



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

Brand negotiations in Video Game Communities

An exploratory study analysing community-made discourses in video game brands and how they shape the brand image

Christian Möller

Master's Degree Project in Marketing and Consumption

Supervisor: Benjamin Hartmann

Graduate School

Abstract

Video games are engaging products with large followings engaging in their brands. Despite this, video game value has proven hard to research and the area is understudied (Boyle et al., 2012). During the years many games have come and gone, some being hailed by their dedicated communities while others get shunned by the gaming community (MacDonald, 2018). This tells a story that the gaming community has a very influential role in the negotiating the game brands, but this subject has received little attention in research.

Therefore, this thesis provides an exploratory study on the online brand community of the video game *Europa Universalis 4* with the goal to visualize the brand negotiation process taking place in its online brand community.

The study identifies that consumers in the brand community actively govern the brand based on the value they derive from the game through social practices. When articulations about the game value are reproduced by a large enough part of the community, it starts to become a naturalized way of speaking about the brand, it becomes a discourse. In the studied case, the consumers first praises the brand upon release, and the almost unison heralding of the deep game experience create an evangelizing discourse, where a naturalized way of speaking about the game as a great experience is adopted in the community. After some years, the ever-increasing amount of paid-for expansions start to create a negative sentiment within the community, laying the foundations for a negative discourse of exploitation. As time goes on and more content is added, the opinions from the community about them feeling exploited grows stronger, ultimately clashing with the discourse of evangelizing, thus actively renegotiating the brand image with values from both discourses.

The discourses are found to inscribe the brands with values and narratives that help consumers make sense of the brand, and the power struggle between them lets consumers make sense of what the brand stands for. The results point to the importance the community has in shaping the brand image of video games, and brand managers must be very cautious about how pricing strategies influence the brand in this setting. It also shows the role the brand community has in acting as a reactive feedback mechanism for the brand. In this setting, it is through the active scrutiny by community members that changes in the brand become enchanted in the brand image and seemingly adds to the dynamism of the brand as interface.

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Theoretical Framework.....	5
How Brands function and is related to cultural structures	5
Discourses	5
Online Brand Communities	7
Rationalization and its effect on brands.....	8
Consumer prosumption monitoring company Rationalization	9
Value and Video Games	9
Methodology	12
Choosing Method	12
Netnography	12
Discourse Analysis	12
Study design	13
Quality of the Research.....	13
Ethics of the Netnography.....	14
Empirical Findings and Analysis	16
Europa Universalis 4 - Contextual Background of the game and its community	16
Initial responses positioning the Europa Universalis 4 brand – The forming of an evangelizing discourse.....	18
The Rationalizing effects of the <i>Europa Universalis 4</i> DLC policy	21
Poor Design Decision acting as symbolic resource for the Exploitation discourse	22
The clash of discourses – How the EU4 brand is actively negotiated in its community.....	23
Summary of the Findings and Analysis.....	26
Discussion	27
The effects of brand Evangelization	27
Discourses being formed on consumer perceptions of Value	28
Theoretical Implications	29
Managerial Implications	29
Future Research and Limitations	29
Conclusion	31
References.....	32

Introduction

Achieving long-term success for video game brands has been a hot topic within the gaming industry for a long time. From releasing physical sequels and expansions to popular titles, to digital expansions and content packages (Robbins, 2015), to subscription-based models (Business Wire, 2019), to micro transactions for in-game benefits and cosmetics (King & Delfabbro, 2018; Heimo et al, 2018). The list of methods to capitalize on video game brand success is long. The path to success is far from easy, as consumers many times have high demands on their products and have been known to rebel against the developers for implementing bad mechanics or poorly designed storylines (Bulik, 2012). For example, in the case of the game *No Man's Sky*, an indie game that drew substantial publicity before launch, it went so far that the studio received bomb threats and heavy harassment from community members when failing to deliver the value that the players expected (MacDonald, 2018). This is far from the only example, launches of games and changes being implemented are frequently discussed and scrutinized on social media by followers of the brands. In a fan-made YouTube video called “*The fall of 76*” (Internet Historian, 2019), the disastrous launch of the game *Fallout 76* is meticulously detailed in a 26 minutes long mockumentary that has garnered over 16 billion views. Even if these examples are not symbolic for the gaming community as a whole, it shows that online brand communities impose an influential force on brand image and the success and failure of the game. It shows the treacherous line game creators walk between being able to satisfy their customers and being able to profit from the game. As of now, video game consumption seen from a marketing perspective is an understudied area, and how the video game communities influence their brands is yet to be explored, something that this thesis aims to do.

Although not applied to video game brands, substantial research has been made on online brand communities. The concept of brand communities is closely related to those of brand tribes and consumption sub-cultures, to the point that they many times are used in tandem in articles (Cova & Pace, 2006). A brand community is defined as any group of people that inhibits an interest in a specific brand and create a parallel social universe around it (Cova & Pace, 2006). They are based on a culture of consumption, meaning that the commercially produced images, texts, and objects of the brand creates a social system of practices, identities, and meanings incorporated by the members of the subculture (Kozinets, 1999). Brand communities have been found to influence how society define the brand (Nakossis, 2013; Cova & Pace, 2006), create firm value through value-adding practices (Schau et al., 2009), and enchant brands with authenticity value (Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013). The area of online communities is in constant evolution as technological advancements of social media is seen to delocalize the ways the brand consumers interact (Weijo et al., 2014; Kozinets, 2015). Based on these studied effects that online brand communities can have on the general perception of their brands, it is valid to posit that video game brands receives similar attention during its lifecycle, although how the community does this has not yet been investigated. As a result of the lack of research in this area, the purpose of this thesis is to explore how video game brands are being defined and negotiated in their online brand communities and what implications this has on the brand image. This should shed light on the intricate details of how consumers' perception of value influences the brands they use and how social mechanisms in online brand communities work to negotiate brand value. Based on this, the **research question** is:

How do online brand communities for video games influence the brand image of the game?

To investigate how the video game brands are being influenced within its brand communities, a netnography is made on the video game *Europa Universalis IV* and its online brand community. Based on the material found in the community, discourse analysis is made to unearth the social structures in the community and how they reproduce certain discourses that affect the brand itself.

Europa Universalis IV (EU4 henceforth) is a historical grand strategy game published by Paradox Interactive and developed by its own studio, Paradox Development Studio. The game is played on computer and puts the player in charge of a nation in late medieval ages. The goal of the game is for the player to make its nation prosper by managing mechanics such as politics, diplomacy, trade and warfare. How the game is played and what goals the player aims to achieve is entirely up to the player due to the non-linear gameplay design. The choice of exploring this video game brand was decided based on several factors. First, it was released in 2013 and is still receiving regular updates and expansion packs, so it is possible to follow the game over a long time to see how the brand is renegotiated. It also has a large and active community, sharing content in online forums, on Twitch, YouTube, and on distribution platform Steam, to name some prominent examples.

The netnography is exploratory in nature to investigate how a gaming community is set up and where interaction occur. When the community setup is understood, a discourse analysis is performed on the texts collected throughout the community to see in which ways the brand community participates in shaping the brand. A set of discourses are found in the community that gives meaning and associations to the brand. This approach is more descriptive in nature, seeing as theories on community influence on brands is a more developed subject research-wise.

The layout is structured as follows: First, a theoretical framework is presented outlining aspects important for the study, such as branding, online brand communities, discourses, consumer value in video games, and effects of rationalization. Second, the method is presented, and the quality of the thesis is discussed. Part three of this thesis is a presentation of the findings and analysis. The section presents the brand as a chronological story from launch until present day. It starts with a quick description of the game and its community, then the reader follows the EU4 brand from its launch up until present day, analyzing the discourses the community create as the brand develops. In part four of this thesis, the discussion takes up important aspects found in the netnography and puts them in context with existing literature. Lastly, the thesis is summed up with a conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

As was outlined in the introduction, how online brand communities in video games influence their brands is an understudied topic, but there is much research on online brand communities, brands, discourses and value that can aid in researching the topic.

This section will describe different important perspectives regarding brands and how they are influenced by the symbols found in culture, especially focusing on culture shaped by its online brand community. The section also presents how consumer value and rationalization can play important roles in shaping these cultural resources that help create discourses in communities.

How Brands function and is related to cultural structures

Kornberger (2010) presents a viewpoint of brands as “Brands as Media”, where brands are seen as a set of relationships of products and services in time. An object is not just a thing, but it also constitutes of the relationships the object has to other objects. The same can be said about brands, and in this sense, the brand co-evolves with its consumers (Kornberger, 2010). A brand engages and creates social value for the consumer, and the consumers on their hand creates discourses of the brand that continuously re-negotiates the mental position the brand has on the market (Kornberger, 2010). The relationships that the brands have in the market presents an opportunity to view them as social structures relating to each other. Brands can therefore be seen as mediums in markets organized through their values and meaning (Kornberger, 2010). It connects producers and consumers through the interactions that happen in the brand, which becomes an institution of its cultural and social capital.

