

# **Social media marketing plan for an indie game**

**Case: Brakesoft Ltd., The Forgotten Guardians**

## Abstract

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Abstract <p>The objective of the thesis was to develop a social media marketing plan for an indie game based on the Social Media Planning Cycle model. The chosen indie game was The Forgotten Guardians mobile game by Brakesoft. The literature review was written on the concepts of social media, indie games, social media marketing, and the social media planning cycle. The study was conducted by using a mixed-methods research approach. Data gathering included two interviews with marketing specialists and 82 respondents to an online survey.</p> <p>First, strengths and weaknesses, goals, and target audience for The Forgotten Guardians were identified. Then, effective content for selected social media platforms was chosen. The game's strengths were the creative ideas on Facebook and Instagram. However, the lack of a defined target audience and a structured marketing plan were weaknesses. The social media marketing plan was aimed to increase the game's visibility and brand awareness, targeting people aged 13-35 who prefer indie games. Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube were selected as the platforms for content implementation.</p>		
Keywords social media marketing, indie game marketing, social media planning cycle		

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Social media platforms have transformed how people connect, share information, and communicate globally (Sreenivasan 2017). Especially during the pandemic, social media has played a crucial role in enabling individuals to maintain relationships, access entertainment, and stay informed about current events (Lee 2020). As a result, the growth of social media has been immense. According to Statista's 2022 survey of social media users worldwide, the number of social media users worldwide reaching an estimated 5.42 billion by 2025 is predicted, with an increase of almost one billion from 4.70 billion in 2022. As of January 2022, Finland has 4.73 million social media users, representing 85.2% of the country's population. These figures illustrate the tremendous importance of social media in modern society and its significant potential in business marketing. (Dixon 2022; Kemp 2022.)

Social media impacts people's communication in all areas of life and contributes to the growth of a business. There is an argument that the social web can help expand that business (Evans 2008). Similarly, Gaines (2021) asserts that social media should be integrated into a company's growth strategy to diversify its growth potential, establish connections with existing and potential customers, increase sales, and impact brand awareness. The CMO Survey - Covid Special Edition shows that investments in social media increased from 13.3% to 23.2% between February 2020 and June 2020. This period also saw a decrease of 5.3% in spending on traditional advertising (Moorman & McCarthy 2021.) These findings reflect the effectiveness and benefits of social media marketing for businesses.

Together with the ubiquitous social media, the gaming industry has had exceptional growth in recent years. As technology advances, a surging gaming audience draws more gamers from diverse backgrounds into the market. Moreover, the gaming market has become universal and popular with adolescents and grown-ups, providing developers and publishers numerous opportunities to capitalize on, resulting in significant profits. (Harry 2023.) Mobile games account for over 50% of the industry's 2022 revenue and are forecasted to be 470 billion USD in 2030 (Global Data 2022). With conveniences such as ease of access, low cost, no hardware requirements, and a wide variety of games, additionally, more and more people using phones, the popularity of mobile games is understandable. Therefore, there is substantial scope for prominent industry leaders, such as Nintendo, esports organizations, and independent game developers, to expand their audience. (Barnhart 2020b; Sano 2022.)

The case company of this thesis, Brakesoft, is an independent game company that released its new mobile game, *The Forgotten Guardians*, in 2022. This thesis focuses on discussing the game's social media marketing. I worked in the company as a marketing trainee in the spring of 2022. My role was to support the organization's marketing planning and implementation processes. During my internship, I was responsible for executing social media marketing strategies to promote the soft launch of *The Forgotten Guardians*.

The thesis aims to continue this work by developing a social media marketing plan for the full launch of *The Forgotten Guardians*, leveraging the potential of social media marketing to enhance the game's presence on social media and boost the game's awareness. The thesis explicitly provides social media marketing for *The Forgotten Guardians* game. In addition, the thesis connects to earlier work on social media marketing, specifically the marketing of independent games, and provides recommendations for Brakesoft.

## 1.2 Thesis objectives, research questions, and limitations

This study focuses on developing a social media marketing plan to promote *The Forgotten Guardians*, using the Social Media Marketing Planning Cycle (SMM Planning Cycle) as a guiding model.

This study's primary research question is:

- How to develop a social media marketing plan for promoting *The Forgotten Guardians*?

The following secondary research questions help answer the main research question:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the game's current social media presence and engagement?
- What are the goals of social media marketing for *The Forgotten Guardians*?
- What is the target audience group for promoting *The Forgotten Guardians* on social media?
- What social media platforms and contents are effective for promoting *The Forgotten Guardians*?

Limitation represents the weaknesses and limits of a research design that can influence the result of the research (Ross & Bibler Zaidi 2019). All studies have limitations that should be noted to understand better the presented findings and conclusions (Blessing & Forister 2015, 178–179). A researcher can increase the transparency and credibility of their work by noting how certain limitations affect the study (Price & Murnan 2004, according to USC Libraries 2023a).

In this study, the limitations are the potential weaknesses and issues that can affect the result of the marketing plan. The first limitation is geography. This study focuses on Finland. Hence, the results can only reflect the situation in Finland. The second limitation is the plan's target industry. This social media marketing plan is tailored for the mobile gaming industry, specifically for indie games. As a result, the project might not apply to a different business in another sector.

### 1.3 Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework refers to the framework that may contain or support the theory of a study. It presents and describes the methodology employed in a research study, explaining the reasons that underlie the existence of the research problem. (Abend 2008, according to USC Libraries 2023b.)

The theoretical framework for this study includes the Social Media Marketing Planning Cycle. The Social Media Planning Cycle is a continual process and consists of eight steps: listening, setting goals, defining strategies, identifying the target audience, selecting tools and platforms, implementing monitoring, and tuning (Figure 1). This Social Media Planning Cycle contains clear steps for following. (Barker et al. 2022, 25). Hence, independent game publishers can use this Social Media Planning Cycle to create a social media marketing plan.

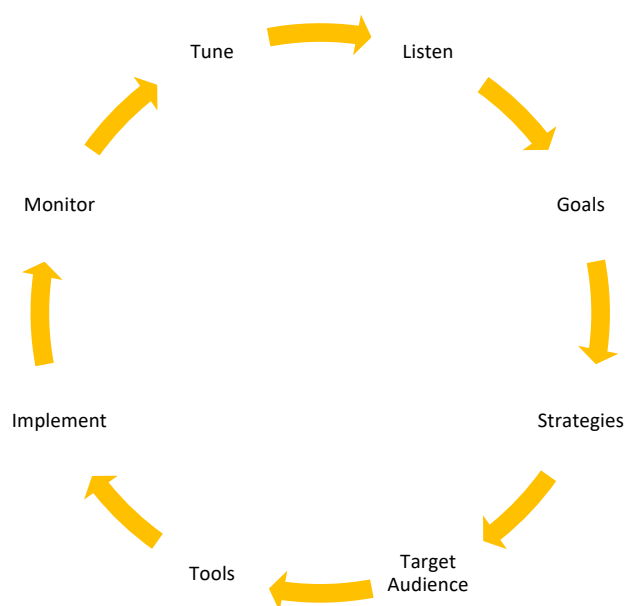


Figure 1. Social Media Planning Cycle (adapted from Barker et al. 2022, 25)

By following Social Media Planning Cycle, the study aims to define the strengths and weaknesses of The Forgotten Guardians' social media through SWOT Analysis, set clear goals, determine the target audience of the game's social media, select tools and platforms, and implement effective content on social media channels.

#### 1.4 Research methods

This study chooses a mixed-methods research approach. This approach includes qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to understand the topic comprehensively. The study's qualitative aspect involves one-to-one interviews with two marketing specialists with experience in the game industry. The interview relates to The Forgotten Guardians' target audience, the strengths and weaknesses of the game's social media presence and sets the social media marketing plan goals.

On the other hand, the quantitative aspect of the study involves a survey to understand social media users' perspectives on promoting indie games on social media. The perspectives contain the most used social media platforms, engagement contents, and impact factors of social media promotion on social media users.

#### 1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis has five main chapters, as shown in Figure 2. It begins with an introduction to the background, the purpose of the study, research questions, and methodology. Subsequently, the literature review is presented, consisting of the key concepts of social media, indie games, social media marketing, and the Social Media Planning Cycle. This chapter forms the foundation for developing the plan outlined in the empirical research chapter. The empirical research contains conducting and analyzing interviews and a survey. The next chapter is the conclusion and discussion. This chapter discusses the collected data and answers the research question. Finally, the summary chapter is about summing up the thesis.



Figure 2. Thesis structure

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Social media

Social interaction has always existed in human interactions, while media enables people to express social actions. With the advance of technology, social interactions evolved from in-person meetings to correspondences such as letters, telephones, and email. Now, web-based interactions are known as social media. Today, social media platforms enable everyone to connect more efficiently and on a larger scale. (Barker et al. 2022, 5.)

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 62–63) define social media as internet-based technology that enables individuals to interact, share opinions, and update information for a larger audience. Social media provides a platform for real-time virtual interactions, making it a valuable tool for individuals to communicate worldwide. Compared to face-to-face interactions, social networks offer their audience instant response times, low costs, and ease of use globally. (Safko & Brake 2009, according to Thackeray et al. 2012, 165.) The primary reasons for individuals to download social media sites are to fill their spare time, find products, gain content inspiration, and avoid the fear of missing out (FOMO) (Global Web Index 2018).

Social networks have revolutionized how people connect, communicate, and consume information. With billions of users worldwide, it has integrated into our daily lives. (Dentzel 2013.) There are many different social media platforms. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitch are popular networking sites worldwide, particularly in the indie game industry. (Ottelin 2015; Cummings 2022.) The thesis focuses on Finland's three popular social media platforms: YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram (Clausnitzer 2023). Understanding the strengths and features of each site is essential when choosing the right platforms to market an indie game (Young Entrepreneur Council 2020).

