult to define within the classifications presented in the literature because the dynamics of the communities change frequently.

- Authenticity is strongly linked to the immersive experience the FPS video game provides.
• The way women are portrayed in video games is often skewed towards the sexualised end of the spectrum which causes disagreements between feminist groups and many male gamer groups.

• Though some individuals may play video games excessively, ‘addiction’ to video games is not seen as a mental health problem in the traditional sense of the definition but is still seen by some groups to be as serious an issue as alcoholism or gambling addiction.
Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodological approach which this research adopts to answer the question of consumer expectations regarding FPS. First I will set out the Research objectives for this study and give justifications for the research approach as well as the research method. The ethical considerations which needed to be considered for the study will be discussed. Finally I will explain the data collection process and the research method which was used as well as detailing the limitations of the method.

Research objectives

The original research questions for this study were concerned with the specific impact graphics had on the gaming experience for those who played FPS. The driving force which sells video games has largely been assumed to be the quality of the graphics (LaViola 2008). This has been a general industry assumption for many years mainly because, in the past, it was true. However, after a pilot study was conducted it became apparent that this may not be the case anymore, and though graphics quality was a definitive factor which the gamers considered in a FPS, it was not the central one. I therefore broadened the research question to:

**An investigation into the key components for a First Person Shooter video game, which will fulfil the expectations of both ‘hardcore’ and ‘casual’ gamers.**

The main objective for this study was to determine if there was some sort of ‘magic formula’ with which to create a desirable FPS video game. This main objective was broken down into two secondary objectives:

*Objective 1:* What components of the video game experience have the most positive impact on gamers for a FPS?

*Objective 2:* Do some components take precedence over others?

Justification for the research approach

A qualitative approach was used for this research project because the main goal of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of what gamers expect and desire from a FPS video game. Aaker et al. (2005) explains that a qualitative approach helps to create this deeper understanding because the data is drawn from the consumers’ (in this case gamers’) actual experiences. With this personal and ‘real life’ data, the researcher is able to better understand the consumers’ behaviours and opinions (Creswell 2003). Another strength of a qualitative approach is its ability
to adapt the data collection process while the data is being collected. For example, if the original line of questioning is proving unfruitful, the interviewer can change questioning tact and look into topics which are of real concern or interest to the interviewees. This is unlike a quantitative approach, where the questions are predetermined and cannot be changed during the data collection process (Hair et al. 2008; Aaker et al. 2005).

Justification for the research method: Online discussion

The resulting method used for the main data collection component of this study was an *Online Discussion*; this method used components from netnography and focus group methodology (Xun et al. 2010; Kozinets 2010). The online discussion was very similar to a group interview or a focus group with the key difference being that the discussion was not real time, so participants had time to think about their responses before they delivered them. Participants could also read over what participants’ comments and agree or disagree with them. In this way the method is much more like a conversation and provides a more interactive and genuine series of responses.

Considerable time was saved by discussing online and having the comments ‘pre-transcribed’, thus leaving time to ask more questions and gain more detailed insight into what was being discussed. Since I was able to read over the comments multiple times while the discussion was taking place, I was able to make sense of comments and ask more probing questions or get clarifications on contradictions. This ‘slowing down’ of the discussion allowed for more thought-out comments from myself as well as the participants (Sandlin 2007; Kozinets 2010).

A major advantage for online discussion over more conventional real-time discussions is the ability to see contradictions in participants’ comments and gain clarification more swiftly, as opposed to interviewing the participant and not being able to get clarification unless a secondary interview is conducted (Aaker et al. 2005). This is often some time after the comment is made so the participant is less likely to remember the context in which they were commenting in (Creswell 2003). Since the comments were being analysed as they were being posted, clarification from participants could be gained within hours of the comments being posted. In addition to this the context which the comments were made were still available to the participants so they could easily go back to the comments and see what was said in its original context (Malhotra 2010; Creswell 2003). Just as with a face to face group discussion, the participants could see each other’s comments and could comment on the other participants’ comments.
Summary of advantages for this study’s method:

- Easy access to participants (Hair et al. 2008)
- Quick transcription of data collected
- Less-judging environment, so participants were more likely to comment without fear of criticism (Malhotra 2010; Aaker et al. 2005)
- The method allowed for a conversation between not only myself and the participants but also between the participants which provided a more interactive and genuine series of responses.
- This ‘slowing down’ of the discussion allowed for more thought out comments from myself as well as the participants, which ultimately gave more insightful results (Sandlin 2007; Kozinets 2010).
- I was able to read over the comments multiple times while the discussion was still taking place, this also allowed me to see any contradictions in participants’ comments and gain clarification more swiftly.
- Qualitative method allows for detail and explanation of the topics discussed (Urquhart et al. 2010; Simmons 2010)

Research ethics

It is important to consider the ethical implications of any research project, both with regards to the researcher’s motivations as well as the impact the study could have on participants (Hair et al. 2008). It was therefore important to ensure that participants were well informed prior to taking part in the study as well as providing them the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. Before any research was conducted for this study, ethics approval was sort from the University of Otago’s Marketing Department within the universities guidelines for ethical research. A consent form was also developed (See appendix A and B for a copy of the focus group and online consent forms) and once both of these documents had been approved the study was able to begin.

Participants for the pilot study were given a hard copy of the consent form which outlined the study’s intentions and their rights as participants, and once the forms had been signed, the discussion could begin. A similar electronic form was presented to the online discussion group, and participants were told that by posting comments in the discussion they were agreeing to take part in the study. All participants were told that they could withdraw at any time and their
comments would be removed from the data collected. No participants from the pilot study or the online discussion chose to withdraw during the study.

**Data collection**

Before the main discussion was conducted, a pilot focus group was held; this helped to test the questions and topics which were to be covered in the main study. The pilot study covered several topics; some were predetermined before the focus group started, whereas others arose during the discussion.

The original topics which were decided upon before the focus group were:

- Motivations for becoming a gamer
- Graphics quality in video games and how necessary or unnecessary it is in selection of a FPS
- What components are necessary for a ‘good game’
- Discussion surrounding the components of FPS

Additional comments which arose from the discussion were:

- The appropriateness of graphic gore in video games
- Children being exposed to R rated video games
- Console gaming vs. PC gaming

From this pilot discussion it was determined that the original question, which just focused on how video game graphics impacted FPS video games, was too narrow and the protocol for the main online discussion was adjusted accordingly.

Aaker et al. (2005) discuss the importance of providing a comfortable environment for interviewees, both physically and physiologically. This was achieved for the pilot focus group by conducting the interview at my own home and providing the respondents with ‘homely’ refreshments such as tea and coffee as well as homemade cookies. Participants were able to sit on comfortable couches in my living room which was warm and inviting, this in turn helped bring about a sense of comfort and relaxation for the participants.