Celia Lury (2004) takes a similar stance to the brand as an object but describes the brand as “*a set of relations between products in time*” (p.2) and compared to brands as media adds layers of complexity to what a brand is. The brand is seen as the interface between production and consumption (Lury, 2004; Kornberger, 2010). The brand as an interface adapts based on input it receives from relationships in its network, thereby organizing the production based on outside feedback (Lury, 2004). This continuous feedback creates a brand that is fluid over time, both dynamic and interdeterminate, and can be seen as an artefact of managed complexity (Lury, 2004). Lury (2004) uses an analogy of a car to describe the dynamism of the brand. The components in a car is usually seen as staying the same through time, and only when one part breaks it is noticed that the broken part aged quicker than other parts. Some components in the car have feedback mechanisms that responds to the relations it has to other car parts and can therefore be managed from breaking down by its feedback. The aim of the feedback processes within a brand (and a car) is that changes in surrounding environment can be managed to keep the brand (or car) stable through time. It is in that way a brand is dynamic through time. The question now is, how do the social processes change the brand?

Discourses

Discourses are often used to explain how customers re-negotiates the mental position of the brand (Kornberger, 2010; Holt, 2004), but what exactly is a discourse and how can they shape the image of the brand?

Originally discourse means “conversation”, “discussion”, or “speech” (Svensson, 2019). When we speak, we voice our opinions about norms, routines, rules, and ways of being, and this opens the gate to understand how culture and social structures are formed (Svensson,

2019). The language we use reproduces the norms we have in society, and by analyzing the usage of the language it is possible to see how society and its social structures are constructed.

Discourse analysis is advantageous when it comes to illuminating how societies are created, a process that can either occur in front of our eyes or behind closed doors (Svensson, 2019). It offers us to see how power and ideologies are configured in a daily setting, where some articulations of society become naturalized, i.e. naturally occurring and meaningless for society members to question. When individuals internalize these ideas of society, they start to take them in on an individual level, often without questioning the process of internationalization (Svensson, 2019). Since discourse analysis is so reliant on language and how it constructs social structures, it is said that it is based on a constructionist world view (Svensson, 2019). Constructionism takes the standpoint that our reality and knowledge about the world is solely constructed by humans that have influence on us. The world that exist for us is the one we perceive, and things that happen beyond our own experiences are irrelevant since what you experience is what will be taken for granted as the truth. The boundaries of your truth are not objective and will be limited by the social structures of your environment. The structures are made up of speech, texts, and practices of certain kinds reinforcing the current system or culture. Examples of this can be textbooks in school teaching you a subject or an online forum post discussing a certain product, and in this way it makes sense that social interaction in online forums reproduces social structures that can create discourses about a video game. Of course, a simple articulation about an opinion will not change the world as we know it, in our society we take certain things for granted through norms, routines and rules, and these structures are hard to change (Svensson, 2019). To simplify, a discourse is a naturalized way of talking about a matter within a culture, and for it to become a norm it must be adopted by enough members in the culture. What is regarded as “enough” in this sense is entirely up to the each and every individual’s own interpretation, because the truth in this matter is subjective. In this thesis, a discourse is seen as a broad theme of how people talk about the studied object, in this case the brand of *Europa Universalis 4*.

Holt (2004) argues for the validity of analyzing the brand through discourses made by vocal members of the brand. According to him most consumers are not the vocal brand populists, but cultural parasites who feed of the cultural nucleus of the brand. Since consumers feed off brands for their identity projects, cultural discourses tied to the brand build up the essence of the brand for the consumers to appropriate. Holt (2004) presents a view of cultural branding where the company must create and nurture its cultural myth. If the myth of the brand is strong enough, it can become an iconic brand, standing above the cycles of fashion brands and viral processes (Holt, 2004). Iconic brands tap into social tensions in society and find cultural sweet spots where customers are culturally unsatisfied. This was the case for Snapple, a previously iconic American Juice brand (Holt, 2004). It was created by marketing amateurs, and the poorly produced marketing campaigns draw the attention of Americans tired of corporate and unpersonal brands present at the time. The sub-par marketing campaigns and unorthodox products garnered a loyal following of consumers and became important artefacts of the brand that supported the myth of the quirky and transparent juice brand. The buzz the company got was a direct result of the identity myth it created. The case of Snapple happened by coincidence, but Holt argues that the effect can be replicated using cultural marketing (2004).

Another way discourses has influenced brands was presented in the article by Hartmann & Ostberg (2013). They investigated how discursive mechanisms among consumer communities are created to counter rationalization attacks on brands. In their case, the revived Swedish guitar brand Hagström faced severe attacks to its authenticity when its production was re-opened in China. By playing on craftsmanship cues in the brand, the community accepted the brand as authentic, thereby keeping its symbolism as a mystic Swedish guitar brand even though its production process was rationalized (Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013). Games, that just as guitars are culturally rich products could very well be the target of similar enchanting discourses as the community of Hagström accepted and inscribed its guitars with.

The fact that brands adapt and are dynamic, sensitive to outside stimuli, from for example brand communities, lays one of the foundational stones for this thesis. It shows that stakeholders in the market has power to influence the decisions taken by the brand, and then subsequently makes it viable to analyse how the online brand community of EU4, an important stakeholder in the EU4 brand system, can influence the production of the brand and its essence.

Online Brand Communities

A brand community is defined as any group of people that inhibits an interest in a specific brand and create a parallel social universe around it (Cova & Pace, 2006). The brand community is based on a culture of consumption, meaning that the commercially produced images, texts, and objects of the brand creates a social system of practices, identities, and meanings incorporated by the members of the subculture (Kozinets, 1999).

The area of online communities is in constant evolution as technological advancements of social media is seen to delocalize the ways the brand consumers interact (Weijo et al., 2014; Kozinets, 2015). Tying into this, brand communities are many times seen to interact in what Arvidson & Caliandro (2015) calls brand publics rather than brand communities, especially on social media. Brand publics offer a more individualistic setup of the communities where the publicity a consumer get is more important than meaningful interaction and a sense of belonging, which is more significant for brand communities. Brand publics are more tied to using the brand as a device to gain publicity, rather than a collective identity that is the focal point of communities. Weijo et al. (2014) agree to the individualistic perspective of community engagement instead of a collective form of belonging but defines it as situated individualism. Many users of communities engage in brand community although socially keeping their distance, taking part in the community by learning the cultural literacy for the specific community and using the knowledge of the community, although interpreting the information using their own social filters to avoid too deep sub-cultural connection. Types of participation in online brand community participation are further detailed by Hartmann, Wiertz & Arnould (2015). They write about lurking, or vicarious consumption as they call it. Vicarious consumption is characterized by not actively participating in the consumptive moment but consuming through others' consumption, as Veblen's (1994) original definition is formulated. As Hartmann, Wiertz & Arnould (2015) identify, vicarious consumption is especially important in online community participation, where a large portion of the members lurk, browse and fantasize about content posted by others. The real takeaway from this section is similar to what Weijo et al. (2014) find, that brand communities can function in many ways, over many different platforms, and be consumed in many different ways, but that there are global discourses that are treated as general wisdoms that apply across the media channels,

forming a mold that connects the many delocalized channels into the same sub-culture. The definition for online brand community used in this thesis is therefore rather delocalized over many channels, and to find discourses applicable to the sub-culture of the community, it should be visible over the different media channels that encapsulate the community.

Online brand communities have been found to play an important role in creating value for brands, derived from a series of practices conducted by the community (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009). The practices range from social networking practices, to impression management, to brand use (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009).

Social Networking practices are the practices of **welcoming** new members, **empathizing** by giving support to other members, and **governing** the expected behaviour in the community (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009).

Impression management practices consists of **evangelizing** and **justifying** practices, where evangelizing is the practice of sharing and preaching the brand to win over new members, while justifying is the practice of justifying consumption of the brand (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009).

Community engagement practices revolves around internal definitions within the community (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009). The practices are called **staking**, **milestoning**, **badging**, and **documenting**. Staking regards the practice of staking out groups and identities within the community. It is important to note that the community is often divided into certain groups with their own focus and interests. Milestoning is the noting of events that the user has with the brand and is used to create cultural capital within the community. Badging follows this rationale but is the practice of translating the milestones into symbols. Documenting is the practice of creating a narrative of a brand experience, often riddled with milestones that can be converted to cultural capital for the user. It is important to note the importance of the community engagements practices when it comes to cultural capital. In a sense, these practices become a competition on who has the most cultural capital that can be derived from the practices (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009).

The last category of value-adding community practices is called brand use. Under brand use lies the practices **grooming**, **customizing**, and **commoditizing**. These practices regard caring for, modifying, and commoditizing the brand and in that way add value to it (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009).

Even though the rationale presented by Schau, Muniz & Arnould (2009) illuminates many of the value-adding mechanisms within a brand community, it is also stuck on an individual level where members show off to one another and thereby enhance their position in the community. It doesn't analyse how the communities can shift the position of the brand in the marketplace. They do however provide some base knowledge of the practices brand community members do, which can act as inspiration for how they influence brands.

Rationalization and its effect on brands

The rationalization of society has undergone throughout modernity and has been studied and discussed by many marketing scholars, partly because of the threat it presents to the mythical essence and enchantment of brands (Ritzer, 2005; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013). On the one hand, brands are inscribed with cultural symbolism to create meaningful objects for customers to consume, but on the other hand brands are driven by economic interest and pressure to ever

optimize processes to increase revenue (Ritzer, 2005). As Ritzer (2005) propose, increasing rationalization, calculability and control disenchant the brand. Degrees of rationalization is needed to continue to control, exploit and attract customers as the scale of operation increases, but the brand is always at risk of being disenchanted by these measures. Surely, some refinements of rationalization will add to the customer experience, a typical example being home deliveries in web shopping, where companies stay competitive by building an online presence, with the customer benefitting from not having to visit stores to make purchases. Within gaming, a similar rationalization change would be to launch EU4 to a new game or distribution platform to gain possible new customers. For customers, it only adds freedom of choice, while the company can increase sales.