Facebook is one of Finland's most popular social media platforms, with over 3.8 million users (Napoleon Cat 2022). Users can upload text, images, videos, links, carousels, stories, and live broadcast formats. Facebook contains advertising tools that can define as its strengths. Businesses can use advertising tools to advertise their products to target specific audience groups based on location, demographics, interests, and behaviours. Facebook allows users to create and administer groups or pages. Moreover, users can connect their Facebook and Instagram accounts together. For instance, a user uploads a photo on Facebook and chooses an option to upload it on Instagram. (Meta 2023.)

In Finland, Instagram has 2 billion users and is especially popular among the age group between 18-44 (Napoleon Cat 2022). This social media platform offers many features, including creating & sharing, Instagram Reels, Instagram Stories, Live, etc (Instagram 2023).

Instagram Reels feature is a new way to create and upload short videos on Instagram (Instagram 2020). Instagram Live feature helps to start a live broadcast to get closer to followers (Instagram 2023). Instagram's advantages include a large and engaged user base, a focus on visually appealing content, effective organic search, audience targeting, and interaction with Facebook (Jackson 2019).

YouTube is a platform for sharing videos for free. It has over 4 million users in Finland, thanks to the diversity of available video content, from entertainment and music videos to tutorials. YouTube has a large user base. This YouTube's advantage makes it a very interactive and powerful social media platform for businesses to advertise products. Moreover, businesses can create ads to target audiences based on their interests and behaviours on YouTube. (Kemp 2022; Sheikh 2022; Kenan 2022.)

Each social media platform has different users, features, and advantages. A company can build a community around its game by tailoring content to each platform's audience. This approach enables the company to engage with its target audience purposefully, leading to increased brand awareness, customer loyalty, and increased sales. (Young Entrepreneur Council 2020.)

## 2.2 Indie game

Small groups or individuals create a game, which is called an indie or independent game. Indie games are typically lower-budgeted and designed to focus on creativity and innovation rather than profit (Juul 2010).

There are three perspectives to examine independent game production: the production, the product, and the producer (Kemppainen 2009, according to Suorsa 2017, 4). Firstly, the production perspective can be categorized based on financial independence into three sub-categories: non-independent, semi-independent, and independent. Non-independent game productions are big companies like Tencent, Nintendo, and Sony. In contrast, semi-independent productions often subcontract work for larger studios and do not have a permanent contract with a single publisher. Fully independent productions are done entirely without financial support from publishers. Secondly, the independent product's style and content often differ from those of mainstream products in several aspects, for instance, graphics, animations, and creative ideas. Due to the limited budget, indie games generally have retro 2D pixel art or an independent aesthetic (Juul 2014, according to Garda & Grabarczyk 2016). Thirdly, producer independence is related to the indie spirit, the freedom to create according to personal interest or from a personal premise. To be considered an indie game, the game must match at least one of these defining features. (Suorsa 2017, 4–5.)

Choosing distribution channels is essential to make a game available (Josef et al. 2022). Developers can publish games through various channels, including mobile platforms (Google Play, Apple App Store), Steam, Itch.io, and more (Ninichi 2017).

For a game to reach the audience, traditional marketing, such as television ads or billboards, can reach more players. However, it requires deep research into market and audience behaviours. Traditional marketing is often out of reach and has high risks for an indie game company. Instead, alternative marketing, like social media, is a safe choice to build awareness for the game. (Kovanto 2013, 14.)

Furthermore, the company can receive comments and valuable feedback on the game on social media by interacting with audiences. The comments and feedbacks allow indie game developers to improve their games and create more relevant content (Rizzo 2020). This feedback loop is advantageous to indie games, which rely on word-of-mouth marketing and positive reviews to get attention (Kovanto 2013, 7).

To sum up, social media has become an essential component of indie game marketing, allowing the company to overcome some unique challenges they face when promoting their games. Using social media platforms, indie game companies can connect with their audience, build a community around their game, and ultimately achieve great success.

### 2.3 Social media marketing

For contemporary business, Reno (2022) states that social media allows companies of all sizes to grow. Also, Mekky (2022) notes that social media marketing can assist new entrepreneurs with limited resources to succeed. With many recommendations for integrating social media into marketing strategies, this sub-chapter primarily discusses the definition of social media marketing, its different types, and its importance for indie game marketing.

Traditionally, marketing refers to sales and advertising. Today, it also involves creating, communicating, providing, and selling products or services while building strong customer relationships to capture value from customer exchange. (Armstrong et al. 2016, 6.) In addition, the emergence of social media and its ability to rapidly access and share features has made social media marketing crucial for businesses (Hanna 2011, according to Li et al. 2021). Social media marketing encompasses promoting new products, interacting with customers, and driving traffic from social media platforms (Evan 2012; Sprout Social 2023a). By influencing how businesses interact with consumers on social media platforms, this aspect of digital marketing boosts brand recognition, generates potential customers, and helps business growth (Kumar & Mirchandani 2012; Tran 2021). For instance, Mekky, a public

relations expert and entrepreneur, founded her PR agency with no staff. With limited resources for promoting her young agency, Mekky turned to social media platforms to strategically promote her business for free. Through her extensive social media network, Mekky effectively communicated the story of her agency's founding and its unique capabilities in delivering complete PR services. She states that social media can be a valuable tool for new entrepreneurs with limited resources and is critical to the company's success. (Mekky 2022.)

However, there are both advantages and disadvantages associated with social media marketing. On the one hand, social media marketing enables marketers to target specific customer groups with customized, brand-specific content and to engage with customers in real-time through chat boxes and comment sections. It also allows immediate content delivery, promoting a brand's ongoing products and activities. On the other hand, social media marketing can present challenges for businesses, including negative feedback, reputation management, privacy concerns, and the inability to control the campaign's outcome due to users' ability to use social media in ways that may not align with the company's goals. (Armstrong et al. 2016, 560.)

Social media marketing practice contains various forms, as illustrated in Figure 3. It includes content marketing, influencer marketing, community management, paid media, and advertising or sponsorship (Patel). This research describes four social media marketing types: community management, content creation, paid media marketing, and influencers.



Figure 3. Social media marketing types (Tech Sense)

Community marketing on social media refers to building a community around a brand's activities on social media platforms by sharing attitudes, interests, values, and goals. The strategy involves actively monitoring and responding to social media conversations, fostering interactions between customers and the brand, and creating a positive online environment. (Upwork 2022a.) For instance, fast food chain like McDonald's has leveraged community marketing by replying to customers' statuses on the social media platform, as shown in Figure 4. In addition, community marketing includes collaborating with influencers and promoting user-generated content to cultivate a sense of community around the brand (Upwork 2022b). Furthermore, this marketing type aims to create a loyal and engaged community of followers who will advocate for the brand and support its growth, ultimately leading to increased brand awareness, customer engagement, and sales (Baker 2019).



Figure 4. McDonald's reply to customer (Patel)

Content creation is essential for social media marketing strategy to promote products or services on social media platforms. Content can appear in different forms like infographics, podcasts, videos, webpages, and books (Steimle 2014). Creating content has been represented as a critical part of many business marketing strategies (Forbes 2022). It is a marketing technique where brands create and distribute content to maximize its impact on customers' decision-making process, drive traffic to their website, and convert it into sales through other websites. (Chojecki 2020; Newberry 2022.) Content marketing is a long-term, cost-effective strategy with substantial growth (Gunelius 2011, 44). Research shows it costs 62% less than other marketing methods, generating three times the leads (Kapost, according to Lopes 2023). Creating content that appeals to the target audience is fundamental to building solid relationships by researching the audience's interests, goals, and pain points while reflecting the unique point of view of the brand (Barker 2020).

Cooper (2021) defines paid media marketing means advertising on social media platforms. It is a method by which businesses display their advertisements or sponsored marketing messages on popular platforms and target a specific sub-audience (Barker et al. 2022).

There are many different social media ad formats, and each form has its best practices for each social media platform. This thesis discusses popular social media advertising formats, low-budget, and works for promoting the game: image, video, and interactive. Image advertising is a clickable graphic ad, shown in the figure. It allows companies to share information and promote their businesses, products, and services. Businesses can customize image URL links directing to the site that they want. (Jones & Scott 2003, 284; Google Ads 2023.) This ad format recommends paying attention to high-quality photos for good results (Barker et al. 2022, 110). Video advertising uses video content for promotion (Adobe Experience Cloud Blog 2021). This ad type is integrated into every social media platform and is the most influential ad format for mobile games. The content video should be authentic to the user's platform to get more engagement and sharing. (Game Marketing Genie 2022; Barker et al. 2022, 113.) Interactive has evolved digital technology to get users to interact with ads. This ad format includes chatbots, lenses, and polls that appear in stories, messaging, and user feeds. (Digivizer 2020; Barker et al. 2022, 112.)

An influencer is a person who is active on social media and receives a sizeable and niche social following (Sprout Social 2023b). Moreover, influencers are content creators who arise along with the growth of social media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube (Barker et al. 2022, 116; Sprout Social 2023b). Therefore, the definition of influencer marketing is a type of social media marketing in which a brand collaborates with influencers or content creators on the internet to promote their products (Barker et al. 2022, 116). The product's review from influencers is social proof, and it can bring potential customers to brands (Sprout Social 2023b). There are four groups of influencers, categorized by number of followers. Firstly, nano influencers have below ten thousand followers. These influencers have good interaction with their audience. Secondly, micro-influencers have ten thousand to one hundred thousand followers. Influencers in this group are embraced by brands thanks to their captive niche, affordable, and higher engagement ROI than macro and mega groups. Thirdly, macro-influencers have one hundred thousand to one million followers. These influencers have good personal branding within their respective niches. Partnering with the macro influencers group provides the brand with a significant reach. Fourthly, mega influencers have above one million followers, often a celebrity. These influencers provide excellent brand exposure, but the cost can be expensive. (Barker et al. 2022, 118; Sprout Social 2023b.)

