

PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN VIDEO GAMES

Consumer perspectives and product placement
effects on gaming experience

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Abstract <p>Video games have emerged as one of the biggest mass-media markets and gaming technology is constantly developing. Games and gaming experiences are continually improving and vast amounts of people play games daily. Games are highly engaging and immersive due to their interactive, challenging and self-rewarding qualities, which enable them to occupy the attention of the gamers for substantial periods of time. Games present an excellent medium for advertisers to get their messages across to the consumers. In-game advertising is common in the present-day gaming industry, but only a few studies have been conducted regarding the consumer perspective of product placement inclusion in video games and their possible effects on the gaming experience.</p> <p>The thesis conducted a research on the possible effects product placement inclusions have on consumers' gaming experiences and measures how gamers generally perceive product placement inclusion in video games. A theoretical framework for the premises of the research was built by investigating existing literature and studies about the phenomenon.</p> <p>The research was a quantitative, descriptive research that used an online survey method to gather the research data. A probability sample consisting of the visitors of two online discussion forums targeted to active gamers was utilized. A total of 83 respondents participated in the survey and 61 of these were valid responses accounted for in the result analysis.</p> <p>The research revealed three notable discoveries. Firstly, large amounts of the sample population were not familiar with concept of product placement. Secondly, over half of the participants had never encountered product placements within the games they play. Thirdly, most participants who had encountered product placement within games felt that it had no affect on their gaming experience. The research was able to conclude that gamers have a generally good perception towards in-game advertising and are mostly satisfied with product placements in video games.</p>		
Keywords Product placement, advertising, games, gaming, consumer study, gaming experience		
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Tiivistelmä <p>Videopelit ovat nousseet yhdeksi suurimmista massamediamarkkinoista. Peliteknologia kehittyä jatkuvasti ja sen myötä sekä pelit, että pelikokemukset parantuvat. Suuret määrät ihmisiä pelaavat pelejä päivittäin. Pelit ovat hyvin sitouttavia ja mukaansatempaavia interaktiivisten, haastavien ja pelaajan itseään kehittämistä tukevien piirteidensä vuoksi ja pystyvät valtaamaan pelaajan keskittymisen merkittävän pitkiksi ajoiksi. Pelit ovat mainostajille oivallinen kanava viestiä kuluttajille. Mainonta pelien sisällä on nykyään yleistä pelialalla, mutta vain muutamia tutkimuksia on tehty tuotesijoittelusta peleissä kuluttajan näkökulmasta ja tuotesijoittelun mahdollisista vaikutuksista kuluttajien pelikokemukseen.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyössä tutkittiin tuotesijoittelun mahdollisia vaikutuksia kuluttajien pelikokemukseen ja mitattiin pelaajien yleistä käsitystä videopeleissä tapahtuvaa tuotesijoittelua kohtaan. Aiheesta olemassa olevia teoksia tutkimalla rakennettiin teoreettiset puitteet ilmiön tutkimista varten.</p> <p>Tutkimus oli luonteeltaan kvantitatiivisdeskriptiivinen verkkokyselytutkimus, jossa todennäköisyysotantana käytettiin satunnaisotantaa kahden suomalaisen Internet – pelifoorumin kävijöistä. Näiden kahden foorumin kävijät koostuivat aktiivisista pelaajista. Kaiken kaikkiaan 83 vastaajaa osallistui kyselytutkimukseen. Näistä 61 vastausta olivat tulosten analysoinnin kannalta valideja vastauksia, jotka sisällytettiin tutkimustulosten analyysiin.</p> <p>Tutkimus paljasti kolme merkittävää havaintoa. Ensimmäiseksi, suurin osa edustavasta otoksesta ei ollut tietoinen tuotesijoittelusta konseptina. Toiseksi, yli puolet kyselyyn osallistuneista ei ollut koskaan kohdannut tuotesijoittelua pelaamissaan peleissä. Kolmanneksi, suurin osa tuotesijoittelua peleissä kohdanneista osallistujista ei kokenut tuotesijoittelulla olleen vaikutusta heidän pelikokemukseensa. Tutkimuksesta voitiin todeta pelaajilla olevan yleisesti hyvä käsitys peliensisäisestä mainonnasta ja he ovat pääsääntöisesti tyytyväisiä tuotesijoitteluun videopeleissä.</p>		
Avainsanat (asiasanat)		
Tuotesijoittelu, mainonta, pelit, pelaaminen, kuluttajatutkimus, pelikokemus		
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1. Introduction

Video games are constantly becoming increasingly popular and gaming technology is constantly developing and improving. It has been said that each new generation born will be a gaming generation. Games attract especially young adults, both male and female who spend substantial amounts of time engaged in the artificial reality of video games. Games are highly popular, because they provide their audience with intense feelings of enjoyment and can induce a heightened sense of self-congruity and self improvement. The virtual world of games provides consumers with an alternate reality where they can freely implement themselves without the fear of consequences or responsibility, furthermore the virtual reality of a game is a place where people can go and escape responsibilities and routines of the reality.

Good gaming experiences can induce an optimal state of happiness called the flow state. Games are ideal mediums for inducing the state of flow and this is what compels people to spend vast amounts of time immersed in the game world. Since games are especially efficient in attracting and engaging huge audiences, they have become increasingly attractive media for advertisers to communicate their messages to the consumers. In-game advertising is the inclusion of products or brands within the game world or integrating them into the gameplay itself.

Generally, product placements that are naturally included into the game world or seamlessly integrated into the gameplay can enhance the gaming experience and create additional realism to the game. Whereas, incongruently integrated product placements may distract the gamer and create negative associations.

This research was a descriptive, quantitative survey-study that explored the affects of in-game product placements on the consumers' gaming experiences. The first chapter will introduce a theoretical background to the phenomena by creating an understanding on demographics of gamers, what games are, how gaming experience is created, what separates games from reality, why games are played, and what product placement is and how it manifests in games. The methodology section describes the research problem

and explains the research method and implementation of the survey more elaborately. The results of the survey are presented and analyzed in chapter four and consequently discussed and summarized in chapter five. The last chapter concludes the research and its findings and presents future suggestions regarding the topic of the thesis. Finally, references and appendices are included at the end.

2. Literature review

Games and gaming are a part of a lively, strongly progressive culture and the present-day gaming industry is constantly accelerating. The popularity of consoles and high quality PCs is huge and more people are playing in the vast amount of different types of games (Lehtonen, S. & Kyllönen, K. 2010, 9, 18). Currently most games are released for both console and PC format since both have sufficient markets (op.cit.p. 9, 18), yet video games are merely a sub-category in a huge category of games in general (Chatfield, T. 2011, 13). The culture of gaming has undergone various different development phases through the decades (Lehtonen, S. & Kyllönen, K. 2010, 9, 18) and the technology used for gaming has drastically improved from the days of the first computer game Spacewar, developed by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1961 (Mortensen, T.E. 2009, 21-22).

Video games have become one of the biggest forms of mass-market entertainment (Ip, B. 2009, 89) and their interactive nature presents possibilities of engaging people unlike any media before them (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 200). This has made games and in-game advertising an increasingly important way for advertisers to promote their message to consumers (op.cit. 48). In addition to the changes in the industry, gaming itself as a hobby is currently very different from what it was ten years ago and players today are a completely different demographic than then. Furthermore, it seems that gaming is no longer tied to gender or age and researches have concluded that the average gamer is more often older than presumed. (Lehtonen, S. & Kyllönen, K. 2010, 9, 18.)

2.1 The popularity and consumption of games

According to the European Consumer Study (2012), conducted by Ipsos MediaCT and Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE), an average of 25% of Europeans play games at least once a week. The gamer profile in the study shows a gender breakdown supporting the claim that gaming is not tied to gender and age anymore. The European average statistics show that 55% of players are male and 45% are female. Furthermore, 51% of male players are aged 35 or under and 49% of female players are aged 35 and above. The age of European players expands from 16 to 64 years old. In addition, the study reveals that consoles, computers and mobile devices are the most commonly used mediums for playing. (op.cit.p. 5, 7, 11).

In 2012 the gaming industry was the fastest growing section of the entertainment industry world-wide and in 2011 it was already worth over €50 billion and as the technology advances, more platforms are constantly introduced to the market (Niipola, J. 2012, 8). Games attract the attention of people of all ages (Ip, B. 2009, 89), however the audience of this mainstream medium primarily consists of adults (Brand, J.E. 2010). Furthermore, graphics, games and gaming experiences are improved due to the technical development of the industry, adding to the amount of new players constantly (Niipola, J. 2012, 8).

By understanding games and, furthermore, the act of playing a game it is possible to create a perception of what makes games so popular, why so many people play them and why they are used as a medium for product placement.

2.2 Games and gaming experience

In order to define and examine gaming experience, it is necessary to first define the concept of game and what makes a game.

2.2.1 What is a game?

In their book *Mariosofia* (2002) Erkki Huhtamo and Sonja Kangas define a game as a set of interactive actions between two or more participants that can either be between players or a player and a computer. These interactive actions are guided by a set of rules and they usually include a goal the player is trying to reach (op.cit.p. 19). Clark C. Abt's (1970) definition supports Huhtamo and Kangas, according to him a game is a context with rules among adversaries trying to win objectives. It is an activity shared with two or more independent decision-makers in some limiting context (op.cit. 6).

David Parlett (1999) defines a game as a twofold structure based on ends and means. More precisely, a game is a contest to achieve an objective with an agreed set of equipment and procedural rules by which the equipment is manipulated to win the game. Contenders may be individuals or teams, but only one of them can achieve the goal since achieving it ends the game. Thus achieving a goal means winning the game. (op.cit. p. 3.) Parlett's definition implies that games are, by nature, competitive. In *The Study of Games* (1971, 405), Brian Sutton-Smith and Elliot Avedon define games as "*an exercise of voluntary control systems, in which there is a contest between powers, confined by rules in order to produce a disequilibrium outcome.*"

Jane McGonigal (2011, 22) uses Bernard Suits' (1990) definition of a game, which supports that of Sutton-Smith and Avedon: "*Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.*" Jesper Juul (2005, 31) questions the use of the word "voluntary" to describe a game and states that games are, rather, autotelic since they are mostly played for the sake of the game itself, not for some external reason. Finally, in *Rules of Play* (2004, 80) Eric Zimmerman and Katie Salen define a game as a system in which the players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome.

Torill Elvira Mortensen (2009, 9) calls Zimmerman and Salen's definition of games in *Rules of Play* into question; Mortensen discusses their "ambivalent choices" that lead into a formation of one definition in which games and

gaming are generally combined, implying that the game is the same as the activity of playing a game. Mortensen continues to refer to anthropologist Johann Huizinga's work *Homo Ludens* (1949) that defines how the concept of play can be integrated into that of the culture. Whereas Zimmerman and Salen (2004, 75) use Huizinga's work as a source for finding a definition for a game, Mortensen (2009, 10) points out that Huizinga defines play both as a rule-bound, competitive activity as well as free play with neither rules, nor competition, focusing more on what qualifies as "playing games" than defining the game itself. Zimmerman and Salen (2004, 75) realize this problem in their work as well by noticing that Huizinga's qualities of play do not necessarily define a game. Gaming and a game are distinct from each other, yet one cannot exist without the other (Mortensen, T.E. 2009, 10).

The four core elements that define games are the goal, the rules, the feedback system and voluntary participation (McGonigal, J. 2011, 21). However, in order to truly understand a game it must be played or at least carefully observed (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 5) and Mortensen (2009, 10) agrees with Edery and Mollick by stating that "*to understand what a game is, we need to understand gaming.*"

2.2.2 Gaming experience

"*To play a game is to experience the game.*" (Zimmerman, E. & Salen, K. 2004, 314)

The Oxford dictionary (2014) defines experience as a practical contact with an observation of facts or events as well as an event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone. Furthermore, it describes experience by using the verb 'feel' as an emotion or a sensation. This definition suggests that to experience something is to feel something, to participate in an event or an occurrence that evokes emotion or sensation within the participant. It can be stated that experience is participation and this supports the idea that games must be played to be understood.