One of the pillars in increased rationalization, or McDonaldization as it is also called, is control (Ritzer, 2005). Increased control decreases unpredictability and uncertainty in the organisation, something that is closely connected to human flaws in the organisation (Ritzer, 2005). Therefore, efforts are taken to minimize human interaction, where technology and robots increasingly are replacing humans in organisations. In gaming human interaction in the shopping experience is more or less gone, EU4 for example is almost entirely sold via digital distribution channels (Paradox Interactive, 2020).

Consumer prosumption monitoring company Rationalization

Internet and digital technology have not only made it easier to control brands, it has also made consumers much more powerful through the freedom internet gives (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). In the age of internet, the lines between production and consumption are blurred, and the amount of user-generated content has exploded (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). In this world where the consumers both produce and consume brands, the mechanisms to control and monetize the market changes (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). In these systems where production and consumption are so intertwined, the term prosumption is used where consumers both produce and consume their products (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). To some extent, producers and consumers have always been prosuming, since in any form of production, some kind of resource is consumed to produce the product (Ritzer 2009, in Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). What has happened in recent years, with the entry of internet and consumers still looking for new ways of finding meaning in consumption culture, is that a new class of labour is available to companies, that of the digital content creating user (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Consumers engage in a wide variety of practices, often at little or no cost, to inform, entertain, rate, legitimize and symbolize brands and products, gathered in the brand communities (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009) or publics (Arvidson & Caliandro, 2015). Hartmann & Ostberg (2013) found that members of brand communities actively monitor their brand as it went through a process of rationalization, and even though they were aware of the changes, they still accepted the authenticity of the brand because of the discursive myths of craftsmanship that the brand managed to cling onto.

Value and Video Games

Value is a difficult subject. In marketing, value is central. Value propositions are made to show what the actual value is for customers, but it is an entirely subjective matter because every customer will have a different perception on what value is for themselves (Hartmann, 2020). Research done on value in video games point to a similar reality, where many different psychological frameworks have been applied to unearth what motivates consumption of video games. Video games are cultural offerings, belonging to the same category of products as

movies, music and novels (Zackariasson & Dymek, 2016). Games, focusing on entertainment games solely, has no inherent value for consumers other than the value to offer entertainment, to provide an engaging experience (Zackariasson & Dymek, 2016; Hsu, Chin-Lung & Hsi-Peng Lu, 2007; Boyle et al., 2012; Marchand & Hennig Thurau, 2013). The subject of finding out how a game is entertaining and creates engagement in consumers has been researched, although more from a psychological and cognitive viewpoint than a consumptive one. The systematic review of the field by Boyle et al. (2012) and the one by Marchand & Hennig Thurau (2013) offers plenty of perspectives on how consumer engagement in video games has been researched, and the empirical results point at a reality that is very subjective from gamer to gamer on what drives engagement to a certain game.

Even though the findings of Boyle et al.'s review (2012) were rather inconclusive due to the complexity of human nature and the breadth of potential reasons for liking a game, some implications found in the field of motivations adds valuable input for this thesis. Even though the subjective experience is central to explaining why gaming engagement is created, researchers using motivational theory continuously found fun/enjoyment and challenge to be reasons to play games. Challenge is identified as the individual's need for achievement and is a strong motivator of behaviour first described by McClelland et al. (1953). Apart from fun and challenge, needs for autonomy and relatedness were also identified as motivations in certain articles (Boyle et al., 2012). Another strain of motivational theory, Uses & Gratification theory, found that elements of arousal, competition, fantasy, suspense, narrative, and interest also contributed to feeling engaged in a game. While all the elements could provide answers to what motivates a player to invest time and find value in a game, they are in many ways overlapping and situational depending on what psychological toolset has been used to answer the purpose of the individual article. Nevertheless, this strain of research can be of use to try and decipher motives of why people like to play video games.

The notion of consumers having very different motivations and the hardships researchers have had in mapping out human behaviour regarding engagement in video games congregates very well with the baseline of value as is presented by Hartmann et al. (2020), namely that different people find value in different things. Further, Hartmann et al. (2020) postulates that value is co-created, and the product or brand is merely a means to make creation of value possible. The line of thought is that value is only created when consumers integrate the brand in their own personal value creation process (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Therefore, value in a game is created when a consumer plays the game and enjoy the experience. This outlook, coined the Service Dominant Logic, is very reactive on customer input based on the knowledge that value is co-created by the consumer. It is said to be a customer centric perspective (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). If the consumer find value, they can go on and influence others, for example by engaging in the brand community of that certain game, and they actively create value for that brand (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009). In that way, regardless of what specific detail in the experience that the individual gamer found enjoyable, they add value to the brand by reinforcing an image of the game being good. This connects consumer value to the possible creation of brand-enchanted discourse. Hartmann et al. (2020) confirms that the reason members of a society support its values is because they individually have found a meaningful difference in the values. If a consumer from the start does not agree with the social values, it bodes for change to happen. Røpke (2009) further investigates how practices and social systems work together, and ties together the work of Giddens (1984) structural approach and the components of practice theory.

Giddens structural approach (1984) says that social structures are created by social interaction between actors in the community that are confirmed and reproduced by other actors in the culture (Giddens, 1984). Some actors are more knowledgeable and hold more power to create transformation through their actions, and if the actions are taken up and reproduced, they will cement a structure within the society or social community (Giddens, 1984). So, it is the consensus in a certain collective that create its values, and therefore what the individual value and articulates has agency to change the values if its understanding is shared and reproduced in the community.

Following the lines of Røpke (2009), it can be seen that the reproduction of what she calls social practices have legitimizing capabilities and create social systems with structures of how to act and be. It is no coincidence that the structuralist perspective of Giddens and practice theory share these similarities, as practice theory was developed based on thoughts of structuralism, and social practice was a theme used by Giddens and Bourdieu before being used as inspiration for practice theory (Reckwitz, 2002). Connecting the thought of social practices and how they create culture through the social structures they form, the online brand community practices Schau et al. (2009) presented becomes important. Since the reproduction of social practices cement social structure (Røpke, 2009), it could be that the practices Schau et al. claim to add value to the brand, also creates social structures of how to consume the brand, and in its extension, acting as a powerful actor in negotiating the brand's position in the market. Looking at the online brand community practices, it is safe to say that they are social practices in the way that communication between community members is an integral component in all the identified practices.

It is somewhere in the crossroads between brands as interface, online communities, and social structures that a brand such as EU4 finds itself, and it is on these premises it will be investigated. The brand community exerts its power through reproduction of social practices, the product providers do their own communication of its goals and values, and somewhere in this negotiation lies the value the brand has. How the influences of stakeholders affect the value of the brand will be subjective from consumer to consumer, but by evaluating the discourses found within the brand community, a nuanced picture of the power struggle can hopefully be illuminated.

Methodology

Choosing Method

The goal of this thesis is to investigate how gaming brand communities function in detail in their process of influencing brands. To investigate this, the thesis aims to take an exploratory approach when it comes to the unique setting of the gaming industry, although taking a more descriptive research approach when analysing online brand community influence on the brand, due to the relative wealth of research on this area. An exploratory approach is built on garnering as much information as possible on the chosen topic, due to the limited research of the area (Patel & Davidson, 2011). A descriptive research approach on the other hand aims to primarily focus on describing certain aspects of the research area, often employing already existing theories and filling the gaps of lacking knowledge between them (Patel & Davidson, 2011).

As a result of this, the decision was made to first employ a digital netnography on the video game brand *Europa Universalis 4* and its community to explore and understand the social structures and modes of communication within a gaming community. After that, a discourse analysis is performed on the texts found at various places in the community with the goal to describe how the community use its influence to negotiate the brand image of the game. Both methods are qualitative in nature and the focus is on verbal analysis rather than statistical, therefore this thesis is to be regarded as qualitative. Further, the relation between theory and empirical finding is inductive, meaning that the research area is first explored, and after that theories were used to make sense of the findings (Patel & Davidson, 2011).

Netnography

To explore the premises and culture of the EU4 community, a netnographic approach was chosen. Netnography can be explained as doing ethnography online, often applied on online communities (Kozinets, 2010). It is a participant-observational method that applies a wide range of tools for the researcher to familiarize and understand a particular culture or social setting (Kozinets, 2010). The netnography, just as ethnography can include multiple other methods such as interviews, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, photography analysis and other tools to approach and assimilate in the culture, but the difference is that a netnography points out the overall importance of computer-mediated communication that sets it apart from an ethnography (Kozinets, 2010).

Discourse Analysis

In the study, discourse analysis will be used to understand how the brand community negotiate the brand. Discourse analysis as a method is in simplified terms a way to study and understand language use and its effects on society, humans, and its relations (Svensson, 2019). It is about unearthing an understanding of the meaning of the spoken language that goes beyond mere description of it and more deeply into how language symbolizes how you interpret the world and its norms (Svensson, 2019). In the studied case the focus will lie on groups and individuals acting in the brand community and analyse how their communication negotiates the brand, or in other words, how the communication shapes the way people speak about the brand. What discourses do the community members create about their brand and how does this affect the brand and its perceived value in the marketplace? In other words, how is the brand for EU4 socially constructed based on the interactions of community members and how does this influence the culture the game finds itself in?