## 2.4 Social media planning cycle

A well-planned social media marketing is valuable for promoting indie games. This subchapter introduces the Social Media Planning Cycle model. This Social Media Planning

Cycle can assist independent game companies in developing a social media marketing plan.

### Listening

Listening to the social web is to determine the company's current social media presence. In this step, conducting a SWOT analysis is a useful way to improve the success of strategic planning. Furthermore, it is an adaptive tool for analyzing and providing information to enhance a company's competitive knowledge. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. In a SWOT analysis for social media, strengths, and weaknesses are internal factors. Threats and opportunities are external factors. Each quadrant represents questions for social media, as shown in Table 1. (Brooks et al. 2014 & Barker et al. 2022, 275.)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are you doing well?</li> <li>• What advantages or strengths does your brand boast?</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where might your business be lacking?</li> <li>• What internal factors could hold you back from reaching your goals?</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's the incentive of your campaign or marketing push?</li> <li>• What do you have to gain, and what's possible?</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What outside forces could hinder your marketing efforts?</li> </ul>

Table 1. Social media SWOT Analysis (adapted from Barnhart 2020a)

Similarly, Table 2 presents questions that help the company find strengths and weaknesses on social media platforms, along with opportunities and threats. To summarize, a social media SWOT Analysis is crucial to developing successful strategies for accomplishing goals (Barker et al. 2022, 278).

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the organization have a strong brand presence on multiple social media platforms?</li> <li>• Does the company have a proven track record on social media platforms?</li> <li>• Does the organization have experienced staff adept at various social media platforms?</li> <li>• Are top executives supportive of social media efforts?</li> <li>• Are ample resources available for participating on social media platforms?</li> <li>• Does the company currently have a variety of vibrant social media properties?</li> <li>• Does the company have unique products or services that satisfy the needs of social media users?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the organization have a weak brand presence on multiple social media platforms?</li> <li>• Is the company's track record on social media platforms spotty?</li> <li>• Does the organization lack sufficient expertise to work effectively on social media platforms?</li> <li>• Does the company lack the ability to fully monitor its social media marketing efforts in order to measure progress in achieving marketing goals?</li> <li>• Are top executives reluctant to fully commit to social media marketing?</li> <li>• Are resources insufficient for building and maintaining a presence on social media platforms?</li> <li>• Does the company lack a variety of vibrant social media properties?</li> <li>• Does the company lack distinctive products or services or do the current offerings fail to satisfy the needs of social media users?</li> </ul>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which social media platforms have the greatest concentration of the company's target audience?</li> <li>• What does the target market do on these sites?</li> <li>• Do they have any unfulfilled needs on the platforms that the company can satisfy?</li> <li>• Are there emerging target markets on these platforms with needs the company can satisfy?</li> <li>• What social media technologies provide opportunities for the company?</li> <li>• Are there ways the company and its competitors can benefit by working together on the platforms?</li> <li>• Are there opportunities for collaborating with customers to build brand presence on platforms?</li> <li>• Are suppliers present on these platforms?</li> <li>• What do customers value about the company?</li> <li>• Is market demand increasing?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there emerging competitors on these major platforms?</li> <li>• What are the social media strategies and tactics that competitors pursue on these platforms?</li> <li>• How successful are these strategies and tactics in building a brand presence on the company's key social media platforms?</li> <li>• In what ways are competitors' products or services superior to the company's offerings?</li> <li>• How are competitors likely to respond to changes in how the company markets on the platforms?</li> <li>• Is the company behind in adopting new technologies?</li> <li>• Are international competitors taking away market share?</li> <li>• What do customers dislike about the company?</li> <li>• Is market demand decreasing?</li> </ul>

Table 2. Social media SWOT analysis questions (adapted from Barker et al. 2022, 276)

### Setting goals

After the analysis and research in the first step, the goals can be defined for social media marketing. The goals should maximize the company's strengths and grasp opportunities while minimizing the company's weaknesses and threats. Setting goals is crucial for a successful social media marketing plan. Furthermore, goals are needed to measure the success of social media efforts and respond to strategies. A set of common goals provides a good starting point for a company's goals. It includes branding, increasing customer satisfaction, generating leads, and driving word-of-mouth recommendations. Setting goals is a basis for setting objectives. The objectives can be stated as goals for a specific campaign, activity, etc. The SMART acronym is the following model while creating objectives. SMART includes five elements and stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-limited. Furthermore, objectives should always be linked to KPIs. (Lempiäinen 2017, 16 & Barker et al. 2022, 33–37.)

### Determining strategies

The Eight Cs of Strategy Development is a recommendation model for identifying the strategies suitable for the company's social media, as shown in Table 3. The Eight C's Strategy

of Development provides broad strategy processes. Therefore, it must be tailored for particular the company's goals. (Barker et al. 2022, 280.)

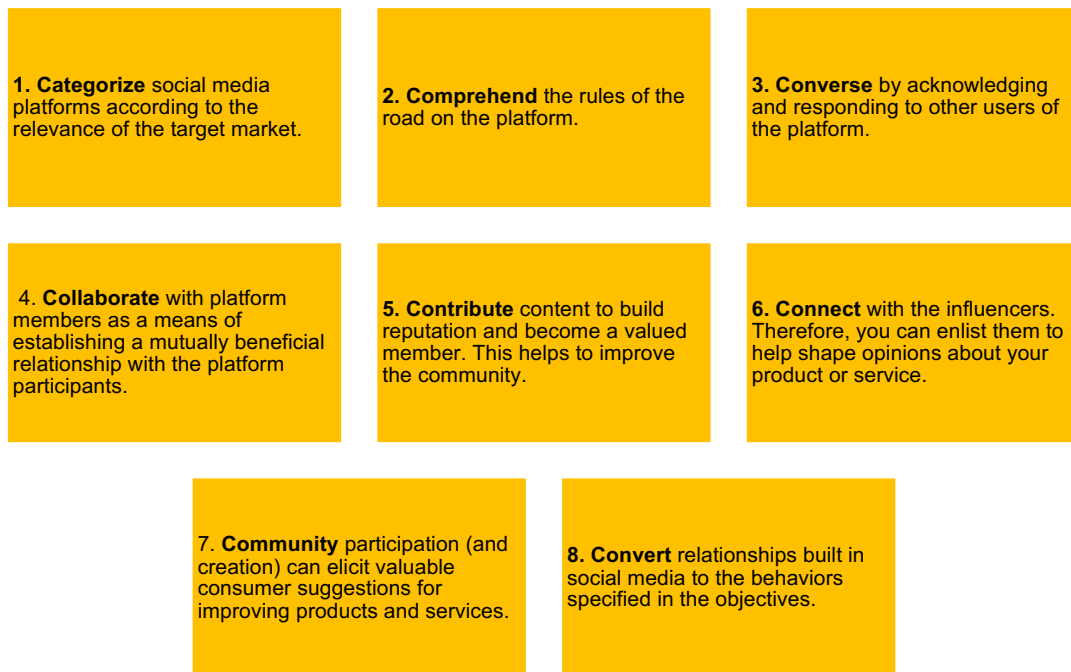


Table 3. Eight C's Strategy of Development (adapted from Barker et al. 2022, 38)

### Identifying target audience

The target audience is significant to the company's product or service. Identifying the target audience includes the following characteristics: demographics (such as age, gender, etc.), psychographics (such as personality, attitudes, interests, and lifestyle), and behaviours. The company can determine the right social media platform depending on the target audience's behaviours. (Barker et al. 2022, 44–51.)

### Selecting tools and platforms

Social media tools help social media marketing be well-organized and cause fewer errors while implemented. Each tool has its functions. As shown in Figure 5, social media tools are divided into nine types. Some popular tools, such as Excel for content management and social media insight for tracking metrics, are suitable for reducing budgets. (Barker et al. 2022, 281.)



Figure 5. Social media tool categories (Razor Social, according to Barker et al. 2022, 244)

Choosing the social media platforms with the highest concentration from the target audience is needed. For instance, social networks like Facebook are suitable for the conversational target audience, and blog publishing sites such as WordPress are ideal for target audiences who are content creators. Therefore, a company profile should be created on social media platforms that have the company's target audience. (Barker et al. 2022, 280–282.)

### Implementing

This step implements goals, strategies, target audience, and platforms. Additionally, the generation and distribution of content on various platforms are covered. Each social media platform has different advantages. Hence, the tactics should have tailored to reach the target audience. The Rules of Thirds is a suggestion for following while sharing content: one-third of posts to promote the business, one-third of posts of ideas, and one-third of personal stories. (Barker et al. 2022, 282–284.)

### Monitoring and tuning

The social media monitoring process includes tracking, measuring, and evaluating social media marketing activities. Following that, tuning is adjusting and improving the social media marketing plan to maximize success. (Barker et al. 2022, 312–314.)

### 3 Empirical research and data collection

#### 3.1 Research context

Brakesoft is an independent game development company established in 2017 by Apil Karki to revolutionize the mobile gaming industry. He was always fascinated by the potential of games to connect people and spark their imaginations. Apil began experimenting with his game ideas on a website in 2014. He decided to pursue his dream of setting up a game development studio, which led to the establishment of Brakesoft. The company now includes industry specialists passionate about their craft and dedicated to creating innovative and engaging mobile games that fascinate players worldwide. Brakesoft has come a long way despite its modest beginnings and is poised to change how we play and interact with games. (Brakesoft 2023a.)

In late 2020, Brakesoft unveiled *The Forgotten Guardians* on its website (Image 1). It is the third game project of the Brakesoft company and has a two-dimensional (2D) pixel design, combining puzzle and strategy genres. This mobile game is a free-to-play application on App Store and Google Play. *The Forgotten Guardians* is a game that centers around protecting a temple and its Core from human invaders who seek to gain control over its power. The Guardians protect the Temple and its Core from the wrong hands to prevent the destruction of the earth. A player needs to strategically place Guardian towers on each level to prevent human invaders from reaching the Core and causing an extinction event for the human species. The game involves tower defense mechanics, where players must use strategy and skill to stop the invaders from reaching their goal. Each level becomes progressively harder, adding to the game's challenge. Brakesoft plans to bring innovation to the tower defense genre with this game. They promise *The Forgotten Guardians* will be an exciting and challenging game. (Brakesoft 2023b; Brakesoft 2023c; Brakesoft 2021.)