As established earlier, a game is a system consisting of a structure of rules in which the players voluntarily participate in to achieve a set goal. Zimmerman and Salen (2004, 311) make a compact explanation of the importance of the relation between play and gaming experience: *“The play of a game is the experiential aspect of a game. Play in a game occurs as the game rules are set into motion and experienced by the players.”*

According to Zimmerman and Salen (2004, 314-315), in his book *Toys as Culture*, Brian Sutton-Smith (1986) lists psychological processes by which specifically video games are experienced. He divides gaming experience into five elements: visual scanning, auditory discrimination, motor responses, concentration and perceptual patterns of learning. By these five elements, Sutton-Smith suggests that gaming experience occurs when the player uses sensorial attributes of sight and hearing to visually perceive the game screen and to hear the events and signals in the game. Furthermore, the five elements suggest that the player uses physical actions to take part in the game by using motor responses such as pressing a controller button. In addition, the elements infer that the player's internal, cognitive mechanisms contribute to the emergence of gaming experience (concentration and perceptual patterns of learning). Participation in the game through visual, auditory and motor stimuli requires a level of intense focus on the play. Zimmerman and Salen's (2004, 315) interpretation of this is that the internal, cognitive mechanisms of the player link the inputs (motor response) and outputs (visual scanning, auditory discrimination) together, allowing the player to perceptually learn the structure of the game itself by concentrating on the game play.

Zimmerman and Salen (2004) drafted Sutton-Smith's five elements into a simple model consisting of three components. This model simplifies Sutton-Smith's thinking into a structure of relationships between inputs, outputs and internal player mechanisms that provide an understanding of how players experience a game. The model demonstrates a theory wherein experience within a game system always includes sensory input, player output and internal player cognition (op.cit.p. 315-316). Thus, gaming experience is generated from a continuum in which a player makes an internal decision,

takes action and the game creates an output as described in Figure 1 devised by Zimmerman and Salen.

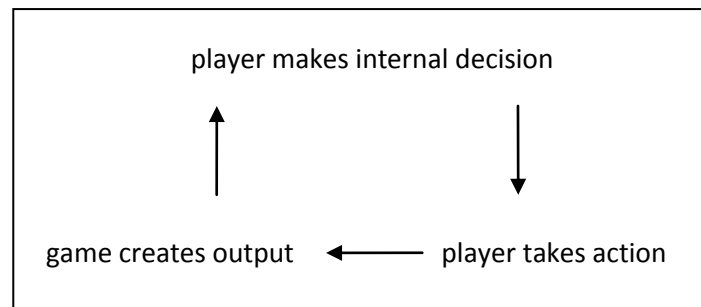


Figure 1. Three-part model for understanding gaming experience (Zimmerman, E. & Salen, K. 2004, 316).

Naturally, different kinds of games create different kinds of experiences (Juul, J. 2005, 12). Playing a game, in its most simple form, is making choices and taking action within a system that supports meaningful choice-making. The decisions the player makes and the actions they take must result in an outcome in the system of the game immediately and the outcome needs to be significant to the gameplay. The action-outcome relationship can also be integrated into a larger context of the game, which means the player's action has an immediate affect and significance in the game, but it affects the experience of the play later on in the game as well. When every action taken affects the system of the game, meaning is created from the relationship between action and system-outcome. With each action taken the players find themselves with new layers of meaning that accumulate and shape their experience. (Zimmerman, E. & Salen, K. 2004, 33-37.) The interactive and realistic characteristics of video games can often immerse the player in the virtual world of the game. Thus video games can create a gaming experience that induces a strong feeling of presence in which the surrounding world becomes invisible and the player focuses solely on the game world (Lombard, M. & Ditton, T. 1997). Since video games can be highly immersive, it is important to define a distinction between video games and reality.

2.2.3 Differentiating the game world from the ordinary world

“Video games are two different things at the same time: video games are real in that they consist of real rules with which players actually interact, and in that winning or losing a game is a real event. However, when winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not a real dragon, but a fictional one.” (Juul, J. 2005,1)

Although games exist in reality, they are temporary worlds with their own boundaries of time and space in which certain structures of rules oblige. As the player enters those boundaries, they enter a specific time and space called the magic circle. The magic circle may be a game board or a soccer field, but it can also represent a non-physical state in which at least one player makes the decision to play a game. (Huizinga, J. 1949, 10-13). McGonigal (2011, 21) states *“when we’re playing a game, we just know it. There’s something essentially unique about the way games structure experience.”* As the game begins, the player enters the magic circle. If the game is paused, the player exits the magic circle, as well as when the game ends. Magic circle is an important boundary that maintains the fiction of a game and separates it from real life. (DeKoven, B. 1978, 38.)

When people play games they adopt rules that significantly hinder their means to reach a set goal. Games are full of obstacles and hardships that the player must overcome in order to reach the end of the game, but before beginning the game, the player has acknowledged these restrictions and willingly enters the magic circle. Games provide their players common goals that have no affect on life outside of the game when achieved (DeKoven, B. 1978, 3), but alongside games, reality seems too easy and games provide voluntary challenges allowing the players to explore, learn and improve themselves while putting their personal strengths to better use (McGonigal, J. 2011, 22-27).

Psychologist Michael Apter (1991, 15) states that once a human enters the state of play they experience a psychological, protective frame, where no harm can occur, that separates them from real life and the problems therein. Similarly, in real life, the fence surrounding a park reflects that exact frame

and in games rules act as the frame, implying that the frame can as well consist of abstract qualities. A game is a psychologically safe place to experience reality without the fear of the consequences of actions or events (Crawford, C. 1984).

Once the player enters the frames of the game, they are constantly observing them to determine if the game is still ongoing (Sniderman, S. 1999, 4). Ederly and Mollick (2009, 87) make a statement, in junction to product placement in video games, that the line between games and rest of the life is becoming a blurred reality due to the omnipresence of games. Games today can go anywhere and their popularity is constantly growing, as shown by the statistics and studies previously introduced in this thesis, but what is the force that drives an increasing amount of people to play video games in such vast amounts?

2.3 Why do people play games?

“Games are compelling because, at their best, they represent the very essence of what drives people to think, to cooperate, and to create.” (Ederly, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 4)

In *Reality is Broken*, J. McGonigal (2011, 39-43) talks about the Pilgrim in the *Microworld* (1983), a book written by David Sudnow in which he elaborately describes his experience of playing the Atari game *Breakout*. Sudnow was completely immersed with the game’s continuous feedback loop and as his skills grew, he wanted to play more and as he played more, his skills developed even further. Furthermore, McGonigal (2011, 38) elaborates on the happiness induced emotion of playing games by stating *“Compared with games, reality is depressing. Games focus our energy, with relentless optimism, on something we’re good at and enjoy.”*

In their research, R. Davis, B. Lang and N. Gautam (2013, 244) reveal that consumption of games is highly motivated by the hedonic experience of enjoyment. This view is supported by Sweetser and Wyeth (2005) who state

that the single most important goal in gaming is enjoyment. Davis, Lang and Gautam (2013, 233) also refer to Mathwick and Rigdon (2004) by stating that enjoyment is a self-oriented reward associated with escapism. Games allow players to briefly transform their perceptions of the world by identifying with their virtual character (Davis, R., Lang, B. & Gautam, N. 2013, 244) and hedonic experience is often intertwined with the player's enjoyment and self-concept (op.cit.p. 232: Arnold, M.J. & Reynolds, K.E., 2003). Therefore, consumers play games to experience self-congruity (op.cit.p. 244: Lu, H-P. & Wang, S-M. 2008) and high levels of emotion and excitement (op.cit.p. 4: Fiore, A., Jin, H. & Kim, J. 2005) as well as to be entertained, to have fun and to immerse in the experience (op.cit.p.. 232: Wolfbinger, M. & Gilly, M.C. 2001). Games link reality with virtual reality through experience, which allows the players to develop their imagination (op.cit.p.. 244: Molesworth, M. 2006).

Playing a good game allows the player to move towards the positive end on an emotional scale and the gameplay activates neurological and physiological systems that entail the sensation of happiness by rewarding, motivating and capturing attention. When engaged in optimistic activities, it is possible to think positively and build personal strengths, thus actively conditioning a happier being. (McGonigal, J. 2011, 28). Ederly and Mollick (2009) make similar remarks, in which they describe the special nature of games as interactivity, immersion and fun, and suggest that millions of eager and motivated people play games for the simple joy of it.

According to a study by Lindsay D. Grace and James Coyle (2011) the four main gratification factors affecting motivation and interest towards gaming are personal, social, competition and escape. People play to satisfy needs such as challenge solving, self-improvement, learning, interaction, cooperation, winning and getting away from real-life routines. Sweetser and Wyeth (2005, 3) refer to psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's (1990) work, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, and reveal that people develop activities for the sole purpose of enriching their lives and games are among these activities. In order to maintain the attention of the players, games need to be immersive and engaging, which also makes the gaming experience more valuable (The evolution of video gaming and content consumption, 2012).

Csikszentmihályi is a credited researcher of the concept of flow, a state in which a person is completely immersed in their current action and is so absorbed in it that nothing else seems to matter (Csikszentmihályi, M. 1975, 40-41). The state of flow is such an exhilarating experience that people will do it for its own sake, because the feeling of the induced enjoyment itself is a reward (Csikszentmihályi, M. 1975, 13, 47). Furthermore, Csikszentmihályi (1975, 71) explains that flow occurs mostly with activities that require mental energy and suitable skills, and with activities that are goal-oriented as well as bound by rules. Sweetser and Wyeth (2005, 3) list Csikszentmihályi's (1990) eight elements of flow that induce the state of flow when combined:

1. A task that can be completed.
2. The ability to concentrate on the task.
3. That concentration is possible, because the task has clear goals.
4. That concentration is possible, because the task provides immediate feedback.
5. The ability to exercise a sense of control over actions.
6. A deep, but effortless involvement that removes awareness of the frustrations of everyday life.
7. Concern for self disappears, but sense of self emerges stronger afterwards.
8. The sense of the duration of time is altered.

These eight elements are remarkably similar with the elements used in defining video games. Sweetser and Wyeth (2005) drafted Csikszentmihályi's eight elements of flow into eight core elements that form the GameFlow model by mapping the flow elements with game literature. The eight core elements of the GameFlow model are concentration, challenge, skills, control, clear goals, feedback, immersion, and social (op.cit.p. 4). The eight core elements of the GameFlow model, as mapped into game literature, are presented in a table on page 13.

As established, the qualities that define a game are nearly identical to the elements that together induce the state of flow, the optimal experience of enjoyment. In order to examine whether or not product placement has an

effect on gaming experience, it is essential to define what product placement is and what effects it has in video games according to previous studies. The following chapter will build a basic understanding of product placement and previous studies about product placement in video games.

Table1. Mapping the Elements from Games Literature to the Elements of Flow (Sweetser, P. & Wyeth, P. 2005, 4)

Games Literature	Flow
The Game	A task that can be completed
Concentration	Ability to concentrate on the task
Challenge Player Skills	Perceived skills should match challenges and both must exceed a certain threshold
Control	Allowed to exercise a sense of control over actions
Clear goals	The task has clear goals
Feedback	The task provides immediate feedback
Immersion	Deep but effortless involvement, reduced concern for self and sense of time
Social Interaction	n/a

2.4 Marketing

In Foundations of Marketing (2009) David Jobber and John Faye describe the concept of marketing as the achievement of corporate goals through meeting and exceeding customer needs better than the competition. The purpose of marketing is to introduce the existence of a commodity (Jobber, D. & Faye, J. 2009). Furthermore marketing is executed in order to influence consumers into taking an interest in the product, to buy the product, to buy a new version of the product or buy extensions of a certain product (Kuluttajansuojavirasto, 2013).