For the online discussion I used an application which all my respondents were familiar with and comfortable with using namely Facebook. I also closed the group off once I had a sufficient number of participants, this meant that the discussion was not posted publicly (to non-group members) and allowed for a more confidential environment. To provide an incentive for my online respondents I held several prize draws for a ‘chocolate basket’, this prize consisted of
several kinds of chocolate to the value of around $30 per prize. I held the prize draws over the course of the discussion period (from the end of March to the start of May 2011) in order to keep the participants interested and commenting on the discussion.

**Sampling: Snowball**

The preliminary focus group and the online discussion both followed the same sampling technique, which was a snowball method. I first enlisted those in my own social circle who I knew to be ‘gamers’, I then got these participants to gather others whom they knew (but I didn’t) to participate. A Snowball sampling collection method was appropriate for this study because I was endeavouring to get the insight of a select community group: Gamers. When collecting participants for specialised groups, such as this one, it is suitable to use this method (Hair et al. 2008; Malhotra 2010; Aaker et al 2005).

Most of the participant collection was done through the Facebook page up specifically for the study; the group was entitled ‘talk about video games for cookies’. The page collected 29 ‘followers’ with around 19 of these being active participants in the discussions, with the remaining 10 only giving a few comments each. Once participants had joined the Facebook page they were invited to take part in the pilot study; then when I had received six volunteers, I conducted the focus group at my own home and compensated the participants with homemade cookies. An example of the discussion forum which the online discussion was conducted on, can be seen in appendix C.

**Participants**

The participants who were selected for this study were a fair representation of the NZ gaming community because the group had a relatively even distribution of hardcore and casual gamers. In addition to this the sample also had an almost even split between male and female gamers which was an accurate reflection of the market. As well as a representative range of ages, and a good spread for average ‘play time’ amongst the participants. In addition to this, those who didn’t regularly play FPS were also used in order to better understand why they didn’t often play FPS. The table detailing the demographic information, which was collected from the participants during the study, can be found in appendix D.

A summary of these demographic findings can be seen below:

- The average age of participants was 23.9 years old
- The average number of years participants had been playing video games was 14.2 years
• Most (23 out of 29) of the participants were currently living in New Zealand
• 48% of the sample were female and 52% were male.
• Of the 29 participants, 23 were university students (which accounts for 80% of the participants)
• Of these 29 participants, 19 were actively commenting on the discussion board with the other 10 only making a few comments. Since the study was conducted on Facebook, many of the participants found it easier to use the Like feature in the discussion as opposed to writing their own comments. Many of those who did not comment as actively as the main 19 participants used this feature to show their views on the questions.

The first thing which was established during the online discussion was what level of intensity the participants gamed at.

The below table illustrates this distribution of the participants’ ‘hardcore-ness’ in regards to video games:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gaming intensity scale</th>
<th>% of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This poll showed that there was a good spread of ‘casual gamers’ and ‘hardcore’ gamers participating in the study.

Research Method

The central goal for a grounded theory methodology is to build a theory without the influence of other existing theories on the same topic (Ng et al. 2008; Glaser 2010; Urquhart et al. 2010; Simmons 2010; Glaser et al. 1967). Grounded theory was chosen for this research project because it allowed for detailed exploration of the expectations of gamers regarding FPS without the
influence of predetermined assumptions which the literature provides. This method also allowed for the research project and questions to develop outside of a predetermined context, this in turn revealed that though this topic is definitely a consideration which needs to be explored, there is very little literature covering the topic. This could be due to the fact that the gaming industry is still ‘young’ in comparison to other entertainment industries, such as movies or television, and as such has not been subject to the detailed academic review which other entertainment forms have received (Steinberg 2007; Laramée 2005).

There is ongoing debate as to how grounded theory research projects should be conducted, most notably between the two founders of the methodology; Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Urquhart et al. 2010; Simmons 2010). However, the main focus of the methodology largely agreed on by both groups and that is to build/create new theory (Urquhart et al. 2010). How this new theory is constructed, however, is where the disagreements start.

Simmons (2010) discusses how Glaser and Strauss differed in how the methodology should progress. Strauss felt that the theory should evolve and that no individual is void of outside influence before they conduct research. Glaser disagreed, and still believes that the main point of the theory was to get researchers to formulate theories from the data only. This being the case, the researcher should endeavour to not let their own knowledge of the topic colour their investigation in any way (Ng et al. 2008). I am of the opinion that this can’t be the case, using my research as an example; I am, and have been, interested in the video game industry for several years and as a result I am constantly being exposed to industry opinions and theories. I could not have approached this research topic completely uninfluenced by pre-existing theory.

Myers (1997) and Glaser (2010) are of the opinion that grounded theory is ‘paradigmatically neutral’; that it doesn’t really matter what your epistemology is as a researcher because the method is about taking an unbiased or ‘neutral’ stance towards the data. Urquhart et al. (2010) does not directly disagree with this opinion but adds that a researcher’s “ontological and epistemological position will impact on their coding and analysis of the data” (Urquhart et al. 2010:360). So though the data collection side of the method can be relatively bias-free, the analysis of that data is going to be impacted by personal opinion, despite the researcher’s best intentions to do otherwise. This being recognised, I endeavoured to collect my data without using my prior knowledge of the video game community, and I openly acknowledge that my analysis has been influenced by my own perspective. However, to compensate for this I have been explicit and drawn direct attention to this element.
Thematic Analysis

There are numerous methods for conducting a thematic analysis; however all these methods are based around similar structures which endeavour to move the researcher through the three stages of ‘knowledge acquisition’ namely observing, understanding and interpreting (Boyatzis 1998). I have used an inductive approach, as opposed to a deductive approach, in that the themes were created by what was found in the data, not theoretical literature (Braun et al. 2006; Smith et al. 1992). It was appropriate to use this method because the study was conducted within a grounded theory framework. If a different methodology which involved reviewing the literature before the data was collected had been used, a deductive approach could have been adopted (Braun et al. 2006).

The following analysis protocol has been adapted from Braun et al. (2006) and was used in the data analysis for this study;

1. Immersion with the data: this can include the transcription of the data but is mostly achieved through reading through the data several times.