Image 1. *The Forgotten Guardians* game reveal (Brakesoft 2021)

### 3.2 Research approach and methods

A research method is a general plan for conducting research that outlines the methods and procedures used to collect, analyze, and interpret data. Research methods are often based on the research question and may vary depending on the research type, available resources, and the research context. (Creswell & Creswell 2017.) Three commonly used research approaches are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Taherdoost 2022).

Qualitative research is an approach to investigating and comprehending the significance that people or communities assign to social or human issues. It collects non-numerical data by gathering participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviours. The open-ended research questions allow participants to explain their thoughts, emotions, and experiences during specific events of interest. This approach is essential for exploring complex phenomena and comprehending social and cultural contexts. (Tenny et al. 2022; Creswell & Creswell 2017.) Standard qualitative research methods include in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, documents, and case study research (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Qualitative research methods (adapted from Office of Research & Doctoral Services 2015; Taherdoost 2022, 56)

On the other hand, quantitative research is a research approach that describes a specific phenomenon by gathering numerical data to answer precise questions (Taherdoost 2022, 54). This research approach is beneficial for testing theories and measuring cause-and-

effect relationships (Creswell & Creswell 2017). Different methods for gathering data exist, such as survey research, experiments, correlational research, quasi-experimental research, and descriptive research, as illustrated in Figure 7 (Taherdoost 2022, 58).



Figure 7. Quantitative research methods (adapted from Taherdoost 2022, 58)

The mixed methods research approach combines quantitative and qualitative research methods. This method utilizes the strengths of both data types to give a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of a research problem. (Creswell & Creswell 2017.) Researchers must carefully evaluate and select the most appropriate research method, considering the research question and the type of data they aim to gather. Each method has its own set of procedures and tools. (Taherdoost 2022, 53.)

This thesis chooses the mixed-method research approach. This research approach gives a deeper examination of the research questions, which concern both quantitative and qualitative aspects of social media marketing to develop a social media marketing plan for The Forgotten Guardians.

For the quantitative component, an online survey is distributed to a random sample of social media users on popular social media platforms. The survey includes closed-ended questions to collect quantitative data.

For the qualitative component, the survey includes two open-ended questions to collect qualitative data. In addition, in-depth interviews are conducted with a purposive sample of two interviewees. The interviews are semi-structured, audio-recorded, and transcribed for later analysis.

### 3.3 Gathering and analysing the data

This sub-chapter describes the process of gathering data through two interviews and one online survey. Then, data analysis methods are discussed.

### **Gathering the data**

The interviews invited industry specialists, including one prior marketing coordinator for The Forgotten Guardians and one person with relevant experience in indie game industry marketing. These interviews gathered in-depth insights and perspectives on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of The Forgotten Guardians' social media presence. Moreover, the game's target audience group was covered in interviews. The questions asked in the interviews were developed based on the research objectives and themes identified from the literature review.

A total of 7 questions were asked in two interviews. The first two questions helped to define a social media SWOT Analysis for the game. The third question asked about the social media marketing goals for The Forgotten Guardians. Next, the fourth question asked about the target audience for the game based on previous questions, as shown in Appendix 1. Moreover, the interviews collected recommendations and suggestions for developing social media marketing plan for The Forgotten Guardians. The interviews were conducted via video conferencing software (Microsoft Teams). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim into English to ensure data reliability.

The survey gathered opinions and data from social media users on the most engaging and effective social media content to promote indie games. In addition, the survey questions collected information on demographics, social media usage habits, potential audience behaviour toward indie gaming, and preferences and decision-making factors through social media marketing.

The survey was designed on Google Forms. The survey period was in one week. The online survey was shared on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, with a target audience of 13 to 35-year-olds living in Finland. The survey consisted of 16 questions, including 14 multiple-choice questions and two open-ended questions. All responses were anonymous and kept confidential.

### **Analyzing the data**

Data collected through interviews and surveys were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Interview data were analyzed by thematic analysis. The thematic analysis involves identifying, organizing, and providing detailed information about thematic patterns in a data set (Clarke & Braun 2012, 2). The interview data collected from marketing specialists were reproduced and examined periodically on topics related to SWOT Analysis, goals, and target audience.

The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics is the process of calculating, describing, and summarizing collected research data to identify trends and practices in the data. Descriptive statistics are reported numerically in the text of a manuscript and tables or figures. (Vetter 2017; Cote 2021.)

### 3.4 Results

This sub-chapter describes the study's findings based on the method or methods used to collect the information and should be in a logical sequence without any interpretation or bias. Moreover, the research's data should be described in detail. (Annesley 2010, according to USC Libraries 2023c.)

Data were collected from an online survey and interviews. First, interviews were conducted with marketing specialists. These interviews aimed to understand better the strengths and weaknesses of the game's social media presence through SWOT Analysis. Furthermore, the goals and target audience were identified through interviews. The survey then collected data to select social media platforms and engaging content for the game on social media platforms.

#### 3.4.1 Interview results

The interview aimed to gain insights into social media SWOT Analysis to understand the strengths and weaknesses of The Forgotten Guardians' social media. Next, the goals and target audience were discussed through interviews. The collected data were analyzed in detail below.

#### **Social media SWOT Analysis**

The social media SWOT Analysis has been developed to gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of The Forgotten Guardians on social media. Two interviewees expressed their opinions about the game's strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. The answers are analyzed and shown in Table 4.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative ideas</li> <li>• Positive contents</li> <li>• Ample room for exploring new contents</li> <li>• Presence on Facebook and Instagram</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undefined target audience</li> <li>• Lack of structure marketing plan</li> <li>• Lack of fan community</li> <li>• Weak brand awareness</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instagram's game account receives the most concentration</li> <li>• Company accounts have good interaction</li> <li>• Create an account on Tiktok</li> <li>• Live feature on Facebook and Instagram</li> <li>• Interaction with followers</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General art styles and game genre</li> <li>• Competitors have strong brand awareness</li> <li>• Competitors have good social media strategies and tactics</li> </ul>

Table 4. The Forgotten Guardians SWOT Analysis

The Forgotten Guardians' strengths include creative ideas and positive content on social media platforms. Brakesoft makes ample room for brainstorming new content. The company environment encourages employees to freely explore new game concepts on social media, allowing for a fresh and innovative approach. Furthermore, The Forgotten Guardians has positive content that received good comments from followers on Facebook and Instagram.

Weaknesses of The Forgotten Guardians include the lack of a target audience and fan community, the lack of a structured marketing plan, and a separate account for the game that causes weak game brand awareness. The game does not have a target audience. Therefore, the fan community is blurred. Weak game brand awareness suggests that a targeted effort is needed to build recognition and establish a loyal community of players. The decision to separate The Forgotten Guardians account from the company's operations could adversely affect the game's visibility and hinder the establishment of trust among potential players. In addition, there is no specific social media marketing plan to promote the game on social networks.

The Forgotten Guardians' threats include competition from other companies, general game genre, and art style. The game encounters competition from other companies already established strong brand awareness within the industry. The presence of similar mobile games with comparable mechanics and core game-play loot further intensifies the competitive landscape. Moreover, the existence of other games with similar art poses a threat to attracting and retaining players' interest and engagement.

The Forgotten Guardians' opportunities are the company's social media accounts, features on social media platforms such as Instagram Reels, new social media platforms such as TikTok, and interaction with followers. Participant 2 mentioned that creating a separate

game's social media account is a weakness. Therefore, the company should use the company's social media account to capitalize on brand popularity and increase the game's visibility. The game's contents have good interaction with followers on Facebook and Instagram. Hence, the company should continuously interact with followers. Using the Live feature on Instagram to interact with followers is a good way to reach them closer and receive a higher impact.

### **Goals**

Participant 1 expressed a goal of gaining more followers and improving the social media engagement rate for The Forgotten Guardians. This goal reflects a desire to build an active and engaged community around the game. She recognizes the significance of a loyal and interactive fan base, as it can contribute to the game's overall success and create a sense of enthusiasm and anticipation among potential players.

Participant 2 described that The Forgotten Guardians' social media goals should be enhancing the game's visibility and brand awareness through social media channels. This goal indicates a strategic focus on increasing the reach and recognition of the game. By utilizing popular social media platforms effectively, he aims to create a strong presence for the game.

### **Target audience**

Participant 1, who had experience working on The Forgotten Guardians game, highlighted the importance of the target audience. The current target audience is diverse and does not have a primary focus. As a result, she emphasized the importance of identifying a niche target group to create a more effective marketing plan. She suggested that the ideal target audience for the game would be adults aged 13 to 35 living in Finland. Furthermore, individuals are interested in casual mobile gaming and indie games.

On the other hand, participant 2, who had experience working in the game industry, proposed the target group as individuals who prefer games featuring 8-bit to 16-bit graphics, pixel art, and nostalgic experiences of classic mobile games. Furthermore, participant 2 mentioned the potential of the young generation as a target audience, and individuals seek casual mobile games for entertainment.

### **3.4.2 Survey results**

To develop a social media plan to promote The Forgotten Guardians, it is crucial to understand the preferences and behaviours of social media users. The survey questions are

shown in Appendix 2. The survey was created to determine the types of social media content that engage users the most and how effective social media platforms are for promoting indie games. It was open for a week when 82 responses were received. The data collected from the survey provides valuable insights into the social media preferences and behaviours of the target audience for The Forgotten Guardians. This sub-chapter discusses the survey results.