The major elements in marketing are customers, needs, exchange and markets. To successfully control these elements through marketing

management, a framework called the marketing mix is utilized. This framework traditionally consists of product, price, promotion and place. However, the modern market environment has led to a debate whether more tools should be included in the mix, such as people, processes and physical evidence in order to satisfy the customers' needs in a profitable manner. (Palmer, A. 2012, 20.)

Promotion is the element within the marketing mix that is used by companies as a communication tool to inform and persuade target audiences to purchase products and services offered by that company (Fill, C. 2009, 932). One of the five key promotional tools used to communicate with customers is advertising (Palmer, A. 2012, 23).

2.4.1 Advertising

Winston Fletcher (2010) and Chris Fill (2009) both state that the main function of advertising is to communicate with specific audiences. Advertisements are paid communication with the intention of persuading the target audience and informing that audience of certain products or services. One defining aspect of advertising is that it is nearly always paid for, with the exception of advertisements that have been given away without any compensation in exchange. Advertising is often reacted to with a certain amount of reserve due to its persuasive intent. However, the informative qualities of advertising are acceptable and even desirable, even though all the information included in advertisements is generally intended to be persuasive. (Fletcher, W. 2010, 2-4).

The most notable strengths of advertising are its abilities in developing brand awareness, brand values and brand association. Advertising has the possibility to reach vast audiences and enable them to understand products. In fact, the main purposes of advertising are building awareness, inducing audience engagement and changing the perceptions and attitudes towards brands. The role of advertising is to raise brand familiarity and identification. As advertisements are often met with criticism, one way to overcome the irritation effect associated with advertisements is the premeditated inclusion of

the advertised product within media in order to attain promotional exposure. This inclusion of products with the purpose of advertising is called product placement. (Fill, C. 2009, 692-695.)

2.4.2 Product Placement

In their article Audience Response to Product Placements, in the Journal of Advertising (2006, 115), Siva K. Balasubramanian and James A. Karrh refer to their previous works to provide an explanation of product placement.

Generally product placement means including real-life brands or brand identifiers into abstract or fictional environments, such as movies, television series and video games (Karrh, J.A. 1998) in order to influence audiences by a paid attempt that does not necessarily identify the sponsor (Balasubramanian, S.K. 1994). Congruently, Finnish Communications Regulatory Authority (FICORA) defines product placement as inserting any product, service or trademark into an audiovisual program in return for a compensation (Viestintävirasto, 2012). Thus it can be stated that product placement is a method of advertising. Jean-Marc Lehu (2007, 19) refers to Samuel A. Turcotte's (1995) work and states that product placement can take on multiple forms. Lehu (2007) continues to reveal that marketing and entertainment are, and have always been, allies (op.cit.p. 23: Mcdonald, J.F. 1979) and that the line between the entertainment itself and the advertising content in it is at least fragile, if nonexistent (op.cit.p. 23: Mcdowell, J. 2004).

There are two distinctively used forms of product placement. Pure product placements are passive, which means they are only visually present within the advertisement medium. "Branded entertainment" means actively including the placement within the plot or storyline of the advertisement medium, or building the entire medium around the single product. (Fill, C. 2009, 692: Hudson & Hudson, 2006.) Edery and Mollick (2009) refer to passive product placement as peripheral placements and branded entertainment as highly integrated product placements. Branded entertainment, or highly integrated product placements, occurs in games, as well, and they have the additional advantage of interactivity over film or television –based placements (op.cit.p. 44).

2.4.3 In-game advertising – product placement in video games

As already stated in the previous chapter, Edery and Mollick (2009) divide in-game advertising into two categories: highly integrated product placements and peripheral product placements. From these two the peripheral placements are most common product placements within video games, because they are easy to include into the game world. Peripheral placements are objects within the game world that are not very integrated into the game play itself, such as billboards or vending machines around the game world. Peripheral product placements may be either two- or three-dimensional. Two-dimensional placements are, for example, billboards, road signs or sides of a box. Three-dimensional placements can be objects such as soda cans, cars or airplanes flying in the sky. Furthermore, the clothes worn by the characters in video games can be branded or the game dialogue may contain brand references. (op.cit.p. 44-46).

Highly integrated product placements are less common in video games, because they require more resources and effort to insert into the game play. Highly integrated product placements can demonstrate the value of the placed product to the consumer and allow the consumer to virtually experience that value. However, unlike peripheral placements, highly integrated product placements cannot be changed or integrated into the game play in the final stages of the game development. (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 44-45).

Peripheral placements can be altered at later stages of the game development or even after the game has already been released into the market.

Advertisements that are embedded into or removed from a video game after the development are called dynamic advertisements. Dynamic advertisements are mostly used with simple peripheral placements, such as billboards or sides of a truck. (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 46.) Static advertising means including such product placements within the video game that cannot be altered after the release of the game. Unlike dynamic placements, static product placements are hard-coded into the game, which makes it impossible to change them after development. (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2010.)

Prototype, a game developed by Radical Entertainment and published by Activision in 2009, has an example of two-dimensional, peripheral product placements with GameStop billboards that can be found around the city of New York, where the game takes place. Tony Hawk's skateboarding game series (Activision, 1999-2004) is filled with peripheral, real-life brand product placements out of which the most obvious are the branded skateboards and clothes that the player can choose for their character to wear in the game. However, the branded skateboards and clothes could also be considered as highly integrated product placements, because the player's character uses them in the gameplay.

Fallout 3 (Bethesda Game Studios, 2008) has a virtual brand in the game called Nuka Cola that very closely resembles the Coca Cola brand by colors, typography and the identifiable shape of the bottle. Nuka Cola is included in the game world by using both two-dimensional and three-dimensional peripheral placements. Vending machines with Nuka Cola branded sides and Nuka Cola branded soda bottles can be found in various places around the game world. Nuka Cola is a so called protobrand, under the category of purely virtual brands including fictional or computer-synthesized brands that only exist in the perceiving imagination. Although protobrands are not real, they have emotional value for the consumer, because the brand image consists solely of the mental connections the consumers have around it. Furthermore, protobrands may hold specific associations to real-life brands. (Muzellec, L., Lynn, T. & Lambkin, M. 2012, 817.) The consistency between Nuka Cola and Coca Cola presents an association of a purely virtual brand into a real-life brand.

Alan Wake is a game developed by the Finnish company Remedy Entertainment and published on Xbox360 by Microsoft Game Studios in 2010. The progression of the gameplay is significantly reliant to a flashlight that the protagonist, Alan Wake, uses to expose his enemies from the darkness into light, thus making them vulnerable to attacks with weapons. The functionality of the flashlight is highly dependent on the use of batteries, and in the game the brand of batteries used is Energizer. The game also includes rooms with televisions that can be turned on if the player wishes to do so. Once turned on, the television shows commercials of Verizon mobile phones and Mustang

cars. These are examples of highly integrated product placements. Racing games often include highly integrated product placements as well, since the cars the player can choose to drive are actual brands that replicate the appearance of the real-life products. Gran Turismo (Polyphony Digital, 2013) and Need for Speed (Electronic Arts, 2013) series' are good examples of racing games with highly integrated product placements. Highly integrated product placements can also be presented as downloadable items within the game. Furthermore, some games include around game advertisements. These are generally banners and digital video ads that can usually be found in online games or they can be additional, downloadable content on console services. (Platform Status Report: Game Advertising. 2010, 6.)

2.4.4 The effects of product placement in video games

Congruently to Fletcher (2010), Mark Lehu (2007, 62-64) refers to works by Atkinson (2003) and Nebenzahl & Secunda (1993) to state that consumers dislike product placements if they perceive them as distracting, but the attitude towards placements is generally tolerant and, in cases of successful integration, even appreciated. G. Clavio, P.M. Kraft and P.M. Pedersen (2009, 146) refer to researches made by Nelson (2002) and Tsuruoka (2006) who noticed that gamers believe product placement enhances the gaming experience by providing realism, sense of familiarity, character development aid, and by creating a sense of historical subtext. Congruently, when product placements are correctly implemented, it is possible to enhance the gaming experience through them by making the virtual game world seem more realistic (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 42). Product placements are generally well perceived with the exclusion of reserved attitudes towards ethically dubious products, such as cigarettes or firearms (de Gregorio, F. & Sung, Y. 2010, 84).

According to Dr. Barry Ip (2009) players do not necessarily even notice product placement within games or they have very little recollection of the brand information of in-game advertising, when the placements have a low level of interactivity, such as peripheral placements. Especially if the game

itself is highly engaging, for example including a lot of action, the players focus all of their efforts in understanding what is happening in the game and thus have very little or no recollection at all of the product placements inserted in the game. Balasubramanian, Karrh and Patwardhan (2006) note that product placements that are feature-rich, meaningful and have personally relevant stimuli to the player are able to attract more attention, which leads to an improvement in cognitive outcomes such as the recall of product placements.

Grace and Coyle (2011) discovered in their study, that poor player performance leads to a decreased ability to retain product placement information, because the player is distracted from focusing on the in-game advertisement due to the difficulties they have performing adequately in the game. Congruently, they discovered that players who had no problems with their performance, or had an improved performance, were able to retain more product placement information in the game due to their ability to focus more on the surroundings of the game in addition to focusing on the gameplay itself. Furthermore, Grace and Coyle (2011) concluded that frequent players of video games are able to retain more brand information than those who play occasionally or very little.

In order for an in-game product placement to be successful it needs to be congruent with the game in every way. The objects need to follow the same physics and laws as all of the other objects within the game despite how unrealistic the laws of nature in the game might be. Incongruent product placements tend to disrupt the immersion of the gameplay experience and discontinue the game flow, which in turn leads to ineffectiveness of the product placement and may even result into negative brand attitudes. (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 42-43.) For example, cars or billboards, which are both frequently used mediums for product placements within games, need to take damage if they are crashed or wrecked within the game as they would in real life. Naturally, it would be logical for a company to not want their placement damaged within the game, but disobeying the laws of the game would be unnatural and thus incongruent, which could negatively affect the gaming experience. Gamers tend to condemn in-game advertisements that shatter the immersion of the gaming experience (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 43).

Furthermore, Balasubramanian, Karrh and Patwardhan (2006) discovered that product placements that contain high amounts of information distract the attention away from the story itself, as they cannot be considered as congruent placements that blend in the content of the game naturally, which results in irritation among the consumers. Product placements need to be perceived as a natural part of the game (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 43), because perceiving the commercial intent of the placements offsets the positive effects they may have (Lord, K.R. & Gupta, P.B. 2009, 189) and indiscriminate placements present the risk of alienating consumers' positive perceptions of product placements (de Gregorio, F. & Sung, Y. 2010, 94).

3. Method

3.1 Research problem and questions

The purpose of this thesis is to discover whether or not in-game advertising, specifically product placement, affects gaming experience negatively, positively, or at all. The research is focused on the consumer perspective of product placement in games and its possible affects on the experiences of gamers. How, and if product placement affects the gaming experience will be discovered by answering the following questions:

1. To what extend are gamers aware of product placement within games?
2. How do gamers perceive product placement within games?
3. How does product placement affect the gameplay?

3.2 Overview of the research method and its reliability

Quantitative and qualitative methods are the two major research perspectives that are used when approaching a research (Joyner, R.L., Rouse, W.A. & Glatthorn, A.A. 2013, 72-73). The quantitative, descriptive research type was chosen as the method to approach this research. Descriptive research aims to

describe a phenomenon and gather data to report averages and percentages, such as attitudes towards a certain phenomenon (op.cit.p. 76). As this research thesis focuses on consumer perception and attitudes towards in-game advertising, the quantitative descriptive research type was the most suitable method to choose.