2. Producing initial codes: once the data is familiar, the researcher goes slowly through the data again, but this time identifies all the issues/topics present in the discussion by coding them

3. Finding the Themes: the codes are grouped together into themes. Creating a mind map often helps to visually show the relationships between themes

4. Revising and defining the Themes: the themes are reviewed. The themes which cover more than one issue are divided and the themes which overlap too much with others are merged. A final mind map shows how the themes relate to each other

5. Naming the themes: once the final themes have been decided on, the themes are named with one word or short phrase titles

6. Results: the themes are explained in detail, using vivid examples to describe the themes and their components

Limitations to this research approach:

Of course, with every research method there are disadvantages and limitations (Hair et al. 2008). The first for this study being that participants could get side tracked easily from the main discussion; using a social media site (Facebook) as the platform for the discussion meant that participants were being distracted by other issues and stimuli. In addition to this, I could not use
hermeneutical phenomenology as I am within the culture being studied. However, on the other side of the argument, since I was a part of the gamer community I was able to relate and therefore explain the behaviours and opinions exhibited by the participants. As with face to face interviews, such as focus groups, there was a chance that the participants could be influenced by other participant comments. Comments which had come before could lead the participant to change the answer they would have otherwise given (Myers 1997).
Findings

This chapter will cover the analysis and findings from the main online discussion. First a review of the thematic analysis procedure will outline how I did the analysis of the data. A summary of the online discussion will then be provided; this summary will illustrate the themes which became apparent from the discussion by giving representative quotes from the data. Mind maps have been created for both the initial and final themes, to help illustrate the themes and the relationship between them.

Thematic analysis

Immersion with the data

Since I was able to read over the data as it was being collected, I was well immersed in it before I started formally going through the thematic coding process. However, before proceeding to identify the initial codes, I re-read the discussion transcripts to ensure that I knew the data thoroughly. Since there were 27 pages (14,500 words) of data to review, this step took some time.

Producing initial codes

Once I had become fully familiar with the data, I began noting all the comments and patterns in the discussion, being careful to note everything because I did not know what was important/unimportant at this stage. Braun et al. (2006) explains that this is a vital first step, which should not be rushed and requires the researcher to go through the data several times. These initial codes included topics such as difference in opinion between genders on certain topics, comments regarding social interactions while playing video games and video games which had a strong emotional impact on the participants.

Finding the Themes

Once I had identified the initial codes I then proceeded to cluster the codes into groups or ‘themes’. The grouping was conducted by carefully putting codes which had similar themes together in small groups; these small groups were then merged with other small groups. This was continued until I was satisfied that all the codes were grouped in an appropriate theme which represented it accurately. The themes were then put into a table and an example quote or two was added to exemplify the meaning of each theme. Thirteen themes were established in the initial theme identification stage and these are presented as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Initial themes</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Storyline**     | Very closely linked to Plot, specifically refers to how engaging the game’s storyline is, includes depth of narrative;  
“In general, a strong storyline is essential. Though I liked Wolfenstein and Quake, I gravitated towards Half life not only because of its mechanics but also and more importantly because of its narrative.” M  
“Storyline has to be well thought out, and campaigns not too linear” M |
| **Customisation** | The ability to add modded content to the game; including clothing, weapons, characters etc;  
“... you need to be able to have max customisation (equipment, guns etc)” M  
“Oh another important aspect for me is the ability to become your own 'person' in the game. for example the ability to customise your character” M |
| **Progress**      | Progress is measureable, by levels or achievements;  
“... and there needs to be some sort of progress thingy (levels etc)” M |
| **Statistics**    | Similar to progress but specific to statistical data on a player’s abilities (eg number of head shots, number of team kills, fastest time to finish a level etc);  
“Statistics are easy to collect and they are a lot of fun to read when you enter that doubting ‘why do I play this game again’ mode. Stat-based achievements are also a new development that has made gaming much more fun.” M  
“I think stats are an integral part of what makes a FPS fun. Either winning the round, or the map rotation, or just getting 3 head shots in a row are good examples of this.” M |
| **Realism**       | Regards the components of the game which the gamers want to be realistic (eg shape and look of real life gun models);  
“the fact that you have to take cover when the bad guys are shooting at you enriches the game (personally) as this adds a new level of strategy and 'perhaps' a level of realism” M |
| **Graphics**      | Graphics which were either aesthetically pleasing or of a high level of quality;  
“but graphics because I like more realistic games and also because I didn't buy a 42” HD TV for nothing” M  
“I'm usually not too worried about graphics, but for an FPS I think it does add quite a lot to the game ... It's easier to immerse yourself in an environment when that environment looks alive.” |
| **Variety**       | A wide range of available game items such a weaponry or armour, also the option to choose the characters gender and other personality specs;  
“A variety of weapons also makes a game, especially if you can mix and match your own combination.” M  
“Variability are good in an FPS, I really don’t like destroying something on a map and then come back to the exact same map to destroy something in the same place as previously” M |
| **Controls**      | How intuitive are the controls to use; |
“I also think that controls make or break a game for me. I have not been able to get into Halo or Gear of War as the controls of the Xbox are borderly un-useable for me. I played far too much with keyboard controls plus mouse, and find XBox clunky and un-intuitive” M

“controls make a big difference - I tend to stick to PC if I'm playing FPS just for the difference in precision a keyboard/mouse gives” M

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenging</th>
<th>The difficulty level could be adjusted and was high enough to provide a significant challenge;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“after plot the action is a close second, meaning that the fighting has to be engaging, challenging and enjoyable” M</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Difficulty - i like a FPS that takes a while and hence challenge” M</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multiplayer</th>
<th>Having a multiplayer component available, both online and off;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Personally i find online multiplayer fps' to be the best, l4d2 despite being a 'zombie' game has a very heavy fps element in campaign and online multiplayer” M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Re-Playability</th>
<th>There was enough interesting components of the game to make it worthwhile re-playing;</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Re-playability/ Variety of experience - if I fork out for it, and then clock it in a week and find replaying is boring/no-challenge/no-excitement, then it is not a good FPS” M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I would rank them in levels... at the top level I would put re-playability (which implies emphases on MP [multiplayer] mode as even the most awesome and epic campaign gets boring after a few times clocking it” M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immersion</th>
<th>How easy it is to get 'lost' in the game/engrossed in the story;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I like a decent story to back the game and add to its immersion” M</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I love being able to customize my character lots and it again helps with immersion” F</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Plot</th>
<th>Very closely linked to storyline, specifically refers to how engaging the games plot is, includes depth of story;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“In a FPS, the plot tends to be more of a framing device.” M</td>
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</table>
Revising and defining the Themes

These themes were then reviewed; themes that were closely linked were collapsed together and themes which had too many patterns in them were regarded as sub themes. The following table shows the relationships between the initial themes:

![Diagram showing the relationships between initial themes]

(Dotted arrows indicate a moderate relationship between the themes)

From these initial themes, the theme **Plot** and **Storyline** were merged, as these two themes covered overlapping concepts. The new theme, **Storyline**, then became one of the four sub-themes for the main theme **Immersion**. The other two sub-themes which also come under **Immersion** were **Realism** and **Graphics**; all these sub-themes had similarities regarding their immersive properties but also had their own distinct features. **Re-Playability** was relabelled as **Playability** to better describe the theme and **Controls** was merged with this theme as well. **Customisation** was merged with **Variety**, since both themes covered similar topics; this sub-theme, along with **Challenging** and **Multiplayer**, became part of the main theme **Playability**. **Progress** and **Statistics** were merged and became the sub-theme **Progress**, which was added to the main theme **Playability**.
Online discussion

The discussions for both the pilot focus group and the online discussion started with the probing question of ‘what is your favourite video game?’ This question cannot be answered with a simple name of a game, and led the participants to discussing the genres which they prefer to play as well as the different games which they played most often. Therefore, this rather ‘loaded question’ helped in breaking the ice for the discussions, allowing me to proceed to the core questions more quickly.