### Question 1

The first question asked about the most use social media platforms. Respondents were presented with eight popular platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, Reddit, and Discord. Facebook is the most widely used platform, with nearly 83% of the 82 respondents reporting using this platform frequently. YouTube and Instagram are also popular, with above 67% and nearly 44%% of respondents indicating that they use these platforms. TikTok and LinkedIn are also popular among the respondents, with 38% and 21% respectively. Twitter, Reddit, and Discord are the most minor used platforms, with only 2.5%, 1%, and 1% of respondents using them. A chart illustrating these findings can be seen in Figure 8.

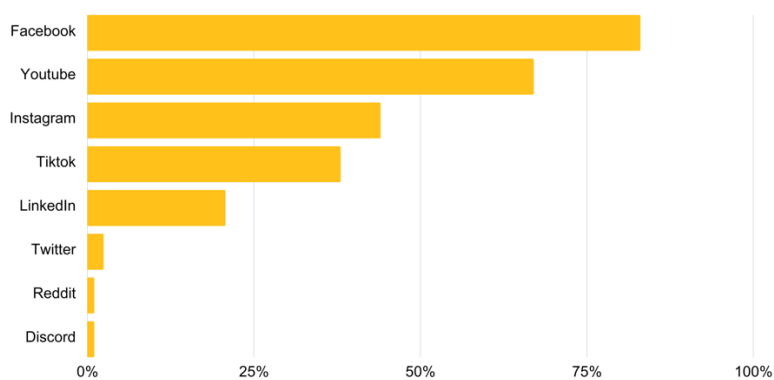


Figure 8. The most frequently used social media platform

These findings provide valuable insights into which platforms The Forgotten Guardians game should be most active on and where the social media marketing efforts should be focused. The percentages indicate that Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are the most frequently used social media platforms. These findings suggest that the game should prioritize establishing a solid social media presence on these platforms to reach the target audience effectively.

## Question 2

This question asked how often respondents interacted with social media content. Figure 9 shows that 69.5% of the respondents check social media multiple times daily. Meanwhile, 16% of respondents answered checking social media once a day and 11% check social media a few times a day.

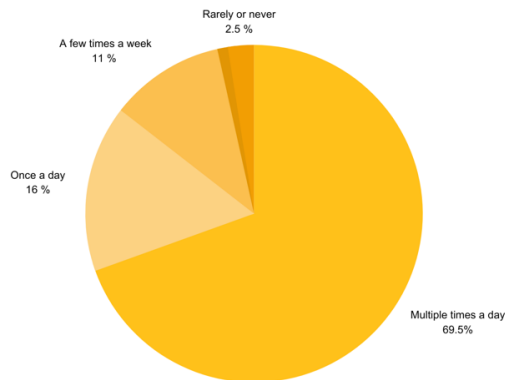


Figure 9. Frequency of engagement with social media content

This question's findings show that social media has marketing potential with a highly engaged audience. Frequent and consistent posting on social media platforms may be necessary for reaching and engaging with more and more audiences.

## Question 3

This question aimed to identify the types of social media content formats most engaging to the respondents. Figure 10 demonstrates that short-form videos are the most exciting content, with 79% of respondents finding them engaging. Images are the second most engaging content format, with 69% of respondents finding them engaging. Other types of formats, live videos (22%), and blog posts or articles (21%), long-form videos (19.5%), infographics (12%), are found to be the least engaging by respondents.

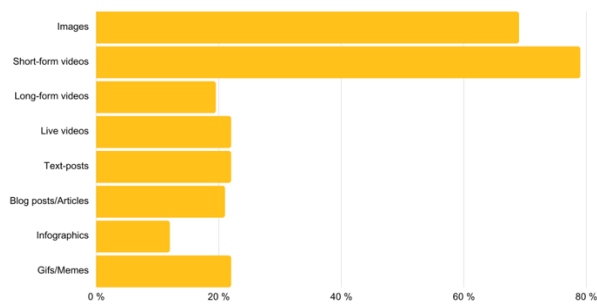


Figure 10. Content engaging on social media

These findings suggest that the company should focus on creating short-form videos and images as part of its social media plan for promoting The Forgotten Guardian game. However, the company should also consider implementing GIFs, memes, and text posts on social media to increase content format diversity.

#### Question 4

This question determined the familiarity and engagement level of indie games among the respondents. Before asking the question, an explanation of indie games and examples of some popular ones were provided, shown in Image 2.

##### Indie game explanation

Small groups or individuals create an indie or independent game, not publishers or larger game studios. They are typically lower-budgeted and designed to focus on creativity and innovation rather than profit.

Here are some Indie game examples (src:<https://indiegamefans.com/10-upcoming-indies-were-excited-for-in-2022/>)

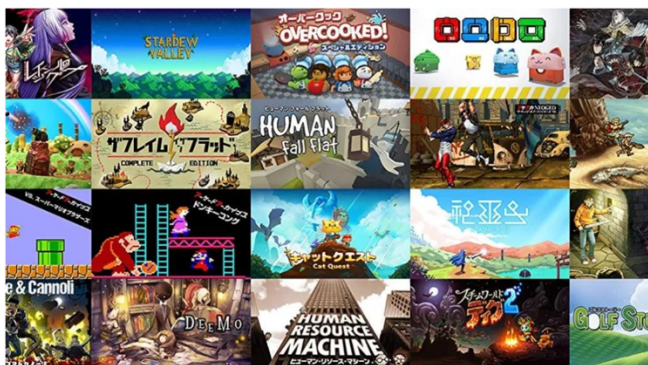


Image 2. Indie game explanation and example

Figure 11 reveals that 66% responded negatively, while 34% responded having heard of or played an indie game. These findings show that low-medium respondents know about the

indie game. The results show that indie game companies can promote their game to the audience but need enormous effort and a good social media marketing plan.

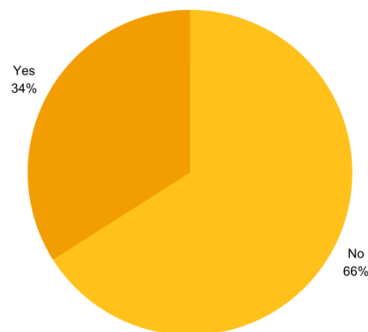


Figure 11. Indie game familiarity

For those who responded yes, the follow-up question asked about the specific indie games they had played or heard about it. Various indie games were mentioned, including Flappy Bird, Overcooked, Stardew Valley, Hollow Knight, and Choo-Choo Charles. It indicates that the audience is not limited to specific indie games and is open to exploring various titles.

Overall, the findings suggest that indie games have a specific following among the survey respondents. These indications highlight the potential of indie games as a viable market for indie game companies and the importance of having a good marketing plan for attracting more audiences.

### Question 5

This question asked respondents whether they had seen ads for games or indie games on social networks, and if so, on what platforms. Most respondents reported encountering game or indie game ads on Facebook and YouTube, with 50% and 43%. On the other hand, there are 21% of respondents reported encountering game or indie game ads on TikTok. Additionally, 24.5% of respondents reported not encountering any game or indie game ads on social media.

Only 17% reported encountering them on Instagram. Other respondents mentioned encountering game or indie game ads on Twitch, Steam, Epic Game Store, Google Ads, and Reddit. A few reported encountering ads on multiple platforms or within other games. These results suggest that Facebook and YouTube are effective platforms for advertising indie games, with TikTok also showing some potential, as shown in Figure 12.

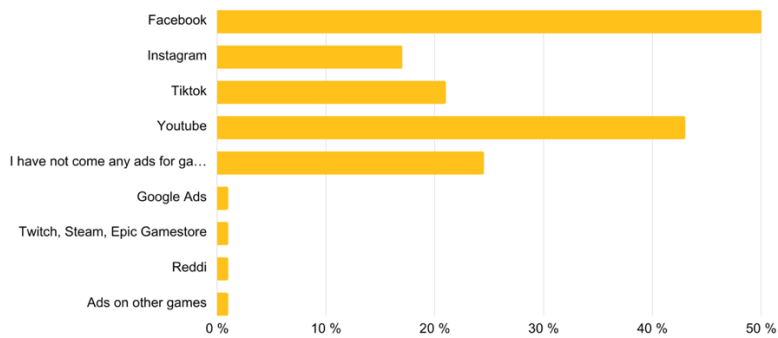


Figure 12. Game advertisements appear on social media

### Question 6

This question asked whether the respondent purchased or downloaded a game based on a social media advertisement or promotion. Figure 13 shows that 43% of respondents answered yes, showing that social media can effectively promote and market games to this audience. However, 40% of respondents answered no, suggesting that there may be more effective ways to reach this audience than social media advertising and promotions. About one-fifth (17%) of respondents said maybe, indicating a potential opportunity to convert these individuals into customers through targeted advertising or promotions.

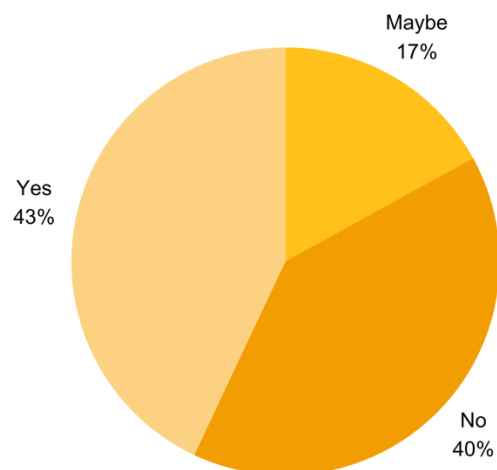


Figure 13. Game purchases/downloads influenced by social media ad/promotion

Additionally, when looking at the specific platforms on which respondents viewed game ads or promotions in previous question results, Facebook and YouTube are the most mentioned

platforms. However, some respondents also mentioned other platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Twitch, and Reddit (Figure 12), showing the importance of considering a wide range of advertising channels when targeting game players.