Quantitative method uses questionnaires to gather measurable, numerical data from a target group concerning the researched phenomenon (Rafting through the thesis process 2011, 72). Questionnaires can be structured or unstructured. Structured questionnaires consist of pre-determined questions that are presented to each respondent in the same form, wording and order. The questions in a structured questionnaire are, generally, closed questions that are answered by choosing one alternative from pre-determined answers, such as "yes" or "no." The questionnaire may include fixed alternative questions, in which the respondent chooses one or more alternatives from a list of pre-determined answers. Structured questionnaires may include open-ended questions, but their amount is and should be kept to a minimum. (Kothari, C.R. 2004, 101).

In order to measure the reliability of a research, the results need to be repetitive and the research should be able to give results that are not random. Validity in a research denotes whether or not the research is able to answer the questions it is supposed to answer. (Hirsjärvi et.al. 2004, 216.) The reliability of a questionnaire may be hindered by a small response-rate and the results of the questionnaire are affected by responses that are returned without answering all the questions. In addition, questionnaires present the risk of generating wrongful information, if the questions are not correctly understood. (Kothari, C.R. 2004, 101-105.) Furthermore, there is no certainty that the respondents have answered truthfully and seriously to the questionnaire, and there cannot be any certainty as to what extent the respondents' knowledge of the topic is and whether or not they truly understand its meaning (Hirsjärvi et.al. 2004, 184). The questionnaire should always be tested before the actual execution to detect whether or not it presents any weaknesses (Kothari, C.R. 2004, 101).

3.3 Implementation of the survey

A survey is an efficient method of conducting a research study, because it saves time and effort of the researcher. Furthermore, the survey method enables the possibility of gathering data from a large audience by a variety of many questions. The main method of data collection in a quantitative survey research is to conduct a questionnaire (Hirsjärvi et.al. 2004, 182-184). The questionnaire for this research was implemented by using an online survey program. This method was chosen for its low costs, ease of use with pre-existing, online survey applications and the possibility to save the questionnaire responses directly into the survey database for data analysis.

The survey was carried out by using SurveyMonkey, an online survey application that allows the execution of questionnaires, result gathering and result analysis. The survey was open from 24th of April to 1st of May 2014. The link to the survey was posted in two forums frequently visited by gamers and people interested in games. The first forum was the online discussion forum of Pelaaja, a gaming magazine that reviews newest games and reports news about games and phenomena in the gaming industry. The second forum was the online discussion forum of Pelikulma.net, a website focusing on games and gaming.

Since the population in quantitative studies is usually quite large in scale, sampling is used to generate valid research results from the entire population by using a representative sample (Rafting through the Thesis Process 2011, 73). In this research, the visitors of the two forums were the representative sample of the entire population. Probability sample, or random sampling, was used as the sample design of the survey. Probability sampling means that any item in the universe can be included within the sample or that all the individuals within a certain population group, in this case the visitors of the two chosen discussion forums, have equal chances of being included in the sample without being deliberately chosen to the sample. (Kothari, C.R. 2004, 60.)

A pilot study was executed by sending a test version of the questionnaire to five people, who were excluded from the final study due to their awareness of

the survey contents. The test subjects were excluded in order to prevent any biased responses in the final results. Secondly, the questionnaire was tested to confirm there were no flaws or weaknesses in the survey and to get acquainted with the features of SurveyMonkey, which was a previously unfamiliar survey application to the researcher.

3.4 Contents of the survey

The survey questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, out of which 17 were closed multiple choice questions, two were fixed alternative questions and one was an open-ended question. One of the closed multiple choice questions included an additional, voluntary open-ended question to specify the answer given. The questionnaire contained four jump questions that were reliant to the given response. Progression in the questionnaire required all the questions to be answered, with the exception of the one elaborative, voluntary open-ended question. The survey questionnaire is included in the appendices at the end of the paper.

The questions were divided into four categories to discover the respondents' basic information, background on gaming, their awareness of product placements within video games and the affects of product placement in their gaming experience. The categories were 1) basic information, 2) background information on gaming, 3) background information on product placement within video games and 4) product placement and gaming experience.

3.5 Analysis method of the data

According to Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2004) there are many ways of analyzing the gathered data, but a method that most efficiently answers the research problem is generally chosen. However, the methods of analysis can be roughly divided into two categories. The method that seeks to explain a phenomenon uses statistical analysis and makes conclusions, whereas the

method seeking to understand a phenomenon uses qualitative analysis instead of statistical analysis. (op.cit.p. 212.)

Analysis refers to computing the gathered information into a measurable form in order to discover and examine existing patterns of relationships among the gathered groups of data. In the beginning of the analyzing stage of a research, the gathered data should be processed to ensure the accuracy of the data and ascertain its consistency with other gathered facts. The processing of data generally includes four central operations: editing, coding, classification and tabulation. In the editing phase, the researcher must carefully examine the collected data and, upon necessity, exclude all false and(or) unfinished answers from the final results. (Kothari, C.R. 2004,123-128.)

SurveyMonkey has an inbuilt data analysis tool that processes the gathered data by coding, classification and tabulation. The data editing was conducted by the researcher and one, obviously false and unfinished answer was removed from the analysis of the final results. For the sake of accuracy and clarity, all unfinished survey responses were excluded from the analysis of the final results. Once the gathered data had been processed and arranged into charts representing percentage statistics of the responding sample, the final data was further examined to discover whether or not recurring patterns of attitudes towards product placement in games emerge and to what extent the population is aware of the product placement.

4. Results

A total of 83 responses were gathered out of which 61 responses were complete, which indicates that 23 respondents left the survey before completing it. The final results were analyzed using the 61 completed survey responses, and the 23 unfinished responses were not accounted for in the results.

The questionnaire consisted of four categories, under which the 20 questions were divided into. The first category was basic information that gathered information of the respondents' gender and age. The second category was background information on gaming that aimed to discover the respondents' preferences in video games and how often they play video games. The third category was background information on product placement within video games, in which the purpose was to build an understanding of whether or not the respondents were familiar with the basic concept of product placement, and if they had encountered product placement within the game of their choosing in category two or in any other similar types of games in the same genre. Furthermore, category three aimed to discover if the respondents had a recollection of the type of product placement they had encountered and if they remembered any specific brands or products from the included placements.

The fourth category elaborated on the effects that the encountered product placements had on the respondents' gaming experience. The purpose was to discover, if the placements interfered with their concentration in the game and how, and if, it affected their perception of the game and(or) the placed products or brands. The fourth category also focused on establishing whether or not the respondents had any presumptions or general attitudes, whether positive or negative, towards product placements within video games. The question-specific statistics of the survey replies are provided in the appendices –section at the end of the paper.

Basic Information

The gathered data shows that 51 (83,61%) of the 61 respondents were male and 10 (16,39%) were female.

Video Games in Europe: A Consumer Study (2012) indicates that nearly half of video gaming population in Europe consists of females. The data generated in this research is not congruent with the statistics provided by the study used in the literature. However, this is not necessarily indicative of the fact that the source literature is misleading. One of the survey links was posted on the online forum of Pelaaja in order to effectively reach the target population of this research, which consisted of gamers. Pelaaja is a Finnish gaming

magazine with 75 000 readers and its target audience mainly consists of young adult males (Pelaaja-lehti, 2014). This is a major factor that needs to be taken into consideration in the analysis of the results of questions one and two, since the vast majority of the respondents were male due to the fact that the target audience of the chosen online forum is mostly male.

The age-scale of European gamers expands from 16 to 64 years of age (Videogames in Europe: Consumer Study 2012), which is why the respondents were given five different age-group options to choose the most suitable one for them. Out of the 61 respondents seven (11,48%) were under 16 years of age, 40 (65,57%) were from 16 to 25 years of age, 11 (18,03%) were from 26 to 35 years of age, two (3,28%) were from 36 to 64 years of age and one (1,64%) was over 64 years of age. Statistics of previous consumer studies show that 51% of male players are aged 35 or under and 49% of female players are aged 35 and above (Videogames in Europe: Consumer Study 2012).

A total of 10 female participants provided information regarding their age and 50% of these female respondents were from 16 to 25 years of age, which is equivalent to a total of five female respondents. Two of the respondents were under 16 years of age and two of the respondents were from 26 to 35 years of age, both age groups being 20% from the total of 10 respondents respectively. None of the female respondents were aged from 36 to 64 years of age. One female respondent was over 64 years of age with a share of 10% from the total of female respondents. Incongruently to the literature, the largest age group of female players was from 16 to 25 years of age. However, the small amount of female respondents is a considerable factor that affects the outcome of the results.

From the 51 male respondents 68,63% were from 16 to 25 years of age, which is a total of 35 male respondents and 17,65% were from 26 to 35 years of age totaling to nine people out of the 51 male respondents. Five of the respondents were under 16 years of age, which is 9,80% of the total of male respondents and 3,92% were from 36 to 64 years of age, which is the equivalent of two male respondents. None of the male respondents were over 64 years of age. The results of the research are congruent with previous

studies, suggesting that the majority of male players are aged 35 or under. However, the results imply that the majority of male gamers are younger than expected with over 65% of the respondents in the age group from 16 to 25 years of age. However, it must be noted that the sample size of the research was quite small in correlation to the chosen target population.

Background information on gaming

The participants were inquired about the frequency of their gaming habits and the majority of 56 participants, from the total of 61, responded that they play video games more than once a week, totaling to 91,80% of the entire sample population of this research. Only three (4,92%) participants responded playing video games once a week and two (3,28%) responded they play video games more than once a month. None of the respondents played video games as seldom as once a month and less than once a month. These statistics suggest that the participants of the study were active gamers, and a presumption can be made that the respondents are very familiar with games and have knowledge in video games exceeding the average population.

The most popular game genre in the list of nine options presented to the participants was First Person Shooter games (hereinafter referred to as FPS) with 34,43%, or 21 respondents, from the total of 61. The second most popular genre was Role Playing games (hereinafter referred to as RPG) with a share of 29,51% of the respondents. The third major genre chosen was action-adventure games with 18,03% of all the respondents. Only 8,20% of the respondents chose platform games. Racing and fighting games were both preferred by 1,64% of the participants respectively. None of the respondents played sports or simulation games.

The participants were consequently asked to name one game that they prefer to play most often, from the chosen game genre. The purpose of this was to discover whether or not any trends emerge in popularity of certain games, or regarding product placement within certain games. This was the only mandatory open-ended question in the survey. Five out of the 61 respondents failed to name a specific game from the game type category chosen in question 4. These five answers are hereinafter referred to as undetermined

answers. Four of the undetermined answers named a game genre instead of a game and one respondent failed to give any description regarding to the specification of a game. This indicates either that the respondent failed to choose a game of their favorite liking, or that the question itself was too broad in spectrum. This could have possibly been avoided by formulating a closed multiple-choice question including one or two games from each of the game types categorized in question 4.

Eight specific games frequently occurred in the responses. These games, respectively, were Call of Duty, Counter Strike, Dark Souls, Final Fantasy, Metal Gear Solid, Assassin's Creed, Skyrim and Killzone. Furthermore, more than one game series emerged within the responses. In addition to the above mentioned these were the Super Mario –series and The Legend of Zelda – series.

The gathered data supports the results that indicate FPS games as the most popular game type among the sample population of this research.

Furthermore, the data supports the results that Role Playing games and action-adventure games are the second and third most popular types of games respectively. The choices of games presented by the respondents are generally congruent with their choices of game genres in question 4.

An inspection of the individual answers of the respondents reveals that some participants did not report encountering product placement within the game of their choice, whereas other participants reported encountering product placements within the same game.

Background information on product placements within video games

In avoidance of making presumptions about the sample population's knowledge about product placement, one question was formulated to determine whether or not the respondents were familiar with the concept. This information was gathered by formulating a closed question with "yes" and "no" options to choose from. However, no certainty can be made to measure the product placement knowledge or understanding among the respondents who answered yes. For the sake of reliability and validity of the research, there was

no foreword or elaboration on the principles of product placement included in the question in order to avoid creating any presumptions, either negative or positive, towards product placement among the respondents. Therefore, the research relies simply on the data generated from the responses. Choosing to answer “yes” indicated that the respondent had adequate understanding of product placement in regard to the later stages of the survey.