It was originally thought that graphics quality was one of the main ‘selling points’ for gamers when evaluating a video game, especially that of FPS (LaViola 2008). This aspect was probed in-depth. Since industry status quo suggests that this is still the case, I was interested to see if the gamers felt the same way, or, if in fact, other components were considered as or more important. The pilot focus group indicated that this may not be the case, so the online discussion questions were altered and specific questions regarding graphics quality were removed. I was, however, still interested to see how gamers felt about graphics quality, so once the topic of graphics quality was brought up in the discussion by one of the participants, I probed the topic to see what they would say.

Video game graphics, with particular regard to FPS, were viewed in several ways; first that quality graphics added to the overall video game experience;
Good graphics added to the game:

“I’m usually not too worried about graphics, but for an FPS I think it does add quite a lot to the game” M

“FPS aiming for a more realistic feel need good graphics... I think good graphics have just become an immaterial expectation,” M

“I want top end graphics in an FPS ... the better the graphics the easier it is to play” M

As the discussion progressed, the discussion delved deeper into the issue and it was concluded that good graphics are an integral component but are not the central factor of a good video game:

Good graphics are one of the ‘cornerstones’ for a good video game, not the ‘centre pillar’:

“Game designers need to understand that graphics are an element of good game design, but they are in no way the key element or the most necessary” F

“Graphics should back up a game not make them.” F

“Also if you’re going to cut out gameplay and plot and focus on graphics you may as well make movies” M

Indeed, the discussion showed that the focus surrounding graphics quality should be around keeping balance with other components, such as plot. Too much effort invested in graphics could lead to poor quality plot or weaponry design;

It’s about balance and context:

“I think if the graphics and other aspects of the game (i.e. intensity, plot and sound) have to interact in a cohesive manner the total experience is greatly increased. However on the flip side of the coin I Hate long loading times! So, sometimes excellent graphics can be a pain in the ass (especially on computer!)” M

“I want the graphics to fit the game. If it’s a silly game I quite like to have the more cartoony graphics. The more serious games it’s nicer to have the better graphics as it adds to the sense of immersion” M

These comments also showed that too much emphasis on graphics could hinder other aspects of the game, such as gameplay or story, diminishing the overall quality of the game;

Too much on graphics can hinder other aspects of the game:

“Crysis is more a piece of benchmarking software than an actual game.” F
I then asked the participants what they expected of FPS graphics. The overwhelming majority decided that they didn’t really think much about what they wanted from the graphics component, just that they expected the game to hold to the ‘current standards’;

*Expectation:*

“I just expect the graphics to be clear, consistent, and at the current standard set in the market place.” M

“I really like to have good graphics in my games but I don’t think any game -needs- good graphics to be a good game but almost every game can benefit from them.” F

Once we had exhausted the discussion surrounding graphics quality, we moved onto other components which help to enhance the gaming experience. The discussion turned to what had disappointed gamers most in a video game;

*Disappointments:*

“I have found most FPS shooters on PS or XBOX disappointing because they look great, the weapons are cool, story is cool, gameplay is a good level of difficult but then I go to play them and end up spending the whole game trying to control my character and actual hit something. This is disappointing and frustrating, leading to me not bothering to play the game” M

“The bugs that hadn’t been worked out just ruined the experience” M

Following on with the impact the emotion of disappointment has on gamers, I asked what emotions in general the participants had felt while playing video games;

*Emotional reactions to games:*

“I normally feel pretty stoked when I have completed a game and the last mission/boss/fight/puzzle was really, really difficult. “ M

“If a character dies, it can be traumatising … but it also adds weight to the choices you make. This is especially true if the game has managed to make you connect with the character beforehand.” M

Finally, I asked the participants to briefly explain what a FPS ‘must-have’ in order to be a ‘good FPS’. One respondent summed up the group as a whole well with this comment:
‘Must-haves’ for a FPS:

“FPS in my opinion is driven by the action and how enjoyable this is. If the action is good (lots going on) it is much easier to get more involved in the game. Personally I think FPS still need plot too or all the action is kind of pointless.” M

These comments, along with the themes from the thematic content analysis, gave me a rich overview of what these gamers expected in a FPS, as well as what components were more important than others. The following chapter will explore these components in detail.
Discussion

This chapter will investigate how the themes and sub-themes relate to each other as well as to the appropriate literature. First an overview of the relationships between the themes and the literature will be provided. Then a detailed discussion on each area which was covered in the online discussion will be presented. Finally the topics which were outlined in the literature review will be re-evaluated, taking into account the data collected from this study.

The table below shows which sub-themes from the discussion affect the issues identified in the literature review:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature topics</th>
<th>Authenticity</th>
<th>Gender roles</th>
<th>Aggression</th>
<th>Game ratings</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Addictive properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-themes</td>
<td>Realism</td>
<td>Graphics</td>
<td>Realism</td>
<td>Realism</td>
<td>Multiplayer</td>
<td>Multiplayer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Storyline</td>
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</table>

The table below gives exemplar quotes for each of the sub-themes reviewed in the following discussion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>“the fact that you have to take cover when the bad guys are shooting at you enriches the game, as this adds a new level of strategy and perhaps a level of realism” M.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Aggression and video games

The two sub-themes which impacted this topic were *Realism* and *Graphics*; both of these sub-themes came under the main theme of *Immersion*. As was expected the participants’ views on the issue was that violent video games do not make gamers more aggressive or violent. Instead they explained how, from their perspective, aggressive and violent tendencies are pre-existing issues which an individual may have and that antisocial behaviour can be caused by any number of ‘triggers’. In fact, several participants indicated that playing video games was a way of venting aggressive feelings or relieving a bad mood. They went on to explain that many individuals who are overly stressed and do have aggression issue will be less inclined to exhibit real life aggression if they have an avenue through which to safely vent such as video games.

“I also feel that it’s a way to vent. The killing of a video game character is calming in a way and probably prevents some people following through in real life” M

The respondents also described how there is a ‘line’ between video game violence and real life violence, dividing what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. According to respondents, ‘normal’ individuals know where this metaphorical line is and know that though some behaviour is acceptable in the virtual world of a video game, it may not be acceptable in real life.