Study design

The design of the study was meant to follow the five-step guide to doing a netnography by Kozinets (2010), but as the author self explains, in reality the process seldom is as straight forward as the guide.

First, the topics of investigation was set and the identified culture to study was that of the EU4 community to find out how they engage in shaping the EU4 brand. Then, data collection ensued in a non-participatory, unobtrusive way, something that can be useful since the interaction is not constructed in any way by the researcher, but the risk is that researchers miss out on important cultural context and understanding (Kozinets, 2010). In the studied case, the author has been a member of the community for several years, although only engaging vicariously in consuming the online community (lurking) and playing the game (479 hours in total). The researcher has therefore been participating by consuming the brand and content made by the community, but has never participated by producing any material to influence the brand image in any way. Many of the deep discussions of complex game mechanics were thus understood by the author save for a very few instances when the discussions went very deep into very particular subjects of the game design.

There was a lot of attention put towards analysing many different channels of the community, with focus from everything from official EU4 forums, the EU4 forum on Reddit, reviews on Steam, the community hub on Steam, grand strategy YouTuber's videos of EU4, Twitch livestreams of EU4, and social media platforms, where Twitter was seen as the most active social media for the brand. After gathering an initial amount of data, a first wave of interpretation and analysis was made. Discourse analysis, in particular in the form of analysing language use was applied on various types of material. When themes of the community composition started to unravel, more data was gathered that allowed for further analysis of the social structures that were found. This process of going back and forth between data gathering and interpretation was useful to capture certain aspects of the culture, and the flexibility of having the content readily at hand on the internet truly helped this process. As a last step the findings were presented as a story of how the brand evolved based on the findings of the netnography and its discourse analysis, answering the research question.

Quality of the Research

Due to the qualitative method employed in the study, several aspects must be taken into consideration to ensure the quality of the research. Qualitative studies are usually varied in their design and thus it is hard to find one unison procedure on how to verify its quality (Patel & Davidson, 2011). The quality in qualitative research does not only include the data collection, but rather the whole research process (Patel & Davidson, 2011). Does the researcher manage to collect relevant data to make a truthful interpretation of the studied subject? This is an important question regarding the quality of the study, and it is important that this can be answered. In the studied case, many actions were taken to answer for this uncertainty.

One identified hazard was that of time. Since the game was launched in 2013, the brand has been through many stages of its lifetime cycle. The brand and community naturally developed during this time; hence a lot of effort was made to divide the analysed texts depending on when they were produced, something that is shown in that the analysis is structured as a

chronological storyline during the formulation of discourses, thus incorporating the changes in the brand in a truthful way.

Another important aspect is that of triangulation. It means that the study is investigated in a rich enough way. It can be fulfilled in many ways: by using different cases, using different sources of data, or investigating if the respondent act in the same way as they portray in the interview (Patel & Davidson, 2011). In this study, triangulation was mostly achieved by collecting data from many different sources within the community and on different platforms in the community. Also, investigating the subject over a long time to familiarize with changes happening in the brand is a sign of the triangulation effort made. In triangulation, it is important to give an as rich picture of the research area as possible, and that means including contradicting results, as they may help to nuance the findings and uncover interesting results as well. Since this thesis in many ways focus on the contradicting thoughts in the community, since it is conflict between those that shapes mental position of the brand, this issue should in that way be naturally be accounted for. Some discourses were found that were not influencing the brand in an obvious way, thus ending outside of the scope for this thesis. They were still collected in the netnography, and even performed linguistic analysis on before being excluded from the final results. They were on the other hand reported as interesting topics for future research. Another aspect that should ensure that the study is researched in a rich enough way is that the author has played the game and been on and off engaged in the community since he got the game in August of 2015, experiencing first-hand the many phases the game has gone through, having acquired cultural literacy in the community even before the study.

Overall, the thorough netnography in combination with the very open-ended approach to the community in the beginning of data collection and analysis, laid the foundations to the area being as fully understood as possible, and it speaks for that the results and ensuing analysis should carry truthful accuracy.

Ethics of the Netnography

When doing online research in the form of a netnography, ethics is a very important matter, because part of the research method involves presenting voices of individuals own opinions, using it as material to describe and reveal culture (Kozinets, 2010). Culture members may not expect that texts are going to be read people outside the community. It is not OK to just publish thoughts of community members without consent, unless taking certain aspects into consideration. It is important to protect human integrity at all times during the research process, and there has to be measures taken so that the identity of the human behind the texts is secure both directly and indirectly, as well as only include texts that are public without expectation of privacy, unless consent is given (Kozinets, 2010). Kozinets further draws a line that it is ethically fine to take texts from online communities “*if the researcher does not record the identity of the communicators and if the researcher can legally and easily gain access to these communications or archives*” (p.142). The reason for this to be fine is that when these conditions are fulfilled, the posts are just texts and stop to qualify as human subjects. Based on these guidelines, all pseudonyms of human individuals have been anonymized so that it is not possible to be exposed from the material found in the thesis. All the texts were also taken from open platforms on the internet that are accessible by anyone, ensuring that the space was public and not taken from private conversations. Due to the precautions taken, no consent was asked before collecting the material. Also, since the study

was entirely unobtrusive, no one was led into saying anything, offering further ethical reassurance.

Empirical Findings and Analysis

To answer the research question of how online brand communities within video gaming can influence their brands, the findings first set out to explore the specific setting *Europa Universalis 4* and its community finds itself in. This initial section is structured in a descriptive way and is presented as a contextual background for *EU4* and its community.

After that, the findings will be presented in a chronological order starting from the launch of the game, analysing how the brand is negotiated and further renegotiated by the community as time passes by and new content is added to the game. The community is seen to reproduce two overarching discourses that come to clash with each other, using different symbolic resources found in the gaming experience. These are outlined in *Table 1*.

Europa Universalis 4 - Contextual Background of the game and its community

“Fulfill Your Quest For Global Domination. The empire building game Europa Universalis IV gives you control of a nation to guide through the years in order to create a dominant global empire. Rule your nation through the centuries, with unparalleled freedom, depth and historical accuracy. True exploration, trade, warfare and diplomacy will be brought to life in this epic title rife with rich strategic and tactical depth.” (Paradox Interactive, 2020, p.11)

This is how *Europa Universalis 4* is presented in its publisher’s the annual report of 2019, and it gives an accurate, short description of what this very complex game is all about. You play as a ruler of a nation of your choice from the end of the middle ages in 1444 up until the year Napoleon Bonaparte died, in 1821. Every nation in the world is playable, and actual historical events will trigger and make the player relive history and alter it. Every other nation is controlled by the AI which will unforgivingly challenge and take advantage of its surrounding nations, no matter if the opponent is a player or another AI nation. The random nature of the opposing nations will create a different playthrough every time, and it is the ability to adapt to the AI and overcome sudden political changes in your surroundings that will make you survive the test of time. The complexity of the game, the unforgiving nature and the sheer amount of impressions that the player is fronted with at the start of a game is in many ways overwhelming for new players and forces them to find help, giving them a natural entry to the online brand community when searching for help.

The online brand community of *EU4* is spread on a wide variety of social media platforms and is in many ways intertwined with the brand community of its publisher *Paradox Interactive*. On many social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and on the video and livestreaming sites such YouTube and Twitch, Paradox has their own accounts where they actively engage with their community. Naturally, some of the content they produce is about *EU4* which then engages the *EU4* community. On the web forum Reddit, the game distribution platform Steam and on Paradox’s own web forum *EU4* has their own channels.

Apart from these dedicated platforms, large parts of the meaningful discussions were found on different content creators’ channels on YouTube and Twitch. On each game’s product page on the distribution platform Steam, user-created reviews about the game are presented. The reviews are structured so that other users can like and comment the different reviews, and

it is possible to apply filters for reviews in different timespans as well as filters for positive, negative, helpful and funny reviews. This tool proved very valuable in monitoring community opinions in the different stages of the game's lifespan. Often, heated discussions were sparked in the reviews on Steam and in the comment field on YouTube-videos about the game's value. When the type of content is targeted at whether the game is good or not, it seems to set the tone of the comment section to discuss the game's value. These sections were a valuable catalyst of brand negotiation within the community, and many symbolic resources found here and there in the brand community were brought forward in a distilled way in these sections.

The difficulty of the game creates a natural entry to the brand community for new players. It comes a time when new players will need help navigating the game and the ones responding to this help is the community. Tutorial videos on YouTube, beginner guides on Steam, and forum posts on Paradox's official forum or on the EU4 Reddit channel are all ready to respond and satisfy the need for knowledge in the game. Analysing this through the perspective of value-adding brand community practices presented by Schau, Muniz & Arnould (2009), it is obvious that many practices are occurring in different ways throughout the community. This example can either fall under the practice of grooming or under empathizing, specifically task empathizing (Hartmann et al., 2015), depending on the social media channel, type of content, and mode of participation.

Upon entering "EU4 tutorial" in the search field on YouTube, a wide variety of tutorials appear, from complete beginner tutorials to more advanced, specific tutorials on how to best use different mechanics in the game. In one popular video, a complete beginners tutorial posted by a famous EU4 content creator that has over 1 million views, the comment field is riddled with comments thanking the content creator for helping them get into the game:

"Great video. The game is so complex that it can easily turn off newcomers like myself, but after this I am frothing at the mouth to give it a try. What a beautifully comprehensive game."

"This game is so awesome, after you spend some time playing and getting to know it, you start to see all the geopolitical events that happened in the real world so similar to stuff that happens in the game!"