From the total of 61 participants, 48 (78,69%) responded a familiarity towards the concept of product placement and 13 (21,31%) responded no familiarity with the concept of product placement. Least familiarity with the concept of product placement was presented within the age groups of males less than 25 years of age. These results indicate that one fifth of the respondents were not aware of the concept of product placement.

This part of the survey included a jump-question reliant to response of the participants. The participants, who responded having no familiarity with the concept of product placement, were directed to the end of the survey due to the fact that proceeding in the survey entailed at least some knowledge about the concept of product placement. Thus, 21,31 % of the respondents finished the questionnaire at this stage.

After establishing the participants' status on product placement familiarity, they were asked whether or not they had encountered product placement in their game of preference or in other similar types of games. From the remaining participants, the majority of 81,25% reported not encountering product placements within the game of their choice and 18,75% responded they had encountered product placement within the chosen game. A total of 43,59% recalled encountering product placements within similar types of games and 56,41% did not recall encountering any product placements in the types of games they preferred. This indicates that the majority of the respondents in the survey did not recall encountering any product placements within the games they prefer to play. The participants, who had never encountered any product placements in the games of their preference, proceeded straight to question 20 concerning their general perception of product placements within video games.

Generally product placement was encountered within FPS games and action-adventure games. Two respondents reported encountering product placement within the RPG Final Fantasy and one respondent reported encountering product placement within a car racing game. Interestingly, one participant responded they had encountered product placement within Counter Strike and three participants responded they had not encountered any product placement within the game. Similar situation occurred with Assassin's Creed. One respondent reported having encountered product placement within the game, whereas one respondent denied having encountered any product placement in it.

The majority of the respondents, who denied having encountered product placement with the game of their choice, preferred to play FPS games and the majority of the respondents, who had encountered product placement within the game of their choice, preferred RPGs. Games that are highly engaging and include a lot of action demand more efforts from the player in focusing on the game itself, thus leading to very little or no recollection of product placements within the game (Ip, B. 2009). This theory is congruent with the results, since FPS games tend to be high in action and fast in pace leaving little or no time for the player to notice the inclusions of product placement. RPGs are generally more relaxed in pace and action content, allowing the player to observe the surroundings of the game world more closely. This enables the players to notice the possible insertions of product placements more effectively.

When enquired about the visibility of the encountered product placements, most of the participating responses were quite evenly distributed from 1 to 5 along the Likert scale. 23,08% of the respondents stated that the product placement they had encountered was hardly noticeable. Most of the respondents felt that the encountered product placements were slightly noticeable, with 26,92% of the participants. 23,08% of the participants responded encountering noticeable product placements and 19,23% of the participants had encountered quite noticeable product placements. Only 7,69% of the respondents had encountered very noticeable product placements within the games they play.

Most of the product placements the participants had encountered were peripheral product placements, with 53,85% of the respondents recalling billboards in the gaming environment and 61,54% recalling static objects in the game environment. Only 30,77% of the respondents recalled encountering inclusions of product placement in the form of interactive objects and 19,23% recalled noticing brands mentioned in the game dialogue. These results support Edery and Mollick (2009) who state that peripheral product placements are more common in video games than highly integrated placements.

The majority of the respondents, with 73,08%, could not recall any specific products or brands from the placements they had encountered. One third of the participants stated they can recall the placed products or brands, but only a few of them identified the brands. These brands included Coca Cola, McDonald's, Pepsi, Sprite, Heineken and Redbull.

One participant named protobrands such as Pipsi and NotaCola, which are nearly identical to the real-life brands Pepsi and Coca Cola. This supports Muzellec, Lynn and Lambkin's (2012) claim that protobrands may hold specific associations to real-life brands due to the mental connections of the perceiving mind. Pipsi and NotaCola are protobrands, however the respondent perceived them as actual product placements, possibly due to the mental association with the brands Coca Cola and Pepsi.

Product placement and gaming experience

After establishing how and what kinds of product placements the participants had encountered, they were presented with a series of questions about the effects that the encountered product placements had on their gaming experience.

The participants were asked if the encountered product placements interfered with their concentration in the game. Most of the respondents (76,92%) felt that the product placement they had encountered had no effect on their concentration in the game and 7,92% of the respondents felt that the placements did have an effect on their concentration in the game. 15,38% of

the respondents could not determine whether or not the encountered product placement affected their concentration in the game. This indicates that the majority of the survey participants did not find product placements within games distracting.

The encountered product placement had no effect on the gaming experience of 69,23% of the respondents. However, 23,08% of the respondents felt that the encountered product placement had a positive effect on their gaming experience and 7,69% of the respondents reported having negative effects from the encountered product placements. This implies that most of the respondents are indifferent to product placements they have encountered in games and only a small portion of the respondents experienced the encountered placements as distracting or otherwise associated them with negative feelings.

Out of the 30,77% of the respondents, who reported having either positive or negative effects on their gaming experience from the encountered product placements, the majority of 62,50% stated that the product placements increased the verisimilitude of the game world. Half of the respondents felt that the products were naturally placed within the game world and 37,50% of the participants responded that the product placements made the game appear more realistic. 25% of the respondents did not perceive the product placements as a distraction to their gaming experience. A minority of 12,5% felt that the product placements increased the interactivity of the game. A small group 12,5% respondents were annoyed by the product placements and 12,5% felt that the product placement did not sit well within the game world.

Gamers believe product placements can enhance the gaming experience by providing realism (Nelson, 2002 & Tsuruoka, 2006) and making the game world seem more realistic if they are implemented correctly and congruently to the gameplay (Edery & Mollick, 2009). The gathered results mostly support this theory.

Over half of the respondents were satisfied with the product placements they had encountered in games, whereas 15,38% stated that they were not satisfied with the placements they had encountered. A fairly sizeable amount

of 26,92% of the respondents were not sure whether or not they were satisfied with the placements they had encountered.

The 26,92% of unsure responses could indicate that these respondents cannot define whether they perceive product placements positively or negatively. Furthermore it could be an indicative of indifference towards product placements in video games. However, the respondents seemed to be generally accepting towards the product placements they had encountered.

Approximately one in four respondents acknowledged that the inclusion of product placements had raised their sense of awareness and interest towards the placed products and brands, however the majority of 76,92% of the respondents did not associate any heightened sense of awareness or interest towards the placed products or brands. Nearly all of the participants (92,31%) stated that the product placements did not steer their perception of the placed products or brands into a negative direction. However, 7,69% of the respondents felt that the product placements did trigger negative perceptions about the placed products and brands.

The large amount of respondents, that had no negative associations concerning the placed products or brands, can imply that these participants are indifferent to product placements within video games, but it can also be an indication that these participants failed to notice the placements, or recall them after playing the game. Due to the fact that the majority of the participants failed to acknowledge any increased awareness or interest towards the placed products or brands, the presumption that having no negative perceptions could be an indication of positive perceptions, is limited and unlikely.

Most participants, with 88,46% of the responses, stated that the inclusion of product placements has had no negative effects on their perception of the game. Only 11,54% of the respondents felt that the included product placements affected their perception of the game negatively.

The number of respondents, who felt the inclusion of product placements in games induced negative perceptions towards the game itself, was larger than the amount of respondents, who felt that the included placements induced negative perceptions towards the placed products or brands. An observation

can be made that the participants were more sensitive to negative connotations about the game itself rather than of the products or brands placed within. Therefore, it is not necessarily a disadvantage for the advertiser to include noticeable placements within the games, but rather a disadvantage for the game company due to a risk of alienating their customers.

The Likert scale was used to evaluate the obtrusiveness of the product placements the participants had encountered. Nearly half of the respondents could neither evaluate, nor had an opinion on the obtrusiveness of the encountered product placements. 23,08% of the respondents felt that the placements were slightly obtrusive and the same amount of respondents felt that the placements were not obtrusive at all. The minority of 7,69% of the respondents felt that the placements were obtrusive and none perceived the placements as highly obtrusive.

The Likert scale was also utilized to measure how the participants generally felt about product placements in video games. Most respondents stated liking product placements in video games with the amount of 37,50% out of all the remaining 48 participants. 31,25% of the participants were not sure how they felt about product placement within games. These numbers can be affected by the fact that a large amount of the participants responded they had never encountered product placements within the games they play. Thus, a vast number of respondents may have simply liked the idea of product placements without having any empirical experience of them in video games. On the other hand, many respondents may have felt unsure of their feelings towards product placement in video games due to their lack of experience with them. 6,25% of the respondents strongly disliked product placement within games and 22,92% stated they disliked them. Furthermore, 2,08% of the respondents liked product placement within games very much.

5. Discussion

The idea of the thesis started to incubate in the spring of 2012 in the Netherlands, where the researcher was attending a study course in the arts

and business of gaming. As a part of the course the students were asked to study advergaming and consecutively program an advergaming of their own. Advergaming are advertisements in the form of a video game that are usually provided to the consumers free of charge (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 55). Instead of product placements, advergaming are pure branded entertainment (see pg. 15) where the entire game is built around a product or a brand for the sole purpose of promoting them.

Studying advergaming induced an increasing interest towards reflecting on the inclusions of product placements within the video games the researcher had played. Increasingly, the researcher began to observe whether or not product placements could be found in the games s/he hereinafter played. The observations were limited to a handful of placements, yet additional research of the played games revealed that those games were filled with different types of in-game advertising.

Gaming communities are highly active and engaged, providing vast amounts of time and effort to learning and gaining experiences through games (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009, 5). With significant empirical experience of playing games for more than 20 years, the researcher wanted to discover how the gaming community perceives in-game advertising and whether or not the community feels product placement within games has a negative effect on their gaming experience.

One of the underlying principles in conducting a research is objectivity (Hirsjärvi et.al. 2004, 103). The researcher must be able to produce objective and unbiased results (op.cit.p. 113). Even though an experienced gamer, the researcher had no premature hypotheses or underlying expectations or presumptions of the results when conducting this research. The results presented in this research are objective and have been interpreted critically and honestly.

5.1 Summary of the results

Most of the participants of the research were active gamers, who play console and computer (or both) games more than once a week. In oppose to statistic provided in the European Consumer Study (2012), a majority of the gamers were younger than expected ranging from 16 to 25 years of age. The sample population of the research was dominated by male presence, indicating that gaming is primarily practiced by young males. However, all of the female participants within the study were active gamers as well, who play video games at least once a week.

Three very notable discoveries were made by analyzing the research results. Firstly, approximately one in four participants had no familiarity with the concept of product placement. This information is substantial among a group consisting of young adults that spend vast amounts of time with different media used frequently and specifically as channels for product placements, such as television shows, movies and video games.

Secondly, over half of the respondents had never encountered any product placements within the games they play. Most of these respondents either liked product placements or were unsure whether they like or dislike them. Women were inclined to dislike product placements more than men, despite the fact they had not encountered any. Only one participant strongly disliked product placements without ever encountering any. It seems that gamers tend to have both positive and negative presumptions about product placements to some extent.

Thirdly, most of the participants who had encountered product placements felt that the placements had no affect on their gaming experience or concentration in the game. Furthermore, most of these respondents were generally satisfied with the placements they had encountered. However, these participants could not determine whether or not they felt the product placements as obtrusive, but most of them still liked product placements. Once again, women were more critical towards product placements, yet it did not have a negative effect on their gaming experience.

The research revealed that female participants were able to recall brands more efficiently than male participants. The female gamers in the study preferred RPGs, whereas the male gamers dominantly preferred FPS games. This is a factor in brand recall since games with high volumes of action that require large amounts of concentration and engagement result in low levels of product placement recollection (Ip, B. 2009). Thus, it seems congruent that gamers who prefer FPS games have little or no recollection of the placed products and brands. This may also explain why over half of the respondents had never encountered product placements. Some of the gamers had difficulties separating protobrands (see pg. 17) from real-life brands and perceived protobrands as in-game advertising.