“Even those ‘desensitized’ to violence through video games can generally recognize that there’s a line” F

There was a considerable amount of discussion surrounding whether video games caused violent behaviour in gamers. Two participants suggested that the tendency to ‘do crazy stuff’ is a pre-existing condition which would/could be triggered by any number of media;

“Also the people who do crazy things because of violence in games are going to go crazy without them.” F

“Those who aren't capable of drawing that line tend to already have existing issues, rather than the game itself being responsible for causing violence.” M

One participant gave a very good evaluation of the debate, explaining that it is personality traits which cause violent behaviour and that these same traits draw adolescents in particular, to violent video games;

“An aggressive child is more likely to have their aggressive tendencies bolstered by a violent video game, and have them sustained in outside behaviours, whereas a relatively mild child - whilst experiencing the same spike in competitive arousal during gameplay - does not have that carry over into their outside behaviours. Also, there is the distinct...
possibility that aggressive children will be more inclined to play violent video games; and that their aggressive or violent behaviour in life is not necessarily BECAUSE they played violent games, but because of their nature, with the video game being a sign of it rather than a factor in it” F

This statement was agreed with by many of the other respondents who added comments such as;

“It’s the nature or character of the person playing [the video game] that draws them to one type of gameplay or another” M

Since all the participants played video games in some capacity, is not surprising that they were all of the opinion that video games were a positive means of entertainment:

“Games are a form of escapism” F

Playing video games as a form of escapism and relaxation was a common perspective held by most of the participants. Engaging in a violent activity in a non-destructive environment, such as a video game world, was considered a form of relaxation for some of the participants:

“As to violence in video games sometimes it can be great!” F

An interesting perspective that emerged was that video game violence was still not as gruesome as in one’s imagination, though this would not be the case for all individuals; one gamer explained how this was the case for himself:

“My imagination is more brutal than any game could possibly provide so when I read a violent book with rape and etc it is a far more grotesque experience for me than any game I play,” M

The gap between gamer perspectives on video games causing aggression and that of much academic study is quite wide. The perspective that violent video games cause aggression behaviour was strongly refuted by the participants of this study. Like myself, the participants have a bias towards this debate, since they themselves are gamers. However, with unreliable evidence to the contrary, the perspective that video games don’t cause aggressive behaviour in adult gamers would seem to be a stronger argument in the case of this study. Until a definitive method of measuring aggression in individuals is developed and several detailed studies are conducted the debate will no doubt continue.

The controversy around violence and aggression in video games focus on the stimuli which the video game provides: images of violence and gore as well as audio of gun shots, screams and other loud violent noises. These stimuli are adding to the game’s realism which was an important factor for the participants in this study. Regarding the visual stimuli, the quality of graphics for a
video game contributes to the level of realistic violent imagery. Participants indicated that, though they don’t specifically seek out video games with high level graphics, they do expect the graphics in new games to be on par with video game industry standards.

“I just expect the graphics to be clear, consistent, and at the current standard set in the market place.” M

Participants also discussed how better graphics could make a FPS video game easier to play

“But having good quality graphics can make the game easier to play” F

Ease of gameplay and a more realistic and immersive environment both help in creating an enjoyable FPS video game for this study’s participants. Though some researchers believe that a more realistic video game environment may have negative psychological effects, the participants of this study did not.

**Video game ratings**

As with aggression and video games, video game ratings encompassed the two sub-themes *Realism* and *Graphics*, under the main theme of *Immersion*. Participants indicated that they felt that parental intervention was the best way to ensure that children are not exposed to inappropriate material:

“I feel it's really going to be more up to the parents as to what they want their kids exposed to, rather than the rating making a difference” F

Conversely to discussion in the literature reviewed, it is clear that there is an extreme lack of parental oversight into what video games their children are playing (Becker-Olsen et al. 2010). The lack of parental oversight was not seen as a failing on the parents’ part however, more a fact of nature regarding adolescent behaviour:

“Once kids are over 10 or so, if they can get a game they will mostly, irrespective of age restrictions” M

Participants went on to discuss how video game ratings were not always appropriate because not all children in a set age group have the same maturity levels:

“It's also really hard to blanket everyone. Some younger kids are very mature and some older people are not.” M

I asked what could be done to improve the situation. Some felt the rating systems could be reviewed and made stricter, however, most felt that:
“Ratings are largely irrelevant” M

They also felt that the problem was not going to go away until parents took an active role in monitoring their children’s entertainment. Interestingly in Becker-Olsen et al’s (2010) study on the issue, they found that parents didn’t feel the need to monitor their children’s video game purchases, stating that they trusted them to only be playing games appropriate to their age. Only a handful of the participants in my study had children themselves; however they were of the opinion that children should have their video game choices monitored. It could be that gamer parents are more aware of what the rating systems mean, being gamers themselves, and this more informed perspective makes them more careful in what they allow their children to play. Further research on the topic is needed so theories such as this can be tested.

The issue of video game ratings, and their effectiveness, relates to the themes Realism and Graphics; these two sub-themes impact the discussion in a similar way that they impacted the issue of video games and aggression. In this case however, the engaging stimuli which created an enjoyable entertainment experience for an adult is not always considered appropriate for children. The graphic horror which many FPS have is appropriate for adults because they understand the difference between a fictitious video game and real life, whereas a 10 year old may not be able to. Parents in Becker-Olsen et al.’s (2010) study felt that their children were mature enough to distinguish this and regulate their own video game consumption. This perspective was not supported by the parents in this study, and as suggested earlier, this could be because gamer parents are more aware of what content is in the games and are therefore more cautious.

**Gamer communities**

The sub-theme Multiplayer was the main influence on the topic of gamer communities, though Challenging also influenced it for some components. The topic of gamer communities was mainly based around the multiplayer aspects for FPS; this was demonstrated by three features of multiplayer FPS. The first was that many participants indicated that they found a game would become boring without a multiplayer component:

“...emphases on [multiplayer] mode as even the most awesome and epic campaign gets boring after a few times clocking it.” M

The second feature was that a game could became too easy without a multiplayer component, the challenge of competing against a real person opposed to an AI character greatly improved the level of difficulty for many of the participants:
“I get bored of AI’s and playing games by myself.” M

The third point was on the social interaction gamers got from playing online, it was noted that this was a different experience from playing with others in the same room. Playing FPS online allows for more players to be in a match, whereas multiplayer or co-op offline is restricted to how many computers or consoles the gamers have:

“Online games can be really sociable, [Left for Dead 2] and [Bad Company 2] require more team work and communication than in any co op game I’ve played in an offline function.”