"Rewatching this video when you have over 1100 hours feels good man, i've gotten better :D"

Even though all comments show the importance of available tutorials, they also touch on what makes the game good. The first comment point to the complexity of the game as a barrier of entry to enjoy the game, but at the same time it is the comprehensiveness that makes it beautiful. All three comment suggest, in one way or the other, that it is the feeling of accomplishment, to become better at this challenging game that makes it so good. The first comment is also commemorating the attention to detail the game has, and the second comment is impressed by how the game is capable to reproduce geopolitical events that are very similar to how they play out in real life. Even in this tutorial setting, that does not intuitively invite to speak about the customer value of the game, community members do not refrain from voicing their warm opinions of the game. Articulations of praise as seen here can be found in various places in the community, but as said before, certain channels offer more condensed negotiations such as in the reviews on Steam. Comments like these are seen as indicators that the value of the game, being derived from the captivating game experience, is confirming and reproducing a social structure within the sub-culture. This is an early indicator

that the perceived value of the game experience is connected to the culture of the brand community, and that it may influence the brand.

Initial responses positioning the Europa Universalis 4 brand – The forming of an evangelizing discourse

Digging deeper into the value customers derive from the game, a fitting arena to investigate is customer reviews. On Steam, one of the most commonly used distribution channels for EU4, every game has its own review section that is easily visible for potential buyers of the game. In this review section owners of the game are encouraged to make their own personal reviews. This puts community members in prime position to influence potential buyers based on their opinions of the game, thereby receiving a fair amount of power to directly influence the brand image to a group not yet engaged in the brand. Since part of the purpose of this thesis is to see how brand community members actively engage in shaping the brand, and that the brand is seen as the interface between relationships in its network (Lury, 2004; Kornberger, 2010), the articulated relationship the members have to the game is of great importance, especially when their opinions are fronted at the point of purchase.

Table 1: Discourses that negotiate the EU4 brand
<p>Initial Discourse voiced in the community – Brand Evangelizing</p> <p>As a result of the engaging game experience, a discourse of evangelizing the game becomes naturalised in the community. The discourse is reproduced and symbolized in the community by the following symbolic resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives of Accomplishment, such as mastering the game despite its high learning curve. - Narratives of the game’s beautiful complexity, giving a rich and deep gaming experience. - Associating it as superior to household brands of the genre (<i>EU3, Total war series, Civilization series</i>) - Having the freedom and opportunity to relive and change the outcome of history
<p>Second Discourse – Brand Exploitation</p> <p>As a result of amounting DLCs being added to the game, the perceived value of the games is diminishing, creating a discourse of exploitation within the community. The following symbolic resources are utilized to signify this discourse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High price of downloadable content - Poor quality of downloadable content - Association to other brands known for using exploitative methods to milk their customer base (<i>Sims 3</i> published by <i>EA</i> is used as a bad association) - Including game mechanisms in paid-for DLCs that are deemed too essential to not be in base game, inferring that the game is unplayable without DLCs

In Ritzer & Jurgenson’s article about prosumption and the new modes of capitalism on the internet (2010), it is argued that companies now have access to a whole new division of labour, namely their consumers, who are beneficial in that they are working for free but are hard to control. Seen through this scope, the case of having a review-function next to the point

of purchase of the product is potentially hazardous for the company, because the consumers are free to say whatever they want about the game without intervention from the publisher. If the reviews are positive, it can instead become an important marketing asset, free of charge and fuelled by engaged consumers. Because of these factors, and that reviews specifically ask the user to evaluate the game which steer conversation to brand negotiation, Steam's review function has been a central point of attention when it comes to the continuous negotiation of the EU4 brand.

Upon researching the initial reviews back in 2013 and 2014 when the game was initially released, the reviews were very often descriptive and presented what made the game fun to play. Further, they more often compared the game to other games in the genre, namely its predecessor *Europa Universalis 3*, the *Civilization* series and the *Total War* series. The reviews were almost unison in being positive, and pointed to the depth of the gaming experience as the primary aspect that put it apart from its grand strategy competitors:

"(...) Those who are willing to take the time to learn the mechanics and intricate details of managing, running, and expanding your empire will be granted with a truly interesting, complex, and unique experience. This truly is a "GRAND strategy game" to the fullest extent of the word. (...)"

"Play as any country within the game's timeline, and conquer the world. Better than games like Civilization or Total War because war is not your only option, and is not the central focus of the game; you could easily become the number one world power by just colonizing/trading."

(...) "I finally invested the necessary time and this is a great empire builder game. The diplomacy is so well done that you could really fear the AI. While the AI need cheats at Civilization game, at EU, the AI is very challenging at normal difficulty." (...)

These outtakes from the player reviews position the brand of EU4, and at the time of its initial release it is regarded as one of the most demanding, in-depth and engaging grand strategy experiences ever made. Compared to household titles of the genre, the *Civilization*- and *Total War* series, it is negotiated as a much more complex and challenging experience, often vocally expressing so, thereby inscribing the brand with values of being something for the hardcore gamer who wants to get involved into a deep experience. It is obvious that players enjoy the game, and for a cultural offering that video games are, hedonic enjoyment is the value that it strives to produce (Zackariasson & Mikolaj, 2016).

At this time, most reviews herald certain aspects of the game that makes it so great, and the community members actively inspire others to purchase the game, doing their most to portray a positive image of the brand. In Schau, Muniz & Arnould's article (2009), this is regarded as the practice of evangelizing the brand, putting it in front of competitors and inspiring others to engage in it. With the scope of this study, the evangelizing practice becomes important. In the brand community, the early evangelization of the game is seen to create a social structure within the community, it is continually reproduced and it becomes the focal reason for why people engage in the community. Seen through the perspective of the brand as a dynamic feedback-mechanism formulated by Lury (2004), it is the product's value that creates the positive feedback in the community, and the community on their hand starts to inscribe the brand with the positive values as a result of their positive emotions toward the product. The

reproduction of evangelizing texts in the community is creating a standardized way of talking about the game, thereby becoming an evangelizing discourse used to make sense of the game.

A brand is on its own empty, the logo and slogans mean nothing, until they are filled with customer experiences (Holt, 2004). Over time, ideas about the product positions it and inscribes it with symbols and meaning (Holt, 2004). The evangelizing practices in this case do just that, they quickly fill a brand with meaning and associations, utilizing certain symbolic resources such as the challenge and complexity of the game to position it against less demanding games. In this case, the time it takes to learn the game becomes a discursive narrative that helps clarify what values are held by the brand. In a sociological outlook on brand stories, narratives as the ones found here create the conventions of what the brand is:

“Brand stories have plots and characters, and they rely heavily on metaphor to communicate and to spur our imaginations. As these stories collide in everyday social life, conventions eventually form” (Holt, 2004, p.3).

The importance of associations and narratives are further defended in brand equity research, because consumer’s knowledge of a brand on a cognitive level is structured based on the associations they have to the brand (French & Smith, 2013). Therefore, evangelizing the brand as something better than another specific brand helps to cognitively position the brand, just as many do when they are referring it as better than certain other games.

In the almost entirely digital setting EU4 finds itself in, its community becomes important since they are visible and create symbolic value for the brand at every point of contact with the brand. If we compare it to the gardening community investigated in Hartmann et al.’s (2015) study, the practice of gardening does not happen in a digital world, thus it does not share the seamless integration between the actual consumption of the product. When engaged in gardening, it is possible to get input on brands and help from other places than the online brand community, for example in a physical store or at a gardening school. In the setting of a niche video game, it is very hard to find any information about the brand, be it a video tutorial, a review, or a humorous playthrough-video without encountering online brand community members that in some way are influencing others by engaging in community practices.

Looking at the way community members structure their positive reviews, wording such as *“those who are willing to take time and learn”* and *“I finally invested the necessary time”* are often paired with wording such as *“interesting, complex, and unique experience”* and *“Ai is very challenging”*, indicating that an influential component of the experience lies in overcoming challenges and mastering the game. This becomes an important symbolic resource that players use when they are evangelizing the game. In the early days when the game was released, most focus on the positive feedback was on the quality of the gameplay experience, which enchanted the brand with the important positive values. This formed a discourse, a way of making sense of the brand, that from here on is called Evangelizing.

Tying this back to the research question of how the community influences the video game brand, it can be seen that the brand community actively engages in the brand in the various media channels and continuously state how good the game is compared to other games, and how certain aspects of the gaming experience lends itself to become symbolic narratives used to signify how good the game is. When these statements are reproduced and defended within

the various social media channels used by the brand community, it comes a point where the texts become naturalised within the culture as the truth (Svensson, 2019). In this case, after the release of the video game, the praise given to the game is seemingly accepted within the culture, forming what is here named an evangelizing discourse inscribing the brand with positive symbolism.

The Rationalizing effects of the *Europa Universalis 4* DLC policy

Any good story has its antagonist, and the tale of *Europa Universalis 4* has its own as well, its DLC-policy. DLC, short for downloadable content, is a kind of content package that adds new features to the game. They are paid for, but not necessary to play the base game. If you choose to not buy the DLC, you still get some of the minor changes to the game in the accompanied patch that usually arrives to implement the DLC expansion. In total, EU4 has released 13 full expansions and three so called immersion packs that focuses on specific regions. The price of the expansions typically ranges from 10 to 20 EUR, so to get the full experience a rather substantial investment must be made compared to other games.