Efficiently executed product placements can increase the sense of reality in games (Edery, D. & Mollick, E. 2009) and gamers believe product placement can enhance the gaming experience by providing realism to the game world (Nelson, 2002 & Tsuruoka, 2006). The research results are congruent with these claims. More than half of the respondents felt that the encountered product placements were naturally placed within the game and were able to increase the verisimilitude of the game world.

It seems that gamers are generally quite tolerant towards product placements within games and perceive them well. This is consistent with the findings of Nebenzahl & Secunda (1993) and de Gregorio & Sung (2010). Furthermore, it seems that most gamers are not aware of product placements within games and those who are seem to be mostly unaffected by it.

All of the research questions were successfully and objectively answered.

5.2 Limitations

The field of game studies is relevantly new and there is only a limited amount of theoretical background available for a research about product placement within games. The field is occupied by a few pioneering researchers, who have provided most of the studies and works concerning the gaming industry. The literature for the theoretical background of this thesis consists mostly of

research reports and online journals of the industry. Furthermore, the writers of those works often refer to the writings of each other. These factors present a reliability risk for the theoretical background of the thesis.

The amount of participants in the research survey was relatively small in correlation to the target population. Furthermore, one of the survey links was posted on a forum that predominantly consists of young, adult males. This significantly affected the gender distribution of the study, thus also limiting the sample size.

The questionnaire was conducted in English to a Finnish sample population, which may affect the reliability of the survey responses. There is an existing risk that some of the questions were not correctly understood and could have therefore generated inaccurate data. Furthermore, it cannot be verified whether or not the respondents actually understand the concept of product placement, which is essential to the results of the study. Even though the participant may have reported a familiarity with the concept of product placement, there is no way of verifying whether or not they understand what it means.

6. Conclusion and future suggestions

Games in the present-day are popular mediums of product placement for advertisers and product placement has become an increasingly frequent practice in video games. Games have the possibility of reaching immensely large target audiences with an interactive and engaging approach. This makes games desirable to advertisers. Successfully executed product placements enhance the gaming experience by increasing the sense of reality within the game. Although product placements are intended to be persuasive messages, gamers seem to have a positive perception about product placements.

Gamers are generally satisfied with product placements within games and presumptions towards product placements tend to be positive or neutral. However, many gamers do not notice inclusions of product placements or do not remember them. Even though product placements are mostly accepted,

gamers seem to get confused with defining the effects product placements may have on their gaming experience. It could be that the idea of product placement has generally been perceived as a negative concept, which generates difficulties when asked to reflect upon from an experiential point of view. Previous presumptions could possibly have an effect on this. Gamers are not able to define if they feel product placements to be obtrusive, but they tend to accept them and even like them. Above all, it can be concluded that product placements have very little or no affect on the gaming experience.

6.1 Future Suggestions

Most of the existing research and studies, on the topic of product placement within games, focus on measuring brand retention and product placement recall. Measuring the effects of product placement on consumers' gaming experience proved to be quite difficult by using a survey study as a method. A more extensive and reliable research could be conducted by using empirical studies on a control group from the sample population to determine the effects of product placement on gaming experience more precisely. Using an empirical study with observation methods would delimit the amount of presumptions the test subjects might have towards product placement, if all of the test subjects played the same game.

Further research on the phenomenon of product placement in games, from the consumer point of view, could possibly generate valuable data that would mutually benefit game developers, advertisers and gamers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Online Survey

Consumer survey about product placement in video games

Basic information

1. Your gender

- male
- female

2. What is your age group?

- under 16 years
- 16 – 25 years
- 26 – 35 years
- 36 – 64 years
- over 64 years

Background information on gaming

3. How often do you play video games (console and/or computer)? Choose the most suitable option from the list below.

- More than once a week
- Once a week
- More than once a month
- Once a month
- Less than once a month

4. What type of video games do you play most often? Choose one option from the category below that best describes your preference.

- Sports games
- Racing games
- Fighting games
- Adventure games
- Action-adventure games
- First Person Shooter games (FPS)
- Simulation games
- Role Playing games (RPG)
- Platform games

5. Name one game from the category you have chosen that you play most often.

Background information on product placement within video games

6. Are you familiar with the concept of product placement?

- Yes
- No

7. Have you encountered product placement within the game you named in question 5?

- Yes
- No

8. Have you encountered product placement in any other similar type of games?

- Yes
- No

9. How noticeable was the product placement you encountered?

- 1 Hardly noticeable
- 2 Slightly noticeable
- 3 Noticeable
- 4 Quite noticeable
- 5 Very noticeable

10. What kind was the product placement you encountered? Choose one or more options.

- Billboards in the game environment
- Static objects in the game environment
- Interactive objects
- Brands that are mentioned in the game dialogue

11. Do you recall what those placed products or brands were?

- Yes
- No

If you answered yes, what were the products or brands you encountered?

Product placement and gaming experience

12. Did the product placement you encountered affect your concentration in the game?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

13. How did the product placement you encountered affect your gaming experience?

- Positively
- Negatively
- No affect

14. Choose one or more options from the list below that specify the affects that the product placement you encountered had on your gaming experience.

- Increased the verisimilitude of the game world
- The game appeared more realistic
- Increased the interactivity of the game
- The product was naturally placed within the game world
- My gaming experience was not distracted
- I was annoyed
- The product did not sit well within the game world

15. Are you satisfied with the product placement you have encountered in games?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

Affects of product placement within games

16. Has the product placement you have encountered in games increased your awareness or interest towards the placed products or brands?

- Yes
- No

17. Has the product placement you have encountered in games affected your perception of the placed products or brands negatively?

- Yes
- No

18. Has the product placement you have encountered in games affected your perception of those games negatively?

- Yes
- No

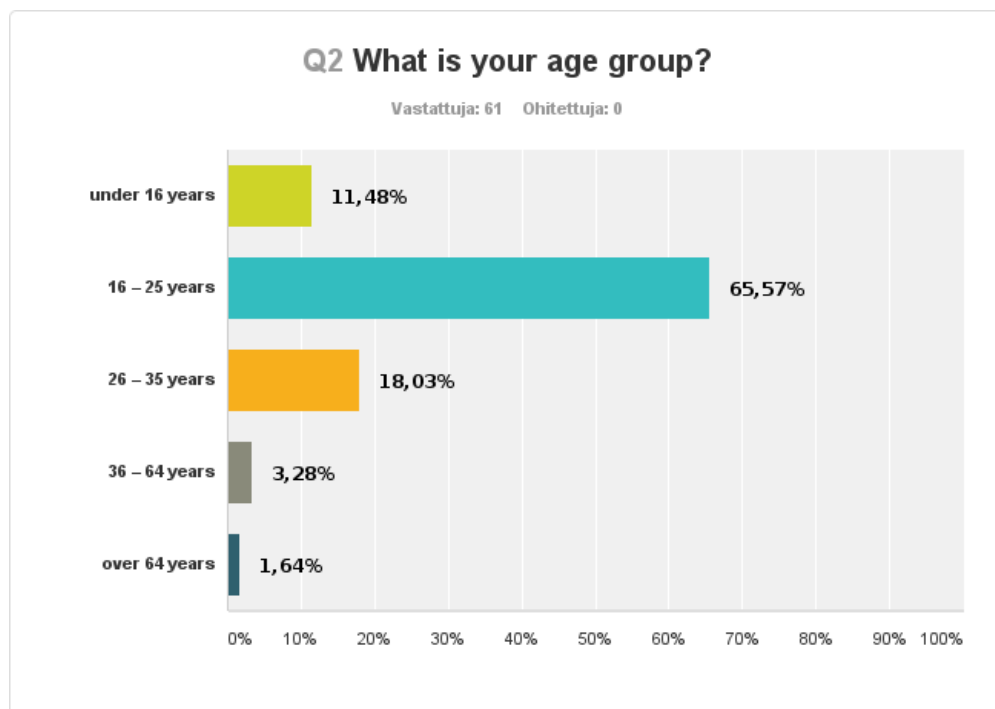
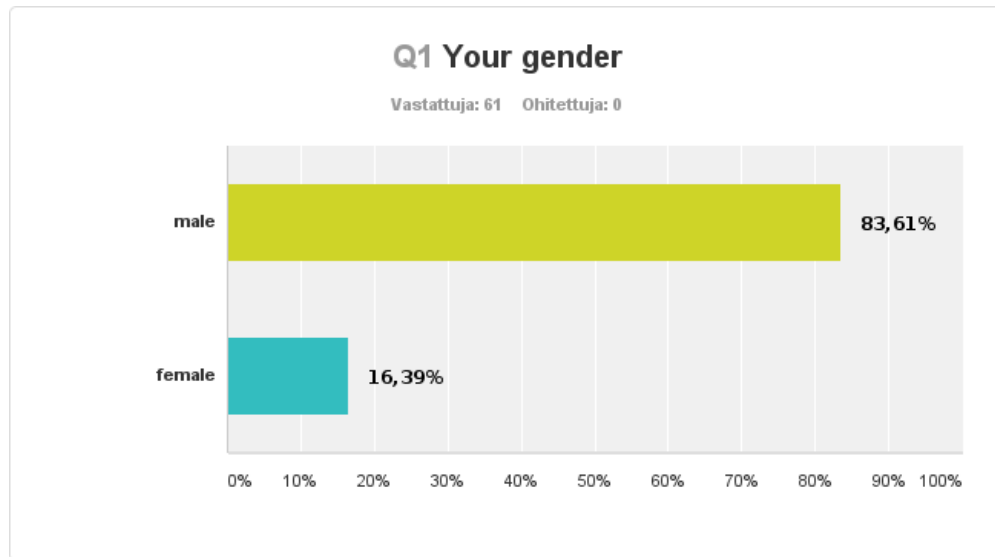
19. In a scale of 1 to 5, evaluate the obtrusiveness of the product placement you have encountered in regard to your gaming experience.

- 1 Not obtrusive
- 2 Slightly obtrusive
- 3 I'm not sure
- 4 Obtrusive
- 5 Very obtrusive

20. What do you think about product placement within games in general?

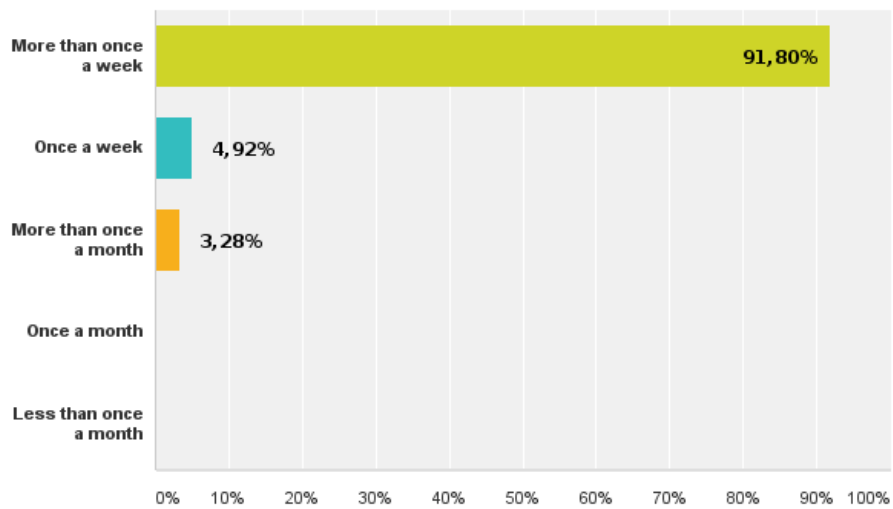
- 1 I strongly dislike them
- 2 I dislike them
- 3 I'm not sure
- 4 I like them
- 5 I like them very much