M

This social aspect of online gaming was important for those who played multiplayer FPS online; however co-operative and offline multiplayer games were also enjoyed by the participants. There was a split between those who formed communities through multiplayer game play and those who simply enjoyed discussing video games. This sort of gamer collective tended to be formed around genres other that FPS, most often RPGs, though some games which straddle the line between FPS and RPG, such as Mass Effect, also formed gamer groups.

Gamer communities vary widely, which makes their classification difficult. The two sub-themes which related to this topic surrounded communities which form around online multiplayer and the competitive nature of FPS. It was recognised by the participants in this study that a multiplayer component is necessary in a FPS. This applies to the concept of challenge because, as discussed by some of the participants, the campaign eventually becomes boring due to the lack of a challenge. Furthermore, a human opponent will almost always prove more challenging because their tactics are less predictable than the video game AI.

**Authenticity**

The topic of authenticity was covered by sub-themes under both of the main themes *Immersion* and *Playability*. Authenticity contributes to the overall experience of a FPS, which was discussed in the literature review; authenticity in video games is associated with the gameplay experience more so than the legacy the game’s brand may have. The sub-themes which contribute to the authenticity of the video game are *Realism*, *Graphics* and *Storyline*. These three sub-themes have an obvious contribution to the video game’s authenticity in that they are important parts of the immersive experience gamers have when playing their favourite FPS. The controls, which are a part of the main theme of playability also play an important part in the immersive experience, but for a different reason; if the controls are not intuitive, then gamers can find they are being pulled away from the immersive experience due to constant checking of the controls (be it hand-held
controller or a mouse and keyboard). This repeated disruption of the gaming experience can be enough to discourage gamers from playing the game again, or even worst, encourage them to spread negative word of mouth descriptions of the game to their networks.

The authenticity of a game is closely linked to the immersive experience the game provides; this immersive experience is dictated by the emotional responses gamers have while playing the video game. I asked the participants to discuss the emotional reactions they have had while playing video games, specifically FPS:

“Doom 3 scared the crap out of me... I got a strong sense of achievement when I finished it just because it was such a mission!” M

Fear was a common emotion associated with FPS, which greatly added to the overall gaming experience for some participants in that it added realism. Feeling a genuine sense of apprehension as to whether or not there was going to be a blood-thirsty monster around the next corner makes the video game more exciting and engaging.

On the other hand, not all FPS involve monsters from Hell. Others, such as the Call of Duty series, involve shooting enemy soldiers in a non-fictional environment. One participant who played this sort of FPS more explained that:

“The only emotions I get in a video game are 'stoked', frustration, and 'gutted’” M

Nevertheless, this is still an emotional connection to the game which adds to the overall immersive experience. Another component of the FPS experience, which was greatly influenced by storyline, was the impact the video game characters had on the gamer. This became apparent when discussing the emotional impact the death of a character had on the gamers:

“If a character dies, it can be traumatising, but it also adds weight to the choices you make. This is especially true if the game has managed to make you connect with the character beforehand.” M

Some felt that the power to control the fate of the characters added to the enjoyment of the game, more so than if the characters had a predetermined fate:

“Being able to determine the fate of the characters via action/inaction made the game much more enjoyable.” M

“I think often when a character dies, this definitely adds to the realism, and can be an effective plot device which makes me feel there is something crucial at stake, and then playing the game feels important (heroic even?!)” F
This sense of heroism, though fictitious, was a strong motivator for many of the participants to continue playing a game. The sense that ‘others were depending on them’ added to the realism of the game and therefore added depth to the games experience overall.

Another important emotion which was common amongst the participants was the sense of accomplishment in finishing a game which proved challenging:

“I normally feel pretty stoked when I have completed a game and the last mission/boss/fight/puzzle was really, really difficult. “ M

Authenticity in the context of FPS video games is affected by several of the components of the gaming experience. As with topics which surround the visual and audio stimuli of a FPS (typically graphic horror) the realism of the game in conjunction with the level of graphics has a strong effect on the overall experience for the gamer. In addition to this, the storyline of the game will also contribute to the realism and immersive abilities of the FPS. The concept of controls works in conjunction with this in that intuitive/easy to use controls cause less interruption with the gaming experience for the gamer. Consequently these three sub-themes; Realism, Graphics, and Storyline work together to provide the overall immersive experience.

Gender and video games

The issue of gender and video games covers two topics, namely, how men and women are portrayed in video games and how female gamers are perceived by others. The two sub-themes which contributed to this issue were Graphics and Storyline; Graphics for how the female, and sometimes male, characters are depicted in various video games, and Storyline for the part female characters play in the game’s narrative.

“The female role is given over to a side character, while the main role is a dude” F

This happens in many video games, including FPS, where the identity of the main protagonist is pre-determined. That is to say, the player has no option of customisability regarding the character’s appearance gender or abilities. Half Life 2 is a good example where the ‘hero’ character is male and the ‘side-kick’ role is given to the female character. The ability to choose the hero’s gender was a key concern for many of the female participants, who expressed stronger loyalty to developers who provided this option in their games.

“Kudos to Bioware for letting people play as a girl” F

Bioware has produced several games which allow the player to pick either gender for the main character, the Dragon age and Mass effect series are of particular note due to their commercial
success. As a fan of the *Mass effect* series and as a female gamer I strongly agree with this statement and would include *Bethesda* as their games (*Elder Scrolls* series and *Fallout* series) also allow for both genders to be played. Though character gender is not a main deciding factor in whether or not a female gamer will play a game, it has strong potential to encourage customer loyalty. The level of customisation often sits at either end of the spectrum, gamers either have no choice in their character, or they have an extensive range of choices. In addition to this, the option of customising the character was mainly found in RPG style games.

Indeed, many of my favourite games have a male hero, I still play and enjoy them but my loyalty to the game series and possibly the producers brand would increase if I were given the option to pick the hero’s gender. So though this is not a defining or even a required component for a video game, it is preferred by the female participants in this study. Within the literature it was indicated that female gamers want the option to play as a female character (Eastin 2006; Schott et al. 2000), which supports this study’s findings.

Advertising was seen as the main ‘culprit’ when it came to the misrepresentation of women in video games and of female gamers;

“Think a lot of advertising bolsters the image of women gamers as artificial/hangers-on for their boyfriends” F

“Although a lot of the advertising companies like to treat them like cheerleaders by creating ‘Gamer Girl’ groups that consist of a few good looking girls who have some success in games. It is mainly this type of thing that is adding to the girls are cheerleaders image” M

Both male and female respondents felt that the negative stereotypical image of ‘girl gamers’ is reinforced by the images of video game advertising produces. The ‘hanger-on girlfriend’ image is also blamed on advertising; however this image was more noted by female participants. Male participants focused on the negative male gamer image of being a ‘geeky shut-ins’ and ‘girlfriend-less’;

“Girls/women also play and that, but the girlfriends of gamers (lol) don’t cheerlead! they discourage” M

The implication that playing video games is a less than desirable behaviour in males (from a ‘girlfriends’ perspective) was interesting considering that approximately half of the sample for this study were female. So though the idea that girls do not play or don’t approve of video games is a dated one in regards to statistics, it is still a perception held by many male gamers.
The sexualisation of women in video games was briefly discussed as well, but was not seen as an important concern for the participants. That being said, one participant did comment on the stereotyping of men in video games.