In the first years, the expansions received little negative feedback. In most cases, the content added was deemed necessary and if you choose not to buy it, the game was still regarded as fully enjoyable. At the time of the sixth expansion, called *Common Sense* and released in the summer of 2015, signs are starting to show that the players are questioning if the price of the expansions is worth the improvements they provide. A new way of talking about the game is on the rise, a way of criticism and stated worry that the game is on a downward trend:

“As it stands right now, this game is broken unless you buy Common Sense (which the devs seem to be lacking as of late). I love this game, it is quite frankly my favorite game, or more accurate "was" my favorite.” (...)

“I would have recomend this game at some point in the past , especailly given that i've spent over a thousand hours in it , but its more obvious than ever that paradox dosen't care about making games anymore and would rather just cut them all into a million pieces and sell you each piece individually at a premium. They're doing what EA did to the Sims 3 , sell you the framework for the game at 50 or 60 dollars , and then have all of this overmarked DLC which should have been in the base game.” (...)

(...)“We can argue over supply and demand. We can argue over worth and value. We can also say that you don't have to buy the DLC to enjoy the game. In many ways I can see both sides of the argument. I do not own a game development studio and I do not know how to make a video game. Yet, I find it hard to believe that some of this DLC can't be more affordable. If you are one of those players who bought this game at its inception and bought every DLC as it came out, the burden is less of an impact. Now imagine you are buying the game for the first time. Who in their right mind would want to pay \$263.93 for a game?”(...)

The above three statements were taken from reviews just after the release of the *Common Sense* expansion release, and they describe a new, disenchanting way of talking about the game that is challenging the perception of the EU4 brand. The developers of the game are accused of milking its loyal customers, taking out a high price for content that is not worth the price, and it tests the patience of the brand community. Even in these three statements, some of the underlying factors that shape this negative discourse of exploitation is visible. One rather obvious symbol is the price of the content, but it is not always the price alone that is the

problem, the reasoning is that it is the price compared to the new features they provide that is at the core of the problem. The statements include that it is not “*affordable*”, “*Who in their right mind would want to pay \$263.93 for a game?*” and that Paradox happily “*cut the game into a million pieces to sell it at a premium*”, pointing partly that the total price is too high and partly at that the expansion is too expensive for the content you get. Just as with the discourse of evangelization, the value of the game is at the core of this new way of talking about the brand. All three comments shown here tell a story of them feeling exploited by the brand. They find that the brand’s value is shrinking since every DLC costs more than the value you get. These are stories of once proud supporters of the brand, now having lost faith in the development studio they once loved. Instead of associating the game as something better than the household names of the genre, they are now associating the level of exploitation they feel with that of other poor examples in the games industry, in this case with *Sims 3* and its publisher *EA*. The overarching theme of the criticism is one of exploitation, where community members are feeling used by the brand in their rationalizing efforts.

In this discourse of exploitation, the element of task empathizing is still there, since community members are still trying to help new consumers make a good decision on whether they should invest in the brand or not, even though they are discouraging from purchase. When it comes to the practices defined by Schau et al. (2009), nothing really covers a practice that is an opposite of evangelization, which is applicable for only positive affect of the brand. The article touches upon it in the practice of commoditizing, which regards practices that approaches or distances the community from the marketplace, since it can target firms as well as individuals (Schau et al., 2009). The findings here show a practice that very much mimics that of evangelization in that members share good news about the brand, inspire other to use, and comparing it positively to competing brands, but instead turned to the negative side. In this practice of rejection, they criticize news, deter others from using the brand, and create negative association by comparing it to other bad examples. This practice can be seen as one of monitoring the brand. If the brand is doing something good, the community will praise the decision, while if they do something the community disagrees with, they will instead cast shade on the brand. This yet again ties back to the brand as a dynamic interface between production and consumption of the brand. The community acts on the changes the brand goes through, and fills the brand with values depending on the response of those actions (Holt, 2004; Lury, 2004).

Poor Design Decision acting as symbolic resource for the Exploitation discourse

Another symbolic resource for this discourse is how the content is shaped. With the launch of *Common Sense*, the developers introduced a game mechanic that let the player develop their already owned provinces, thus enabling a playstyle where a small country with few provinces could become powerful without the need for acquiring new land through conquering other nations. The problem was not the design of the feature, it was highly appreciated, but that it was only included in the expansion. The game mechanic was deemed by the community as too essential for the gameplay experience to be excluded from the base game experience, “*making the game broken*” unless you own this exact expansion. This was by many seen as foul play since Paradox always stated that the game would be fully playable without owning certain expansions. An example of this reasoning is found here:

“A fantastic game, however the rebalances in the new Common Sense DLC has made the base game virtually unplayable without it, and given it is not on sale it raises the question of if

it is ever going to be playable without what amounts to a subscription every time Paradox releases a DLC.

Seriously guys, if you are going to make a major change like the development system for provinces, don't put it behind a paywall, and let us actually use some of the features you implement in the patches.”

This single feature in the DLC became yet another symbolic resource that signify the exploitation discourse that started to take form, and there are other features that has been implemented that have evoked similar backlashes from the community, even if this is one that perhaps has had the largest negative impact in the community. The exact feature was made available in the base game in 2019, probably due to the criticism it received.

Drawing on the presented statements and other texts being produced at this time, a new discourse is being formed in the community, a discourse of exploitation. In the online setting the brand finds itself in, users can easily voice their opinion in non-regulated online spaces (Jurgenson & Ritzer, 2010), and they were starting to do just that. Using symbolic resources such as high price and low quality of the downloadable content, mixed with displeasure of feeling like they have to buy expansions to get a playable experience, the brand is quickly getting inscribed with values of exploiting its customer base.

It is important to note that at the time *Common Sense* was released, in the summer of 2015, the overall opinion of the game was largely positive, and that the negative discourse just started to form with posts like the ones found here. In most texts found at this time, the two discourses do not interfere with each other. As more DLC was added, the more the exploitation discourse is being reproduced in the community, cementing itself as a social structure in the culture of the brand community. As time goes on, the two discourses are seen to clash more often, and the debate in the community is clearly getting more infected. Seen through a branding perspective, these discourses are competing over the brand image. The brand, being an interface for consumers to make sense of what it is, is seemingly fronted with a cognitive dissonance of what the brand really is. Is the game truly as good as some say when others clearly are criticising it for being exploitative towards the consumers? These negotiations of what the brand truly is will be analysed in the next section.

The clash of discourses – How the EU4 brand is actively negotiated in its community

Fast forward to today, and it is still apparent that the brand is heavily influenced by the two discourses of evangelizing and exploitation. What started to show when the discourse of exploitation grew in the community, was that it goes against the discourse of evangelization that was first established. It challenges the brand image of being a good game if the value retrieved from the game gets lower each time a new DLC is launched. For some, the positive aspects of the game experience can coexist with the negative of being expensive, but many times polarized supporters of either discourse clash when speaking for their version of what the brand stands for. The following review was found recently on Steam and demonstrates how the two discourses clash within the community:

Sven:

This is a wonderful game, but I believe Paradox's DLC policy should be discouraged. Don't buy this from Steam and don't fork out truckloads of money.

The review supports both discourses: the experience is wonderful but he also feels exploited by the publisher. *Sven's* final verdict leans more towards the negative part of the spectrum though, more heavily accentuating that the game is too expensive to buy. The comments that followed agreed with the reviewer's line of thought, just confirming his statement with comments describing the DLC situation:

Lisa:

True! Anyone reading this, please sum up all the DLC price (even though the base game is free, they want to get you hook like cocaine). This is a 2013 game, yeah that's 7 years ago, look at the price today, you will find paradox is milking its customer dry.

Also, the base game is totally UNPLAYABLE, paradox do it purposely so you would buy the DLC. They give you an unfinished, unpolished game, so that you spend tons of money to buy the DLC. This is the principle of paradox marketing, milking dry its customer. If i were you, i will go and look for civilization 6 game or total war series game. You as the customer you compare yourself the pricing of these game and the year its made, you decide for yourself which has more bang for your bucks yourself.

Jack:

Almost 250€ for the game.

If you miss a DLC, the game is patch to lower the game experience (not every DLC) and forced you to buy it.

I wish to earn more money but I would not have the time to play...So...

Sarah:

The least they could do is offer a nice deal to get all the DLC's or something

These comments all support the exploitation discourse, supporting that the brand is not worth the price and is exploiting its customers. Interestingly, one of the comments associates that a *Civilization* or *Total War* game might be more worth the money, which stands in contrast to the evangelization back when the game was launched.

All of a sudden, a user challenges the argument that the DLCs are too expensive:

William:

None of the DLC is required to play, and half of the content (new map updates, parts of mechanics, new nations etc.) is added into the base game for free by paradox. Furthermore DLC is built so that you can buy only the DLC relating to factions or areas of the game that you want. Is the game "missing features" without the DLC? Sure, features that didn't exist when the game was launched and wouldnt exist without the DLC. I'm just glad you guys are a vocal minority so Paradox keeps breathing new life into this title with content support rivaling that of an MMO.

This is a very interesting comment, it challenges the legitimacy of the notion that the community actually thinks that the price is too high, and that the opposers of the DLC is just a vocal minority. The argument is clear and presents a picture that the content which has been added to the base game wouldn't have existed unless people payed for the DLCs. This is

positioning the DLC-opposers as greedy, rather than the company. Who holds the truth? The backlash to this comment is hard, agitated to say the least. The first attack:

Kim:

William that's a very shitty excuse. This game is extremely barebones without dlc, and half of the nations aren't even playable because of it. Stop making excuses.