The survey continued by asking respondents who said yes, what factors influenced their decision in purchasing or downloading a game. Figure 14 reveals that the most influential factors are the quality of the game and the visuals or graphics. Thus, indie game developers should prioritize creating visually appealing games of high quality to attract potential customers. The next factor that significantly influences purchasing decisions is positive reviews or recommendations from others. It highlights the importance of cultivating a positive reputation among gamers and employing word-of-mouth marketing strategies. Moreover, other essential factors are the genre or type of game, the game's gameplay or mechanics, the game's storyline or plot, the reputation of the game developer or publisher, and the availability of a free trial or demo. Game companies need to take note of these factors and ensure that their marketing strategies address them effectively.

These findings suggest that social media can be crucial in driving game sales, but only if the advertisements are visually appealing, feature high-quality games, and address critical factors influencing purchase decisions.

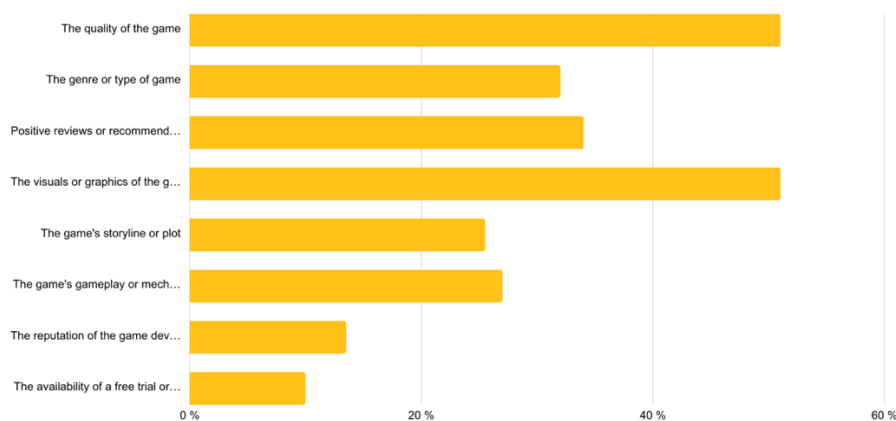


Figure 14. Social media advertisement factors influence the purchase or download decision.

### Question 7

This question aimed to ask about respondents' motivations for following an indie game or game social media account. Figure 15 shows the results.

The most common answer is to receive updates on the game development process, with above 52% selecting this option. This percentage shows the content about the game's development progress and new features or updates that attract more followers to the game account. Contests and giveaways on social media platforms have a 44% selection of respondents. This percentage suggests that creating contests or giveaways can increase the number of followers and increase engagement with followers. Behind-the-scenes content has a 22% selection from respondents. This percentage shows the followers can interest in the team behind the game or the progress of making the game content. Additionally, 17% of respondents are engaged with fan content such as fan art or cosplay. Other respondents chose the content options such as game graphics, branding content, or providing value related to brand marketing.

Overall, the results of this question suggest that indie game social media should focus on providing regular updates on game development progress and creating contests or giveaways to attract and engage potential followers. Moreover, social media content should be diverse to create excitement for followers.

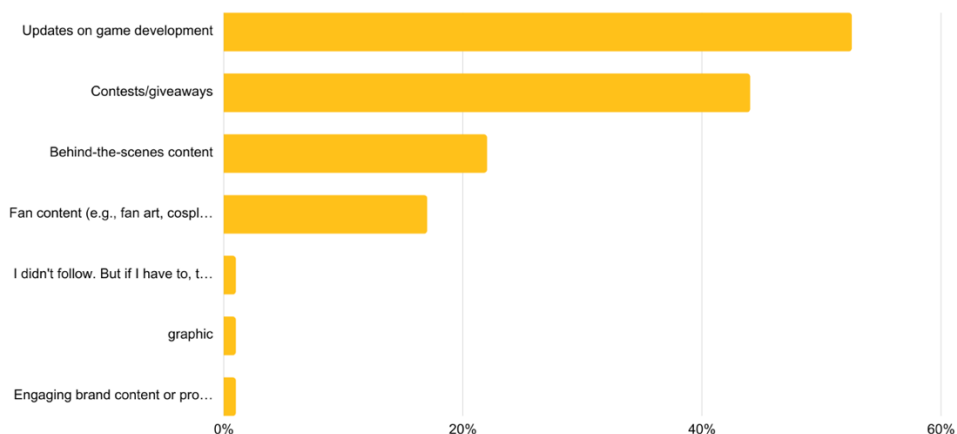


Figure 15. Motivations for following a game/indie game's social media account

### Question 8

This question aimed to explore the types of content indie game followers are interested in seeing more on social media. Indie game companies can use this information to create

content to engage their followers and encourage them to continue following their social media accounts.

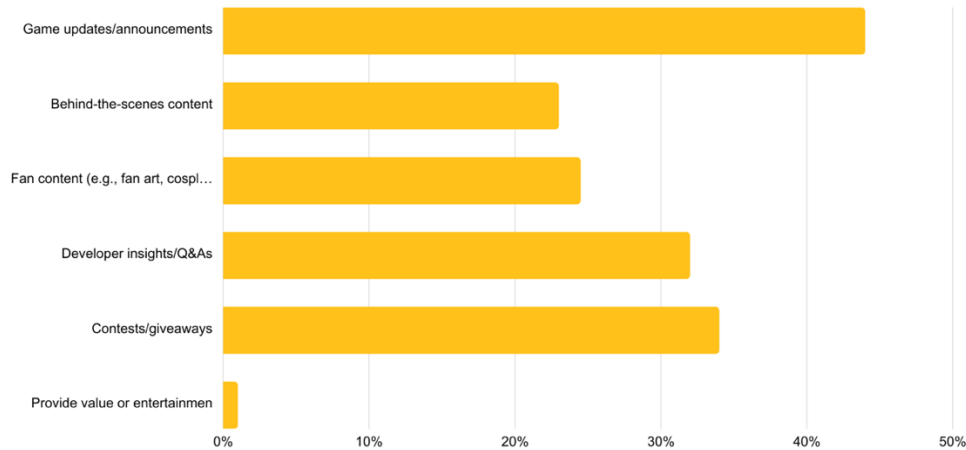


Figure 16. Desired content types from indie games on social media

Figure 16 indicates that respondents are primarily interested in game updates or announcements, contests or giveaways, and developer insights such as questions and answers (Q&As).

Game updates or announcements effectively build anticipation and excitement among followers and can help maintain the game's visibility. On the other hand, contests or giveaways can increase the game's reach and foster a sense of community among followers. Additionally, developer insights, such as questions and answers and behind-the-scenes content, can help to establish a deeper connection between followers and game developers. This type of content helps to clarify the game development process and can increase fans' investment in the game.

### Question 9

This question aimed to estimate the potential reach of indie game social media content by asking respondents how often they share it with others. Figure 17 demonstrates the result.

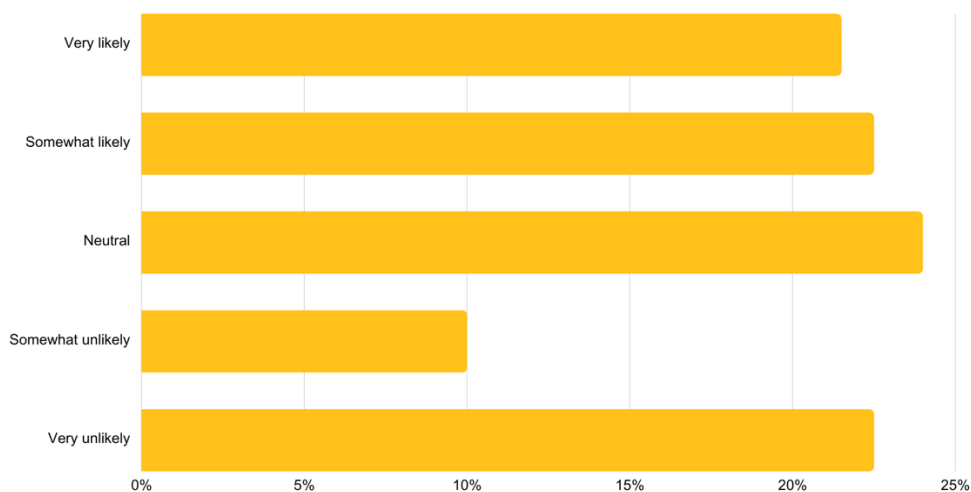


Figure 17. Likelihood of sharing social media content related to indie game

Most answers are neutral. It points out that indie game companies need to put effort into shareable content that encourages their followers to forward. The second most common responses are slightly like and very unlikely, showing a significant difference in the likelihood of people sharing content indie game-related content. The very likely response is also relatively high, indicating that many respondents are enthusiastic about sharing game-related content independent of their networks. Finally, the somewhat unlikely response is the least common, suggesting that while some respondents are cautious about sharing indie game-related content, they are still somewhat open to the idea. Overall, the results of this question suggest that indie game companies want to focus on creating high-quality, shareable content that provides value to their followers.

### Question 10

This question reveals the frequency of social media posts by indie game publishers. The results suggest that most respondents prefer daily or several times-a-week posts.

Figure 18 shows that 27% of respondents preferred daily posts, while 24.5% preferred several times weekly. It highlights the importance of maintaining a consistent presence on social media to keep the audience engaged and informed.

On the other hand, 18% of respondents preferred weekly posts, while 17% preferred rarely. About one-fifth (13.5%) of respondents preferred several times a month. To sum up, the company should consider posting daily or several times a week on social media to ensure a consistent and engaging presence while also being conscious of not overwhelming their audience with excessive posts.