“When was the last time you played a game with a male lead that was overweight and balding?” M

Though it is an issue of concern for some groups, the portrayal of women in video games and of female gamers was not seen as a pressing matter for the participants. This indifference to the matter is probably due to the sexualisation of women in general media, since unrealistic and stereotypical portrayals of both men and women are so prevalent (Shugg et al. 2002).

As with topics which surround the graphic horror in many FPS, the sexual depiction of characters in a video game has an effect on the experience for the gamer. For female gamers in particular, the sexualisation of female characters (playable and supporting characters) within the video game can affect the enjoyment the female gamer gets from the game. Though none of the participants felt that the sexualisation of female characters was a bad thing per se, they did feel it was unfair to not be given the option to play as a female character (sexy or not). This, of course affects the storyline component of the gaming experience and thus the immersive abilities of the FPS. While many may argue that it is predominantly male gamers who play FPS video games, there is still a segment which enjoys FPS and are also female, this group should not be ignored, especially considering the continued increase in female gamers in the market as a whole.

**What makes a video game addictive?**

The participants viewed the term ‘being addicted to a game’ as a positive one, using the term to describe a game which they play (or had played) a lot and which in most cases they very much enjoyed. This is in contrast to academic literature which uses the term to describe a serious psychological issue. The following comments are using the term ‘addicted to a game’ to describe their fondness for a game not an actual psychological health issue. The sub-themes which contributed to this topic were *Storyline, Variety, Multiplayer, Challenging and Progress*. This topic relates to many of the sub-themes because it involves several aspects of the experience a video game provides, as such just one component of the video game will not keep the gamer playing.

When asked what makes a video game addictive, the participants indicated two factors; cooperative and multiplayer capability and user modified/created content.

“User content and variety are definitely factors which make a game addictive.” M

“User made content is really what kept it going for me.” F
User modified content (or ‘Mods’ as it is sometimes referred to by those in gamer communities) are downloadable items or actions which can be added to the game. For example on Sims 2 gamers can create new outfits, furniture, hairstyles, pets, makeup, and countless other items which can be added to the game. These mods are available for other players to download (from various websites) to add to their own games, these mods result in more choice and variety for the player while playing the game. Though the participants mainly discussed the benefits of mods in sandbox style games, such as Minecraft and Sims, mods in other genres such as FPS come in the form of new/customised weaponry and new game levels. Games, such as Doom, which released their source code to gamers a few years after releasing the game allowed the gamers to expand outside the confines of the game’s original context and rules. This was a very clever move by id, creators of Doom, as it helped strengthen a very loyal fan base. The gamers are not restricted to the original levels provided by the game; having the ability to create their own new levels increased the games’ re-playability considerably.

Being able to modify a multiplayer game would seem to be a beneficial move on the developer’s part, as it encourages gamers to explore the full scope of what the game is capable of providing, entertainment wise. Another reason is that a co-op or multiplayer aspect to a game, according to this study’s participants, encourages longer and more frequent play times due to the social nature of the game;

“I realise the most addictive games have been those that I have played co-operatively with my flatmates, so it’s probably a social thing for me more than anything else.” M

Multiplayer was one of the core features which the participants felt should be in a FPS, these comments referring to the ‘addiction level’ of a game further confirm these speculations that multiplayer is a necessity in a FPS.

The addictiveness of a video game as discussed by the participants is strongly related to the game’s playability and the immersive properties it possesses. Variety and Challenge all persuade the gamer to play the game, coupled with Storyline, a sense of Progress and Multiplayer encouraging the gamer to continue to play the game. This can be seen in a basic puzzle game such as Tetris all the way through to a complex FPS such as Call of Duty. All these themes relate to the level of fun the gamer has while playing and enforces the gamers desire to continue to play or to re-play the game after completion. So, though it is inaccurate to refer to continued video game play as addiction, there can be a video game craving.
Summary

This discussion has found that the components which make up the FPS video game experience are extensive and complicated, with the different themes linking and relating to one another in various ways depending on the context of the issue. For topics such as aggression and video games or video game ratings, the more tangible aspects such as Graphics are as important as the intangible theme of Realism; nevertheless these two themes impact the issues in different ways. Other issues such as gender and authenticity were also affected by Graphics and Realism which shows that these two components are very important in a FPS; however they must also be supported by other components such as Storyline, otherwise the game is perceived as being incomplete;

“Importantly a game needs to feel complete. That means it needs a plot with enough drive to keep it moving forward, and thematically the rest of the game needs to fit to that plot and story. The mechanics should be creative but also intuitive; and I think that's the most important point for me. I think a game should be trying to bring something new to the table, not simply an extension of every other game in the genre.” F

A good narrative component most definitely adds to the FPS experience for gamers, but again it is only as strong as the other complementary components of the video game, such as the Multiplayer. This was found to be a very important aspect for FPS games, as a point of differentiation from other genres which often can not support a multiplayer aspect.

“Storyline has to be well thought out, and campaigns not too linear. But again just as much emphasis should be placed on [multiplayer], even the noobest of noobs can clock a campaign on the hardest level, generally because the most sophisticated AI sooner or later is predictable.” M

The game’s mechanics, narrative, character options and playability all add to the overall experience. This discussion has highlighted the importance of cohesion between all components and that too much emphasis on one aspect at the cost of another is not a wise decision on a video game developer’s part. The fundamental thing to remember though is that the point of difference this genre of video game has over others is that it is about shooting things; the level of immersion the game provides should be the key point of focus for developers.
Conclusion

Many FPS video games can be seen as interactive stories which need certain components to not only make sense but also to be engaging for the audience. The core entertainment component of a FPS video game is its interactivity but these same interactive components also open up other problems for the developer. Game developers must constantly monitor and adjust the balance between the different components which make up the game in order to prevent confusion or upsetting the audience. With a FPS there is no clear cut order of priority which can be assigned to the components, this is because within the genre of FPS there are different categories; re-enacting world wars or modern wars, attack from un-dead zombie hordes, invasion by evil aliens or post-apocalyptic shoot ‘em’ ups. The focus and context of the individual FPS video game affects the priority of the different components. This study has outlined the different components which a FPS needs in general, but further study is needed before the ‘magic recipe’ of the best FPS can be discovered.