We certainly aren't the vocal minority you dumbass, but whatever. Eat shit

Surprisingly (talking from reviewing many similar discussions), **William** actually gets support from a similar-minded user, striking back at the DLC-haters, focusing on **Kim**'s agitated answer in particular:

Robin:

@Kim go play fortnite you damn parasite. This game is for people with a job. I like seeing dlcs, it makes me happy and makes me come back to the game.

It is fair to say that the language use took a turn for the worse when **Kim** entered the comment section, and **Robin** gave back with the same coin, personally insulting **Kim** the same way he/she insulted **William**. The rhetoric in the comments, both the tone of discussion and arguments is not uncommon in the community, and it shows how far apart members of the brand community are. The community members verbally fight over the discourses, some attacking the rationalization efforts and others defending it. As a spectator, possibly one that is interested in buying the game, the outcome of this discussion can potentially decide whether the game it is worth buying or not. If a spectator is led to believe that the game is unplayable without several hundreds of EUR worth of DLC, that is definitely a negative influence for the potential purchase and disenchant the EU4 brand image. This discussion, as most others investigated, never result in a clear answer of which discourse reigns supreme, simply because no consensus is reached. The discussion usually just dies out when someone stops answering, and the spectator is left to decide where the truth lies.

What is seen here is that the original discourses are the same, the broad themes of the brand conflict has not changed, but the positions on the cognitive battlefield has moved forward. The two discourses are almost at war which one another, where groups of people take side and defend their discourse using symbolic resources. The defenders of the evangelizing discourse seem to have adapted its rhetoric as a result of the pressure it has received from the exploitation discourse. The initial review points out what most reviews say, that it is a great game although you are getting exploited if you buy the whole experience. In this iteration the experience is fantastic (evangelizing) but the brand still exploits its customers, leaving the answer open-ended and poses a kind of middle way of how it should be interpreted. In the ensuing comment section, discourse fanatics adhering to one of the two discourses take over and try to steer the consensus towards their viewpoint. The evangelizers here take on a defensive stance, and rather than actively evangelizing the brand they defend the DLC policy for the (in their eyes) uncalled for criticism. Because of this, they use symbolic resources that defends the brand and counters the arguments of the opposing side, which often end up in a sort of capitalistic logic, with statements such as the ones seen above: *"Is the game "missing features" without the DLC? Sure, features that didn't exist when the game was launched and*

wouldnt exist without the DLC.” and “This game is for people with a job. I like seeing dlcs, it makes me happy and makes me come back to the game”.

The discussion shown here contains both the fluidity and elements of affective acting advocated as signs of a brand public (Arvidson & Caliandro, 2015), but the members still find identity in fighting over the brand values, something more significant for brand communities. The sense of belonging is missing when the communities clash, at least in regard to homogeneity of the community. The belonging is rather connected to which discourse the brand member adhere.

In some way, this conversation still shapes the brand. Instead of everyone agreeing on a set of values, it is up to the spectators themselves to decide where the truth lies. In that way, it follows the line of thought of brand publics, where the heterogeneity of consumers just posting posts without considering social rules that otherwise would be monitored in a community. Here, different groups within the community duke it out over whose line of thought is the right, thus not representing one uniform set of beliefs for the brand. In a way, the identity of the brand gets lost in this battle. The evangelists, who in the beginning were telling stories of an engaging hardcore experience, now has been reduced to patrons of the EU4 business model. It is inevitable not to see how the brand image has been hijacked and turned into a discussion of pricing policy, value, and rationalisation, rather than the gaming experience itself. This is a fate surely harmful for a brand in the sector of cultural offerings, a sector where brands very much are dependent on the brand story to invoke a sense of meaning in its consumers (Holt, 2004).

Summary of the Findings and Analysis

To summarize this section, it is fitting to see how the findings explain the research question of this thesis, namely how do online brand communities for video games influence the brand image of the game? The brand community of *Europa Universalis 4* is actively engaging in monitoring and supporting the game, and dependent on each individual's experience with the game, they may produce content that reinforces or damages the brand image. In the case of EU4, the content that is reproduced when it comes to what the brand stands for can be divided into two discourses drawing on certain symbolic elements connected to the offering and the supplied gaming experience. The community is first found to inscribe the brand with positive values derived from the deep and engaging game experience, resulting in a discourse named evangelization. A second discourse inscribing the game with negative value is later shaped from community resentment towards the exploitative downloadable content packages (DLCs) that are continuously added to the game. These two discourses on their own are found to give the brand different values, but at times the discourses clash, fueled by polarized members in the community who argue for the discourse they see as the one truth.

Discussion

This exploratory study help shine light on video games as brands, analyzing what aspects of the experience and the offering that influence the brand image. At the core of gaining positive brand influence from the community lies the gaming experience itself. If the game is more enjoyable than its competitors, in EU4's case by being a much deeper and complex experience, community members are found inscribe the brand with positive values. On the other side, this study also shows how precarious monetizing games can be. Community members are quick to criticize their brands and create discourses of exploitation, and it is seen to disenchant the studied brand.

What truly is uncovered in this study is how the brand of EU4 is under the mercy of the narratives that the community creates. These symbolic resources usually stem from individuals' own experiences with the brand and the value they feel they get from the game. Texts and other community-made content such as videos or pictures create the culture of the brand community, similar to what has been found in other brand community studies (Kozinets, 2001; Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009), and when certain articulations are voiced by a large part of the community, they become naturalised as established ways of talking about the brand, or discourses (Svensson, 2019). Even though the brand community is spread out over many media platforms, the discourses are seen to reach over all the studied platforms, signifying that the discourses are shared values in the community and is what connects the different sub-groups, similar to the findings of Weijo et al. (2014).

The two overarching discourses of evangelization and exploitation are supported by different members in the community, and even though they clash with each other, they both do seem to inscribe the brand with the symbolism they exert. The members react on the value and changes made to the brand, and it is these articulations that are used to cement the discourses in the culture and make sense of the brand. The community acts as a feedback device on the changes that is made to the brand, and are actively seen to monitor and respond to changes in the brand, creating articulations that form the discourses. Based on the enjoyment members get from the game experience the discourse of evangelization is sustained. The same goes for the discourse of exploitation, the deteriorating value of the game as new, expensive DLCs are released infuriates the monitoring members of the community, who articulate expressions of resentment towards this fact, thus reproducing the exploitation discourse that grew strong.

The effects of brand Evangelization

There were several interesting results derived from the evangelization occurring in the community. First, it was found that after the release of the game, the community engage in inscribing the brand with values they derive from the gameplay experience. The act of enchanting the brand with its initial values were likened with the social community practice of evangelizing identified by Schau et al. (2009). The practice's application on brand value had not yet been made, but this thesis points to that evangelization as a social practice may become so significant so that it creates a discourse of evangelization.

A second effect became visible later in the lifetime cycle of the brand, when the community, being upset at the brand, used the evangelization practice in a similar way but instead spread negative associations to the brand because they were dissatisfied with certain aspects of the brand. The evangelization practice became demonizing when they talk about their feelings of exploitation. The consumers seemed to be using this practice in a regulatory way, trying to

steer the development process of the game. It shows that community members often are very engaged in the brand and care for it, so much that they actively try to meddle in development. The practice has become a tool to try and govern the brand. Therefore, based on the findings here, the practice of evangelization could be described as a positive outcome of a monitoring practice, where brand community members react to changes in the brand and re-negotiates the brand values through reproducing texts about their feelings of the changes. This monitoring of the brand congregates well with branding theory, where brands are dynamic in the way that they are socially constructed from stakeholders that have relations to the brand (Kornberger, 2010; Lury, 2004), the stakeholder in this case being the brand community.

Discourses being formed on consumer perceptions of Value

The negative discourse, identified as a discourse of exploitation, arranges the speech of the brand to a discussion of value, more specifically if the experience of the game is good enough to motivate the ever-accumulating costs of the new expansions. The findings show that game brands are very sensitive to becoming hijacked by a discourse of exploitation, similar to the findings in the studies by Wathieu et al. (2002) and Cova and Pace (2006). In this case, the once alluring narratives of conquest, complexity, and historical relevance become exchanged with stories of dissatisfied customers and corporate greed. Surely, the company has interest in profiting from its brands, but they are instantly at risk of eradicating alluring narratives of their brand.

The underlying factors to why the discourses were formed related in one way or another to the perceived value the consumers felt from the product. For the evangelization discourse, positive values were inscribed to the brand based on the entertainment value consumers felt from the game experience. The exploitation discourse was also related to value, specifically the lack of entertainment value and high price of the launched DLCs. In previous studies, the players found value in being enjoyed, being challenged, and having autonomy (Boyle et al., 2012; Marchand & Hennig Thurau, 2013). What had not been shown before was the effect that the value of the experience had on brand value, since the consumer used these experiences as symbolic narratives to build up the discourse of evangelization.