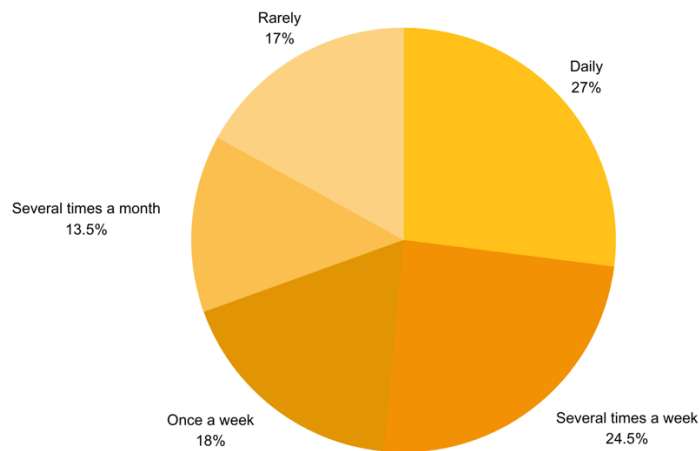


Figure 18. Frequency of social media posts

### Question 11

This question aimed to determine social media's impact on gamers' purchasing and playing decisions regarding indie games. About two-thirds (72%) of respondents indicate that social media does impact their decision. The most common reasons are to provide more information about the game and create hype or interest, as shown in Figure 19.

This question's results emphasize social media's importance for indie game publishers. Social media builds a following and creates hype and provides information that can impact gamers' purchasing and playing decisions.

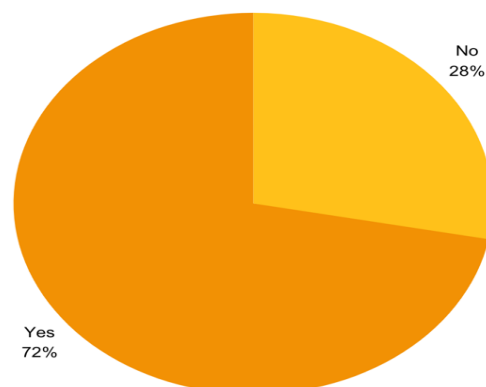


Figure 19. Influence of social media on purchasing/playing decisions for indie games

**Question 12. What suggestions can you give indie game companies looking to improve their social media presence?**

This open-ended question invoked several suggestions for indie game companies to improve their social media presence. One common recommendation was to produce engaging and high-quality content, such as short videos showcasing behind-the-scenes looks at game development, fan-created content, and memes. Respondents also emphasized the importance of avoiding violent content.

In addition, respondents show interest in social media content related to the game update, such as character level and map design at each level. Interaction with followers by replying to comments or messages is essential to keep them engaged with the game's social media accounts. Moreover, content should be tailored to different social media platforms. Other suggestions contained collaborating with influencers or streamers to increase visibility, using paid advertising to target specific audiences, and creating a consistent brand voice across all social media channels.

Overall, this question's responses suggest that indie game companies should prioritize creating engaging and high-quality content, regularly communicating with followers, and tailoring content to different platforms and audiences. Partnering with influencers and utilizing paid advertising may also be effective strategies to increase visibility and reach. These suggestions help indie companies improve their social media presence.

**Question 13. What social media content needs to be added to indie game marketing?**

The final open-ended question in the survey asked respondents what kind of social media content indie game companies should add to their marketing. It encouraged respondents to respond more broadly about what they were interested in.

The responses provided were diverse, but there were several recurring themes. One suggestion was to increase the gameplay footage and trailers shared on social media platforms. Respondents desired more in-depth gameplay footage that showcases the game's mechanics and more frequent trailers that build excitement for the game. Another common theme was greater community engagement on social media platforms. Respondents suggested that indie game companies should encourage more fan discussion and interaction, such as hosting Q&A sessions, contests, and polls. Finally, respondents recommended that indie game companies increase their focus on social media advertising, using targeted ads to reach potential customers and drive sales.

Overall, the responses to this question reveal that indie game companies should prioritize sharing engaging gameplay footage and trailers, fostering community engagement, and utilizing social media advertising to reach and engage with a broader audience.

### 3.5 Summary of the results

The interviews gathered in-depth insights and perspectives on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of The Forgotten Guardians' social media presence. The game's strengths are creative ideas and positive content on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. However, the weaknesses include a weakly defined target audience and fan community and the absence of a structured marketing plan, and vague brand awareness. Competing with established brands, similar game genres, and art styles poses threats. Leveraging the company's social media accounts and features on social media platforms present opportunities to increase better visibility and higher engagement. The interviewees pointed out that the social media marketing goals are enhancing brand awareness and visibility, gaining more followers, and improving social media engagement to foster an active and engaged community. Furthermore, the interview results indicate that identifying the audience group within the diverse range is essential for promoting The Forgotten Guardians game on social media. Finally, the game's suggested target audience includes individuals ages 13 to 35 interested in indie games, 2D pixel art, and the experience of classic mobile games.

The survey continually connects with interview results to create social media marketing plan for The Forgotten Guardians. The survey reveals the most engaging social media platforms and content for promoting The Forgotten Guardians. The findings highlight Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram as the most popular social media platforms. Short videos and images are the most engaging content formats. Using social media ads can influence social media users to download the game. Moreover, game quality, visuals, and positive reviews can affect social media users' download decisions. Indie game companies should actively provide regular updates, organize mini-contests, share behind-the-scenes content, and engage with their fanbase to cultivate a strong following.

## 4 Conclusions

### 4.1 Discussion of the objectives and results

The thesis aims to develop a social media marketing plan for promoting *The Forgotten Guardians* and utilizing the Social Media Marketing Planning Cycle as a guiding model. The thesis analyzed concepts like social media, indie games, social media marketing, and social media planning cycle in the literature review chapter. These theories highly support the research.

The thesis conducted two interviews with marketing specialists and an online survey. The interviews gave the information to analyze the strengths, and weaknesses, through social media SWOT Analysis. Then, based on questions related to strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities of the game's social media, the interviews determined the goals and target audience for the social media marketing plan.

SWOT Analysis is an adaptive tool for analysing and providing information to enhance a company's competitive knowledge (Brooks et al. 2014). The result revealed strengths in *The Forgotten Guardians*' social media presence, such as creative ideas and positive content. However, weaknesses include the lack of a defined target audience and a detailed marketing plan, while competition from other companies with similar genres poses threats. The company's social media accounts present an opportunity to increase visibility and build trust. The social media marketing goals are enhancing brand awareness, gaining followers, and improving engagement. Barker et al. (2022, 44–51) suggest that the target audience is identified with the following characteristics: demographics (such as age, gender, etc.), psychographics (such as personality, attitudes, interests, and lifestyle), and behaviours. The game's target audience is between the ages of 13–35, who are interested in indie games, pixel art style, and the experience of classic mobile games. These findings provide a good foundation for crafting social media marketing plan.

The survey gathered information about the potential game audience's most used social media platforms, their interest in content, and decision-making factors for following the game's social media account. The results align well with the existing literature on the topic. YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram are three popular social media platforms in Finland (Clausnitzer 2023). The respondents also chose those three social media platforms to promote *The Forgotten Guardians*. Engaging content formats such as short videos and images should be utilized. Social media ads, game quality, visuals, and positive reviews significantly influence users' decisions to download the game. Moreover, there are suggestions for content to attract and retain followers, such as behind-the-scenes content and fan content.

## 4.2 Answers to research questions

The primary research question has been defined to ensure coherent and focused research. Additionally, secondary research questions are developed for this study to support answering the main research question. This sub-chapter answers the research question presented in the introduction. The secondary questions are addressed first, then the primary research question follows.

### **What are the strengths and weaknesses of the game's current social media presence?**

SWOT Analysis shows the strengths and weaknesses of The Forgotten Guardians. The research shows that the game has some strengths. First, the game's social network has creative ideas thanks to the freedom to explore and create ideas. The company provides a channel for every employee to generate ideas for the game. In addition, The Forgotten Guardians' marketing team leverages the power of popular social media platforms, especially Facebook and Instagram, to effectively engage the audience. An active presence on these platforms enables the spread of positive content that resonates with the game's target audience.

However, The Forgotten Guardians possesses weaknesses that need attention and strategic improvements. The significant weakness is the lack of a defined target audience. Followed is the need for a dedicated fanbase. These weaknesses suggest that efforts are needed to identify specific segments of players and build a loyal and engaged community around the game. Furthermore, the game needs a structured marketing plan. This weakness hinders the ability to promote the game and effectively reach its target audience. A well-defined marketing plan is critical to increasing brand awareness, expanding the player base, and driving sustainable growth. Additionally, the decision to maintain an independent social media account for The Forgotten Guardians, separated from the company's account, could hinder visibility, and affect the trust among potential players.

### **What are the goals of social media marketing for The Forgotten Guardians?**

The Forgotten Guardians' social media marketing plan aims to achieve two primary goals. The first goal is to increase the game's visibility and brand awareness through social media platforms. The second goal is to gain more followers and improve social media engagement for The Forgotten Guardians. The number of followers and interactions on social media platforms can create a fan community for the game.

### **What are the target audience groups for promoting The Forgotten Guardians on social media?**

The Forgotten Guardians' lack of a target audience group is a significant weakness in creating a social media marketing plan. Therefore, this thesis helps the company identify the game's target audience through research. Based on the interview results, the game's target audience is between the ages of 13–35, living in Finland. Furthermore, the target audience is interested in indie games, 2D pixel art, and the experience of classic mobile games.

The social media content needs to be tailored to engage the desired target audience. The marketing team should understand and respond to the target group's preferences and concerns.

### **What social media platforms and contents are effective for promoting The Forgotten Guardians?**

The Forgotten Guardians should be active on social media platforms with high target audience concentration. According to the literature review and survey results, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are the right social media platforms to promote the game. These three social media platforms are popular in Finland, including users between the ages of 13–35. A recommendation for Brakesoft is to promote the game on the company's accounts. The content should implement on the company's accounts to ensure game awareness and visibility.

Social media content must reflect the game's energy and contribute to maintaining the company's image. Content should be authentic, entertaining, and valuable. The Forgotten Guardians can use engaging formats, such as short videos and images, that are effective for game promotion. The company should pay attention to image and video quality before uploading. The game's social media content should include game announcements/updates, mini contests, behind-the-scenes footage, and fan interactions such as questions and answers with game developers. Each social media platform has different advantages. Therefore, the content should be effectively selected for specific platforms to achieve the goals.