This study’s primary goal was to explore the genre of FPS through discussions with a wide range of gamers to determine what the components of an enjoyable FPS were. The next goal was to determine if these components had some sort of priority to them. It was found that though some gamers have a preference for what components should have more emphasis placed on them, the experience as a whole is achieved through a balance of the different components, more so than an emphasis on one single component. A video game is a form of entertainment and due to interactivity it has grown and evolved from the basic little white ball of pong; to the detailed, narrative rich and often blood filled games of today.

Industry recommendations

A few key points can be concluded from this analysis and a list of recommendations for developers is provided. The following section will provide recommendations for video game producers and developers based on the findings from this study.

Though narrative has proven to be a very useful tool in Role Playing Games (RPG), it has not been utilised to its full extent in FPS:

*Half Life* and *Half Life 2* are credited as utilising narrative well to deliver an engaging and enjoyable FPS. *Gears of War* has also used narrative in an attempt to added depth and enjoyment, however unlike the *Half Life* games, the *Gears of War* games plot has been poorly written. This isn’t to say that *Gears of War* is not enjoyable, it is, but games such as *Half Life*, though older, will
still be favoured over non-narrative or poor narrative FPS games. As this study has concluded narrative can help the gamer become more immersed in the video game as well as being an effective marketing tool when promoting the video game. However this is only the campaign component of the FPS, the multiplayer component does not need, and probably shouldn’t, have a narrative.

**Multiplayer is very important in a FPS:**

It became apparent quite quickly in this study that FPS need to have a multiplayer component because there is a large portion of gamers who purchase FPS solely for the purpose of playing it online or with their friends. FPS video games which involve re-enacting a world war (for example *Call of Duty* or *Bad Company*) allow gamers to play against other gamers in large matches online. Just as narrative adds immersive quality to the campaign component of a game, online matches add immersion to the multiplayer component. FPS most definitely need a multiplayer component, however this should be balanced with a quality campaign. After conducting the data analysis for this study it became apparent that developers for FPS are creating offerings for two target markets with the same offering.

**Establishing the target market before developing the game:**

As has been previously established, FPS now cater for two consumer targets with the one video game, this is through the campaign and multiplayer components of the video game. Though both target markets will play both components, the aspects which will draw them into purchasing the game are different. Therefore it is important to establish who these groups are before development begins and learn which aspects are most important to each group. I personally play FPS for the campaign, however many of the participants in this study play the same games I do but for the multiplayer component. FPS gamers play for different reasons, it is therefore a matter of ratio; the developer needs to ensure that both aspect of the gaming experience are properly created and delivered; and not to give excessive amounts of development to one component at the expense of the other.

**Girls are gamers too:**

Providing the gamer with the option to play as a female character is a very appealing aspect for female gamers, it has been found in not only in this study but also in others that girl gamers want to play as girls. With the increase in female gamers, bringing about an almost 50/50 split between
male and female gamers in the market, this simple aspect should be seriously considered by all
developers.

**Interacting with the gamer community:**

Interaction with customers helps build a deeper loyalty on the consumer’s part as well as the
producers understanding of the consumer wants. This study has shown that gamers enjoy and
want their opinions to be heard by developers who will actually listen and will take action on their
suggestions and comments. In an industry where millions of dollars is spent in developing a video
game it is very important to ensure that there will be a return on that investment. By engaging
with the gamers in environments, such as online forums, developers are able to determine what
the consumer wants in a game and are able to better their chances of producing a video game
which will give a reasonable return on their investment. Engaging with the customers is not a new
idea, but it is an underutilised one which more video game developers need to employ.

**Future areas of research**

This study has revealed several interesting issues which warrant further investigation. The
discussions surrounding gender portrayal in and around video games is a topic which is still in
need of further study to unearth the real issue(s) which causes conflict between the different
groups involved. As discussed in the literature review, the topic of aggression needs to be
revisited with more primary research to help support the current body of information. Further
investigation could also be done into the level of authenticity which is desired in a FPS. This could
regard the level of realism in features such as the sights on weaponry; should it be accurate to the
design of the real life weapon at the possible expense of the ease of use? And finally the
immersive level of video games in general would also be an interesting topic to investigate to
determine which genres require what levels of immersion and how this level of immersion could
be measured accurately.
References


de Burgh-Woodman, H. & Brace-Govan, J. (2007), ‘We do not live to buy; Why subcultures are different from brand communities and the meaning for marketing discourse’. International


Appendix

Appendix A: Information sheet and consent form for participants in the pilot focus group

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE PILOT FOCUS GROUP

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?
This project is being undertaken as part of a thesis for a Masters of Business in Marketing. The aim of this project is to gather opinions regarding graphics in video games.

What Type of Participants are being sought?
Those who consider themselves gamers on a casual/social level to a ‘hardcore’ level, both males and females, and gamers who play on any platform (PC, Xbox, Nintendo, etc). Participants must be over the age of 18.

What will Participants be Asked to Do?
Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in the discussion board on the Facebook group ‘talk about video games for cookies’. Those who live in the Dunedin area will be invited to participate in a face to face focus group as a preliminary stage of the research.
This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the Department of Marketing is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, it has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

**What Data or Information will be collected and What Use will be made of it?**

The data collected from these interviews will be used in a postgraduate dissertation, the results of the project may be published and will be available in the library. You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned above will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

**What if Participants have any Questions?**

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor:

Tabi Polson
Department of Marketing
Email fitscat@gmail.com
Tel: 479 5497

Robert Aitken
Department of Marketing
Email rob.aitken@otago.ac.nz

This project has been approved by the University of Otago, Department of Marketing
I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

- My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
- I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
- The raw data and personal information gathered for this project will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed;
- This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.
- The results of the project may be published and will be available in the library and I understand that every effort will be made to ensure anonymity but it is not guaranteed.

I agree to take part in this project.

............................................................................
.........................................................
(Signature of participant) (Date)
Appendix B: Information sheet and consent form for participants in the online forum

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS ON THE ONLINE FORUM

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

The aim of this project is to gather opinions regarding graphics in video games, data collected will be used as part of a thesis for a Masters of Business in Marketing.

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in the discussion board on the Facebook group ‘talk about video games for cookies’.

This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the Department of Marketing is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, it has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

The data collected from these interviews will be used in a postgraduate dissertation, the results of the project may be published and will be available in the library. You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which
the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor:

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Department of Marketing
Email fitscat@gmail.com

Robert Aitken
Department of Marketing
Email rob.aitken@otago.ac.nz
Tel: 479 5497

This project has been approved by the University of Otago, Department of Marketing

By posting on the online discussion page you are agreeing to take part in this study.
Appendix C: Example of discussion page used to conduct the online discussion
Appendix D: Summary of the demographic information of the participants.

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