Appendix 2 - Replies to the survey



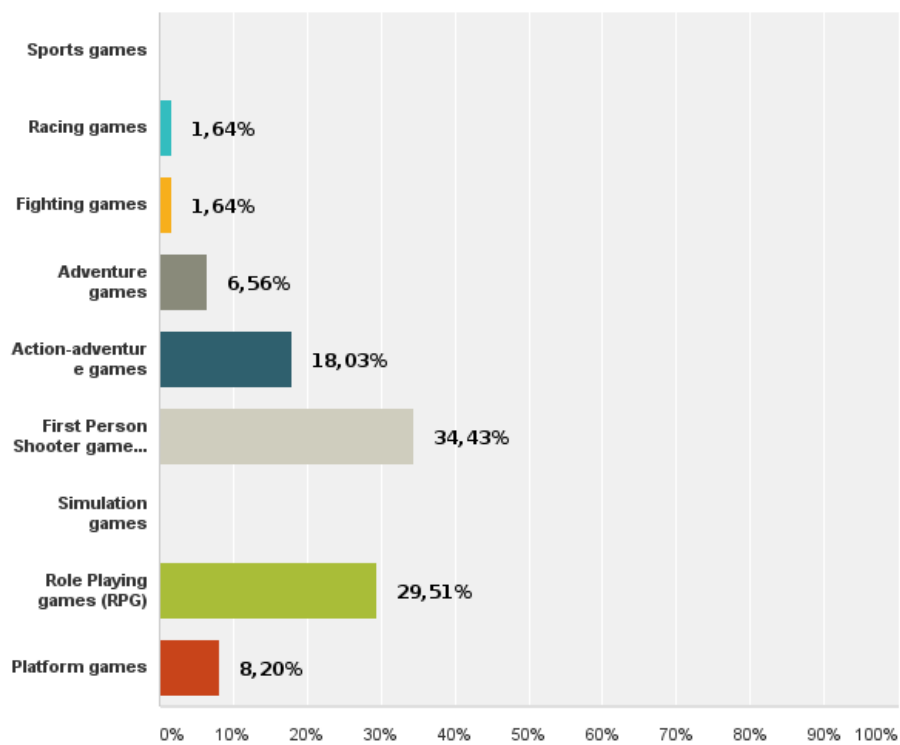
Q3 How often do you play video games (console and/or computer)? Choose the most suitable option from the list below.

Vastattuja: 61 Ohitettu: 0



Q4 What type of video games do you play most often? Choose one option from the category below that best describes your preference.

Vastattuja: 61 Ohitettu: 0



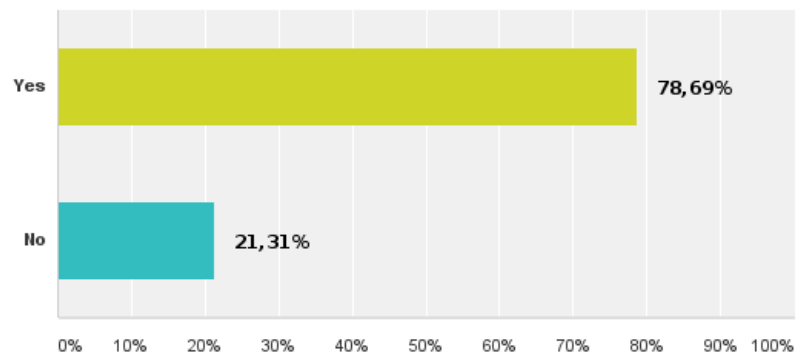
Q5 Name one game from the category you have chosen that you play most often.

Vastattuja: 61 Ohitettuja: 0

#	Vastaukset	Päivämäärä
1	Final Fantasy	30.4.2014 19:06
2	Final Fantasy	30.4.2014 19:00
3	Call of duty	30.4.2014 16:01
4	League of legends it's MOBA	29.4.2014 18:41
5	Dark Souls	29.4.2014 16:07
6	battlefield 4	29.4.2014 16:00
7	Far Cry 3	29.4.2014 13:59
8	KOD	28.4.2014 20:59
9	LittleBigPlanet	28.4.2014 17:42
10	Counter Strike	28.4.2014 15:22
11	Secrets of Grindea	27.4.2014 23:32
12	Call of Duty	27.4.2014 1:06
13	Skyrim	26.4.2014 22:49
14	Fallout	26.4.2014 16:16
15	Puzzlet?	26.4.2014 15:29
16	Red Orchestra 2: Heroes of Stalingrad	26.4.2014 12:07
17	street fighter	26.4.2014 10:27
18	TES V Skyrim	26.4.2014 8:47
19	-	26.4.2014 4:04
20	F1 2013	26.4.2014 0:22
21	DC Universe Online	25.4.2014 23:57
22	Killzone: Shadow Fall	25.4.2014 23:49
23	Uncharted 3	25.4.2014 23:19
24	Monster Hunter 3 Ultimate	25.4.2014 21:05
25	Titanfall	25.4.2014 19:43
26	Counter-Strike: Global Offensive	25.4.2014 19:26
27	Metal Gear Solid	25.4.2014 19:14
28	Super Mario Galaxy	25.4.2014 18:44
29	Counter Strike: Global Offensive	25.4.2014 18:18
30	Counter-Strike: Global Offensive	25.4.2014 18:06
31	Action-adventure	25.4.2014 18:02
32	The Last of Us	25.4.2014 17:43
33	Dark Souls 2	25.4.2014 17:40
34	League of Legends	25.4.2014 17:36
35	cod ghost	25.4.2014 17:36
36	Final Fantasy	25.4.2014 17:29
37	FPS	25.4.2014 17:10
38	FPS	25.4.2014 15:13
39	Super Mario Bros.	25.4.2014 14:51
40	Call Of Duty	25.4.2014 14:31
41	Pokemon	25.4.2014 14:00
42	DayZ, Zelda, Assassin's Creed..	25.4.2014 12:18
43	Battlefield	25.4.2014 12:14
44	Grand Theft Auto V	25.4.2014 11:56
45	Dark Souls II	25.4.2014 11:42
46	The elder scrolls online, I played WoW before.	25.4.2014 10:49
47	Mass effect	25.4.2014 10:31
48	Super Mario 3D World	25.4.2014 10:10
49	Dark Souls	25.4.2014 9:47
50	The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	25.4.2014 8:57
51	Halo	25.4.2014 8:46
52	Borderlands 2	25.4.2014 8:05
53	I mainly play StarCraft II but RTS was not on the list. Titanfall would be the second favourite.	25.4.2014 8:04
54	Assassins creed	25.4.2014 4:56
55	Killzone	25.4.2014 4:56
56	Call of duty	25.4.2014 2:57
57	The Legend of Zelda -series	25.4.2014 1:24
58	Dragon age: Origins	24.4.2014 23:21
59	Diablo III	24.4.2014 23:20
60	Metal gear solid	24.4.2014 22:47
61	Batman	24.4.2014 22:47

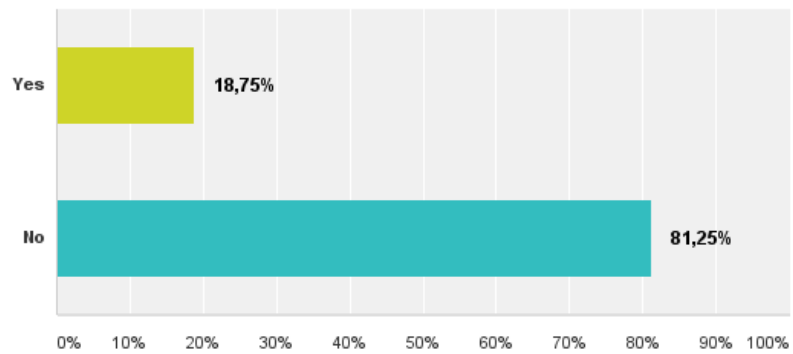
Q6 Are you familiar with the concept of product placement?

Vastattuja: 61 Ohitettu: 0



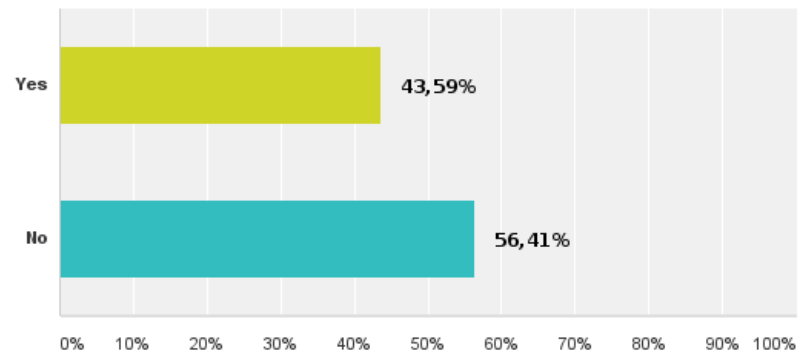
Q7 Have you encountered product placement within the game you named in question 5?

Vastattuja: 48 Ohitettu: 13



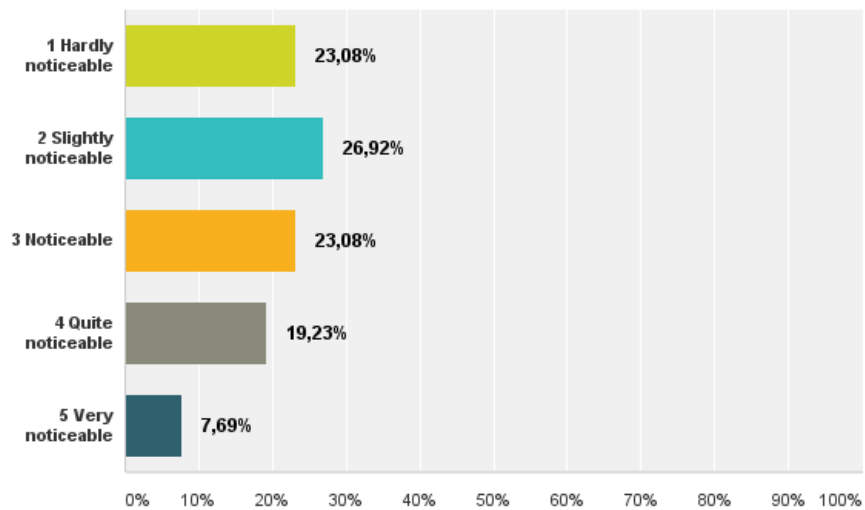
Q8 Have you encountered product placement in any other similar type of games?

Vastattuja: 39 Ohitettuja: 22



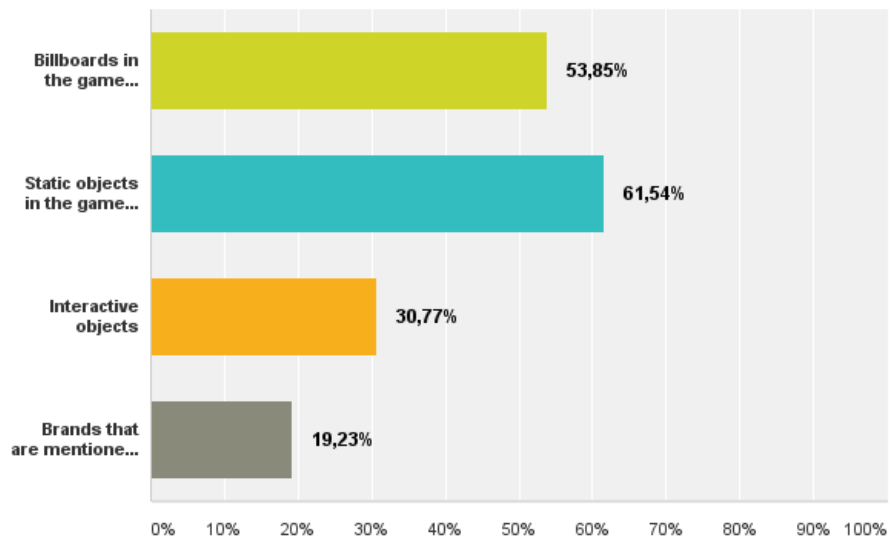
Q9 How noticeable was the product placement you encountered?