Findings where the two mentioned discourses clashed were plentiful in the community, found in YouTube videos, livestreams on Twitch, in forum posts, and in the reviews on Steam. The focal point of the discussions was in most cases if the game was worth the price. The positive aspects of the game experience were presented on one side, and the cost of the experience on the other. In discussions where the price was questioned, brand advocates who wholeheartedly support the brand often responded with capitalistic rhetoric that the game still is developed because people buys the DLCs. The discussion often turned away from the superior experience of the game, culminating in an argument of corporate strategy and revenue models. Seen through the perspective of looking at the brand as an interface that structures production and consumption (Kornberger, 2010), it seems as if the consumers view social media complaining as a tool to govern their brand, because they know that the bad publicity they create can change the decisions of the game developers. This then becomes a prime example of how the brand actually becomes the interface between society and organisation: By community members actively disenchanting the brand, complaining about added features that they feel deduct use value. That leaves the corporate organisation forced to take into consideration this discursive attack if they don't want their brand to lose value. This is the backside of what Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010) postulate of how internet gives consumers

more freedom. With the interconnectedness on the internet, and the new possibilities for consumers to be seen, the control of the brand is put more and more in the hands of society rather than to its corporate owners, exactly what Veloutsou & Moutinho (2008) also found.

Theoretical Implications

The study identifies that video game brands are being influenced by their online brand communities dependent on the perceptions of value the community members derive from the brand. This happens through a process of discourse-creation in the community where members in the studied case use symbolic resources from the game experience and its business model to create a discourse of evangelization and one of exploitation. These discourses are found to mentally position the brand, inscribing it with brand values. These findings shines a much needed light on the branding processes for video game brands, an industry with very specific setting in the forefront of digitalization.

The findings imply that members in online brand communities have a strong position to monitor their brands, acting as dynamic feedback mechanisms for the brand (Lury, 2004). For brand theory, this further supports the notion of the power consumers are given on the internet (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), and that members can use this powerful position to construe the brand's social position.

Managerial Implications

Managerial implications for this paper are that brands within the gaming industry must be extremely careful in analysing their consumers' capability to determine the experience's value. The monetization model of adding continuous content-expansions to the game is filled with risk, since it almost guaranteed will come under intense scrutiny of the engaged brand community members. If they deem it of poor value, they will quickly create negative sentiment and potentially try to hijack the brand to get their will through, in accordance other findings (Wathieu et al., 2002; Cova and Pace, 2006). These findings are in line with other research that found that the brand community many times have more influence on the brand than its brand managers, and that the brand will get its own character from the interpretations of the community (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2008).

Future Research and Limitations

As this thesis took an exploratory scope, investigating only one case, not much can be said about the generalizability of the study unless it is applied to other cases. Future research must further investigate the identified patterns that the perceived value of the game create discourses in the community that positively and negatively influence the brand.

Also, the exact influence that the community-discourses had on consumers were not fully investigated in this thesis. All the respondents in this study were already initiated members of the brand, either agreeing or disagreeing to the symbolism enchanted in the brand, which leaves the question how an outsider of the brand interprets the culture. It is only outlined how video game brands were negotiated in the community, it does not research to what degree the created discourses actually influence purchase intentions or other quantitative measures. Before that is done, not much can be said about the effect of the discourses uncovered.

When examining the community, a wide variety of ways to engage in the brand was found that could be valuable targets for further research, especially in regard to the value-adding mechanisms in video game brands. A deeper analysis on factors such as the importance of

humour in the community, the effect of modding communities on brand value and so on were themes that were visible making the netnography, but its value in negotiating the brand could not be fully understood and incorporated in this thesis. These present valid areas of research to fully understand how communities create brand value for video game brands. The importance of humour as a social marker within the community was evident, but the motivations to why people actively try to be funny when posting content was never fully investigated.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate video game brands and see how the brand image was shaped by the value consumers derive from the brand. Upon doing a netnography and applying discourse analysis on the texts produced by community members of the grand strategy game *Europa Universalis 4*, several important aspects were found about how the brand was shaped and negotiated.

First, it was shown that community members engage in various enchanting and disenchanting practices based on the experience they had with the game and the perceived value of the offering. In the studied case of EU4, two enchanting discourses were formed as a result of the community's collective evaluation of the game: One evangelizing discourse inscribing the brand initially with narratives of a truly engaging experience, and the second being a disenchanting discourse of exploitation, spawned as a result of the addition of expensive expansions. The two discourses were often found to be at odds with each other, where some community members were staying true to their evangelization of the brand, while others broke free from their appreciation and publicly slander the brand for their monetization strategy. The conflict between these groups permeate the community, and the visibility of the two discourses leaves little questioning about the values it inscribes to the brand. The discourses tell a story of a gaming great experience which is offered for an unreasonably high cost. The study thereby shows that consumer's internal perception of value can have influence on the brand image through their vocal expressions in the community. The expressions, if reproduced by enough members, create discourses that become naturalised in the community.

The study points to the power of the consumer in the online brand community setting, where the members monitor and react to every move made by the video game developers, potentially finding new symbols to fuel their brand-altering discourses.

References

- Arvidsson, A., & Caliandro, A. (2016). Brand public. *42*(5), 727-748.
- Boyle, Elizabeth A, Connolly, Thomas M, Hainey, Thomas, & Boyle, James M. (2012). Engagement in digital entertainment games: A systematic review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *28*(3), 771-780
- Bulik, B. (2012). 'MASS EFFECT 3' STRUGGLES WITH SOCIAL-MEDIA FUROR OVER ENDING; Critics attack uninspired finish, leading to quandry: Should EA bow to pressure or defend game as 'art'? *Advertising Age*, *83*(14), 0004.
- Business Wire. (2019). Electronic Arts and Valve Announce Partnership to Bring EA Access Subscription and EA Games to Steam. *Business Wire*, Oct 29, 2019
- Cova, B., & Pace, S. (2006). Brand community of convenience products: New forms of customer empowerment - the case "my Nutella The Community". *European Journal of Marketing*, *40*(9/10), 1087-1105.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. (1st ed.).
- Hartmann, B. *Unboxing Marketing: Creating Value for Consumers, Firms, and Society*. 2020. Print.
- Hartmann, B., & Ostberg, J. (2013). Authenticating by re-enchantment: The discursive making of craft production. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *29*(7-8), 882-911.
- Hartmann, B., Wiertz, C., & Arnould, E. (2015). Exploring Consumptive Moments of Value-Creating Practice in Online Community. *Psychology & Marketing*, *32*(3), 319-340.
- Heimo, O., Harviainen, I., Kimppa, J., & Mäkilä, T. (2018). Virtual to Virtuous Money: A Virtue Ethics Perspective on Video Game Business Logic. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *153*(1), 95-103.
- Holt, D. (2004). *How brands become icons: The principles of cultural branding*. Boston, MA: *Harvard Business School Press*.
- Hsu, C., & Lu, H. (2007). Consumer behavior in online game communities: A motivational factor perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *23*(3), 1642-1659
- Internet Historian. (2019, 4th May). "The Fall of 76". Retrieved 2020-05-12 from: <https://youtu.be/kjyeCdd-dl8>.
- King, D., & Delfabbro, P. (2018). Predatory monetization schemes in video games (e.g. 'loot boxes') and internet gaming disorder. *Addiction*, *113*(11), 1967-1969
- Kozinets, R. (2001). Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of Star Trek 's Culture of Consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *28*(1), 67-88.
- Kozinets, R. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*.
- Kozinets, R. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined* (2nd ed.)
- Lury, C. (2004). *Brands: The logos of the global economy*. *New York: Routledge*.

- MacDonald, K. (2018, 20th July). No Man's Sky developer Sean Murray: 'It was as bad as things can get'. *The Guardian*. Obtained from: <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2018/jul/20/no-mans-sky-next-hello-games-sean-murray-harassment-interview>
- Marchand, André, and Thorsten Hennig-Thurau. "Value Creation in the Video Game Industry: Industry Economics, Consumer Benefits, and Research Opportunities." *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 27.3 (2013): 141-57. Web.
- Nakassis, C. (2013). BRANDS AND THEIR SURFEITS. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(1), 111-126.
- Paradox Interactive. (2020). Annual Report 2019. Retrieved 2020-05-01 from <https://www.paradoxinteractive.com/en/paradox-interactive-ab-publ-publishes-annual-report-for-2019/>
- Patel, R., & Davidson, B. (2011). *Forskningsmetodikens grunder: Att planera, genomföra och rapportera en undersökning* (4., [uppdaterade] uppl. ed.)
- Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5(2), 243-263.
- Ritzer, G. (2005). *Enchanting a disenchanted world: Revolutionizing the means of consumption*. Thousand Oaks, CA: *Pine Forge Press*
- Ritzer, G., & Jurgenson, N. (2010). Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital 'prosumer'. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10(1), 13-36.
- Robbins, M. (2015). To download or not to download? *Library Journal*, 140(7), 55.
- Schau, Hope Jensen, Muniz, Albert M., Jr., & Arnould, Eric J. (2009). How brand community practices create value.(Report). *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 30-51.
- Svensson, P. *Diskursanalys*. Upplaga 1 ed. 2019. Print. Greppbar Metod.
- Vargo, S., & Lusch, R. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal Of Marketing*, 68(1), 1-17.
- Veloutsou, C., & Moutinho, L. (2009). Brand relationships through brand reputation and brand tribalism. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(3), 314-322.
- Wathieu, L., Brenner, L., Carmon, Z., Chattopadhyay, A., Wertenbroch, K., Drolet, A., . . . Wu, R. (2002). Consumer Control and Empowerment: A Primer. *Marketing Letters*, 13(3), 297-305.
- Weijo, H., Hietanen, J., & Mattila, P. (2014). New insights into online consumption communities and netnography. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(10), 2072-2078.
- Zackariasson, P, and Mikolaj D. *Video Game Marketing: A Student Textbook*. 2016. Print.