Vastattuja: 26 Ohitettuja: 35



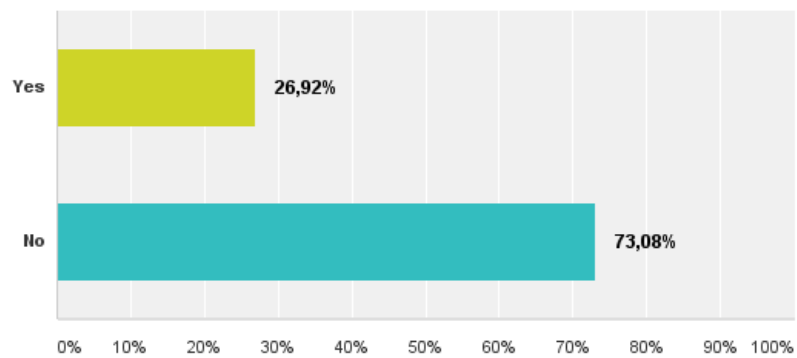
Q10 What kind was the product placement you encountered? Choose one or more options.

Vastattuja: 26 Ohitettuja: 35



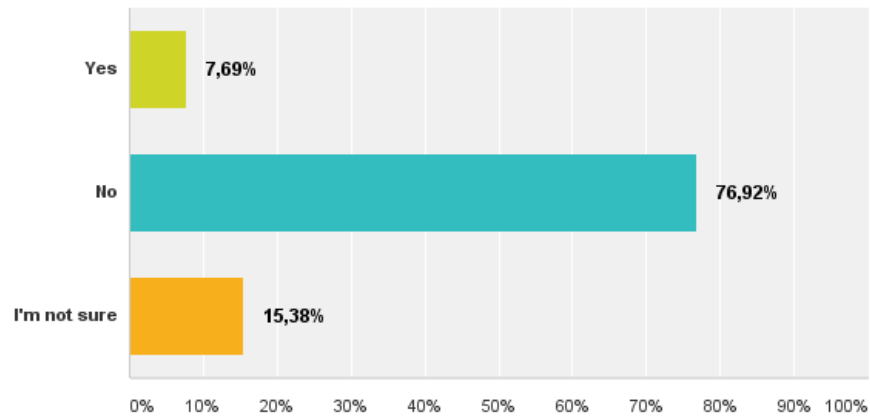
Q11 Do you recall what those placed products or brands were?

Vastattuja: 26 Ohitettuja: 35



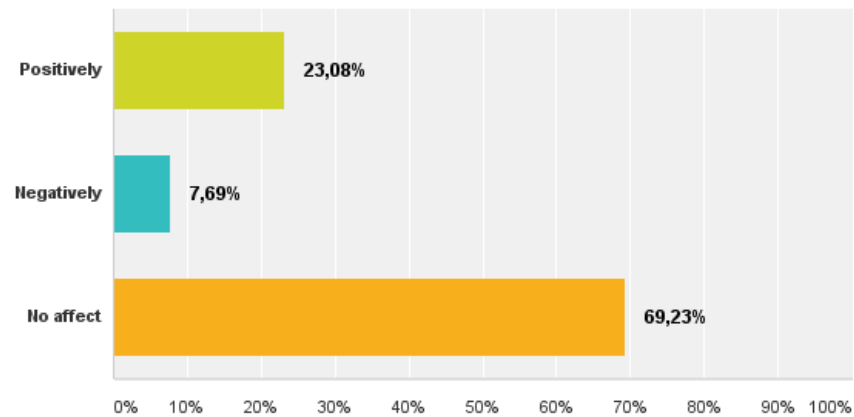
Q12 Did the product placement you encountered affect your concentration in the game?

Vastattuja: 26 Ohitettuja: 35



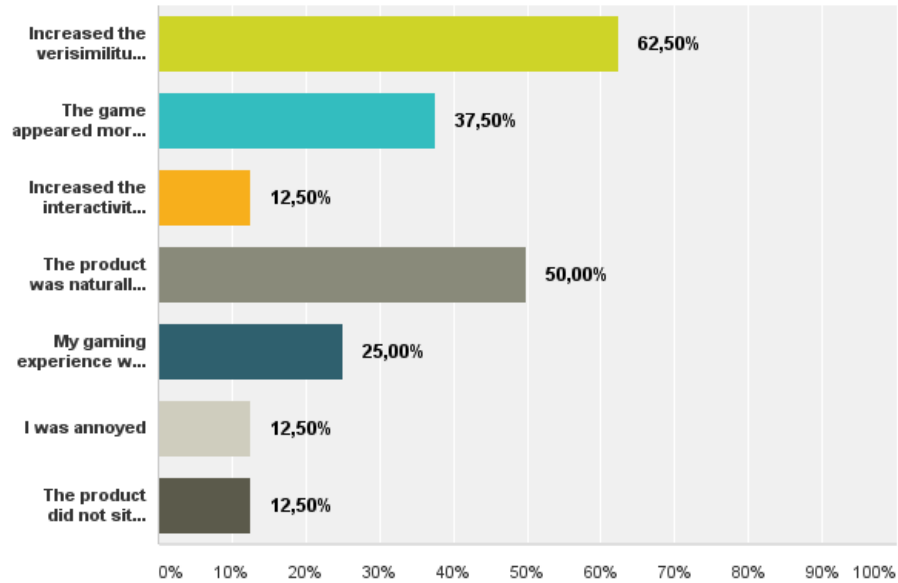
Q13 How did the product placement you encountered affect your gaming experience?

Vastattuja: 26 Ohitettuja: 35



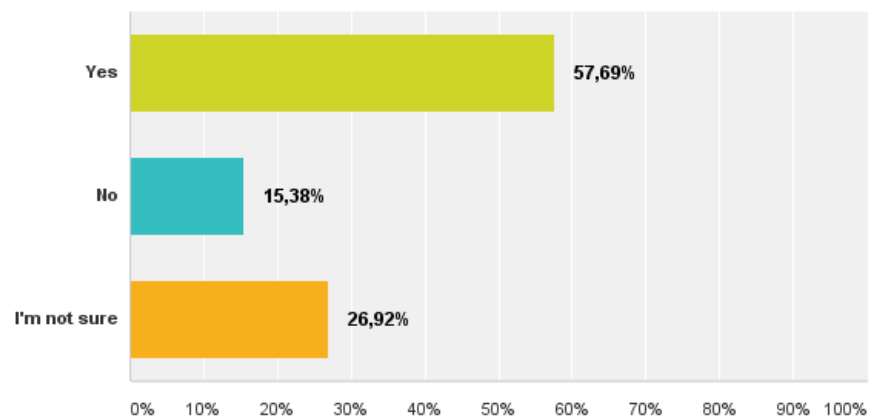
Q14 Choose one or more options from the list below that specify the affects that the product placement you encountered had on your gaming experience.

Vastattuja: 8 Ohitettuja: 53



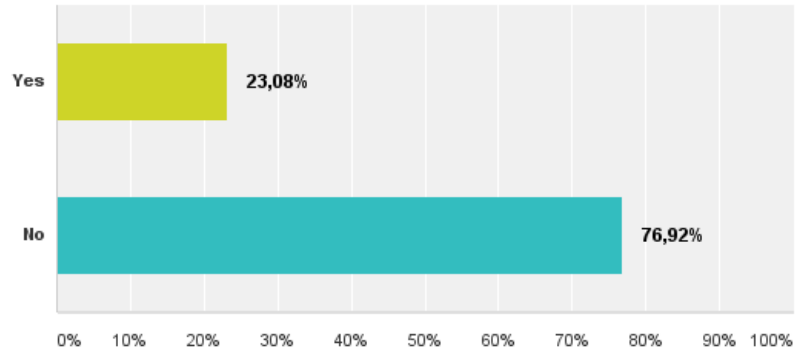
Q15 Are you satisfied with the product placement you have encountered in games?

Vastattuja: 26 Ohitettuja: 35



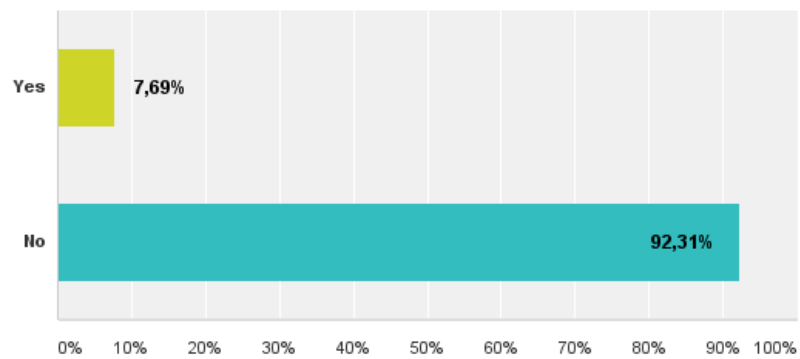
Q16 Has the product placement you have encountered in games increased your awareness or interest towards the placed products or brands?

Vastattuja: 26 Ohitettuja: 35



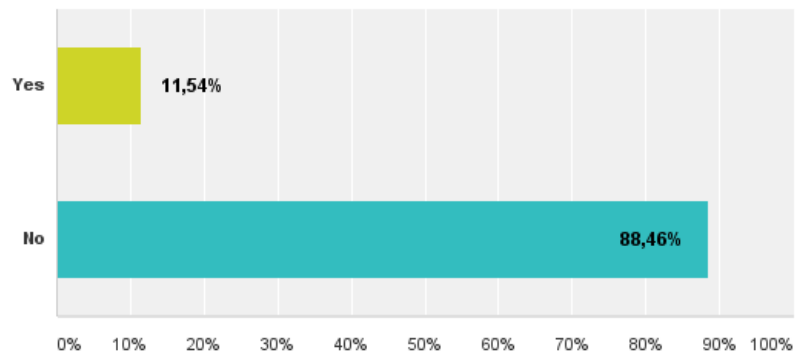
Q17 Has the product placement you have encountered in games affected your perception of the placed products or brands negatively?

Vastattuja: 26 Ohitettuja: 35



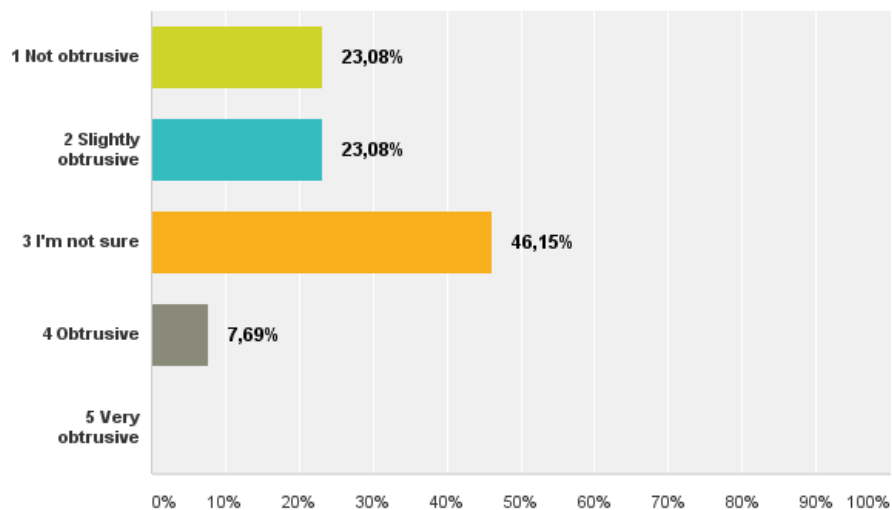
Q18 Has the product placement you have encountered in games affected your perception of those games negatively?

Vastattuja: 26 Ohitettuja: 35



Q19 In a scale of 1 to 5, evaluate the obtrusiveness of the product placement you have encountered in regard to your gaming experience.

Vastattuja: 26 Ohitettuja: 35



Q20 What do you think about product placement within games in general?

Vastattuja: 48 Ohitettuja: 13