For Facebook, the company should post one to three posts a week by following Barker et al. (2022)'s The Rules of Thirds. Content needs to be appealing to The Forgotten Guardians' target audience, such as updating new levels of gameplay, fan art, or entertainment in the format of images and videos. One of Facebook's strengths is advertising tools. Hence, paid marketing is ideal for creating ads to increase the game's visibility among 13–35 years old living in Finland. Furthermore, the company should respond to comments quickly to maintain interaction with the followers.

Instagram has features like Live and Reels. The company should use these features to reach more followers. The company should publish one to three weekly posts by following Barker et al. (2022)'s The Rules of Thirds. Companies can create short video content on Instagram and upload it as Reels. Video content can be how the game is made and the game's story, which is related to The Forgotten Guardians behind the scenes. The company may upload featured images of The Forgotten Guardians, such as game characters. For Live, the company can instantly engage followers by answering their questions. Furthermore, collaborating with nano or micro-influencers is ideal on Instagram to gain more followers and increase game visibility.

YouTube is a potential platform for uploading long video content. The company can connect with influencers to create gameplay videos. Furthermore, Brakesoft can take advantage of the YouTube Short feature to post attractive short videos from gameplay videos.

### **How to develop a social media marketing plan for promoting The Forgotten Guardians?**

A strategic social media marketing approach is necessary to develop an effective marketing plan for promoting The Forgotten Guardians. Following the Social Media Planning Cycle, this thesis outlines the key steps involved in The Forgotten Guardians' social media marketing plan.

Firstly, a social media SWOT Analysis identifies the game's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in social media. This analysis allows for identifying strengths, addressing weaknesses, and leveraging opportunities.

Secondly, clear goals need to be defined based on the insights gained from the SWOT Analysis. The social media marketing plan aims to increase brand visibility and awareness of The Forgotten Guardians through various social media platforms. Additionally, the game's social media attract more followers and enhance engagement.

Thirdly, the niche target audience is crucial. The social media marketing plan needs to identify the target audience's demographics, interests, and preferences (individuals aged 13–35 in Finland interested in indie games, 2D pixel art, and classic mobile gaming experiences).

The next step is to choose the appropriate social media platforms based on the target audience's preferences and activity. Gathering data through surveys helps select the most effective platforms for reaching and engaging the target audience.

Once the platforms are determined, the implementation phase begins. Engaging content formats like images and videos should be utilized, incorporating interactive features to foster audience interaction. Developing a content calendar ensures a consistent and organized social media presence.

Monitoring and tuning are steps that help to track the effectiveness of social media marketing efforts. Gathering and analyzing data helps to identify areas for improvement and optimization to maximize the success of the social media marketing plan.

### 4.3 Evaluation of the study

Creswell and Creswell (2017) state that the mixed methods research approach combines quantitative and qualitative research methods. This method utilizes the strengths of both data types to give a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of a research problem (Creswell & Creswell 2017). The thesis applied mixed methods research approach to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Moreover, this thesis composed information from both primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources were obtained from official books, magazines, articles, and reliable internet sources to support the literature review. The primary sources were collected through online surveys and interviews. Interviews and survey questions were designed to match with sub-questions and research questions.

The respondents answered the survey through Google Forms. Moreover, the respondents saw the survey via Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The online survey received 82 responses. In the survey, definitions and examples of indie games were provided. Thus, it ensured that respondents understood the questions. Interviews were conducted with two marketing professionals who work in the games industry and have contributed explicitly to The Forgotten Guardians' marketing team. However, the interview could not invite the Brakesoft founder to participate. This unexpected situation caused the lack of information on content management tools and the ongoing marketing plan for The Forgotten Guardians. The interviews with two marketing specialists with relevant experiences in The Forgotten Guardians game and the game industry contributed valuable information for developing a social media marketing plan for the game. The research objectives and clarified concepts were explained before each interview. Furthermore, the interviews followed a structured format to ensure the responses' coherence. Open questions were asked during the interview process. Word-by-word transcription of the answers maintained the reliability of the analysis.

#### 4.4 Further research

There are three suggestions for future research. The first is to conduct a social media audit to measure brand health. A social media audit helps to identify the problems of each social media platform of the game by using metrics like sentiment, followers, company posts, and engagement rate. As a result, the strengths, and weaknesses of the company's social media presence will be more obvious.

The second suggestion is to set objectives. It should follow SMART and be linked with specific KPIs. The Forgotten Guardians' goals are broad and require KPIs to measure and evaluate. Defining the SMART objectives can be valuable for measuring later.

The third suggestion is to monitor the effectiveness of The Forgotten Guardians' social media marketing plan. This research needs more monitoring after implementing social media marketing. Thus, after implementing social media marketing on The Forgotten Guardians' social media, future research should monitor the plan to track its effectiveness and make needed adjustments.

## 5 Summary

The impact of social media on Covid 19 has been enormous. It helps people update news, maintain relationships, and access entertainment. Moreover, social media has contributed to the growth of the business through different social media marketing methods. Hence, this thesis aimed to develop a social media marketing plan to promote The Forgotten Guardians. The thesis followed the steps of the Social Media Marketing Planning Cycle (SMM Planning Cycle) as a guiding model.

The study conducted a literature review and empirical research to achieve the thesis objective. The literature review analyzed concepts related to social media, indie games, social media marketing, and the social media planning cycle. The empirical research method was used. Two interviews with marketing specialists and an online survey gathered insights on the strengths and weaknesses, goals, target audience, and effective implementation of The Forgotten Guardians' social media. The findings from the interviews identified the strengths and weaknesses, target audience, and goals to have a strong foundation for the plan. The survey, on the other hand, found possible social media platforms and engaging content to implement.

The research showed several key findings. Firstly, the game's strengths were creative ideas for social networks and the effective use of Facebook and Instagram to engage the audience. However, the weaknesses included the lack of a defined target audience and the lack of a structured marketing plan. The goals for The Forgotten Guardians' social media were to increase game visibility and brand awareness, gain more followers and improve social media engagement. The defined target audience was individuals aged 13–35 who prefer pixel art, indie games, and nostalgic gaming experiences. The recommended social media platforms included Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, based on their usage concentration of the target audience. Engaging content formats were short videos and images. Moreover, the content topics could be regular updates, mini contests, behind-the-scenes footage, and fan interactions. Each platform should implement specific tactics to achieve the marketing goals. By implementing these strategies, Brakesoft can effectively promote The Forgotten Guardians and engage with the target audience aged 13–35, ensuring a successful social media marketing campaign.

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## Appendix 1. Interview questions

1. Could you introduce yourself and your experience?
2. What do you think about The Forgotten Guardians' social media target audience?
3. How do you define the strengths and weaknesses of The Forgotten Guardians' social media? How to improve?
4. What do you think about the game's opportunities and threats while promoting on social media?
5. How do you determine The Forgotten Guardians' social media goals and objectives?
6. What tactics should the company use on those platforms to promote The Forgotten Guardians?
7. Do you have any other recommendations or suggestions for developing a social media marketing plan?

## Appendix 2. Survey questions

### 1. What social media platforms do you use most frequently? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Facebook  
 Instagram  
 Twitter  
 Tiktok  
 Youtube  
 LinkedIn  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. How often do you interact with content on social media platforms?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Multiple times a day  
 Once a day  
 A few times a week  
 Once a week  
 Rarely or never

### 3. What types of content do you find most engaging on social media? \*

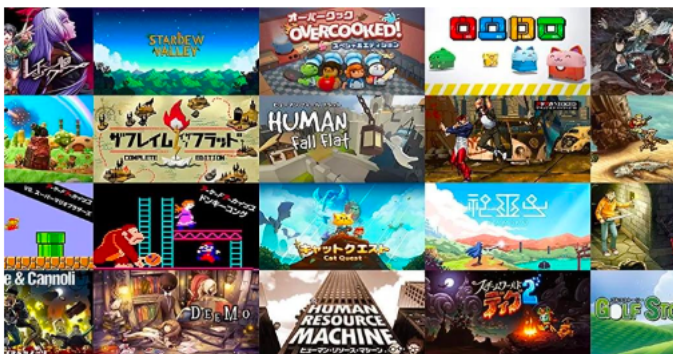
*Check all that apply.*

- Images  
 Short-form videos  
 Long-form videos  
 Live videos  
 Text-posts  
 Blog posts/Articles  
 Infographics  
 Gifs/Memes  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Indie game explanation

Small groups or individuals create an indie or independent game, not publishers or larger game studios. They are typically lower-budgeted and designed to focus on creativity and innovation rather than profit.

Here are some Indie game examples (src:<https://indiegamefans.com/10-upcoming-indies-were-excited-for-in-2022/>)



4. Have you ever heard/played an indie game before? \*

Mark only one oval.

No

Yes

5. If yes, which one(s)?

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6. Have you ever met ads for games/indie games on social media? If yes, which platform did you see them on? \*

Check all that apply.

Facebook

Instagram

Tiktok

Youtube

I have not come any ads for game/indie game on social media

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Have you ever purchased/downloaded a game based on a social media advertisement or promotion? \*

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Maybe

8. If yes, which factor influenced you to make a decision?

Check all that apply.

The quality of the game

The genre or type of game

Positive reviews or recommendations from others

The visuals or graphics of the game

The game's storyline or plot

The game's gameplay or mechanics

The reputation of the game developer/publisher

The availability of a free trial or demo

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. **What motivates you to follow a/an game/indie game's social media account?** \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Updates on game development
- Contests/giveaways
- Behind-the-scenes content
- Fan content (e.g., fan art, cosplay)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

10. **What type of content would you like to see more of from indie games on social media?** \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Game updates/announcements
- Behind-the-scenes content
- Fan content (e.g., fan art, cosplay)
- Developer insights/Q&As
- Contests/giveaways
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

11. **How likely are you to share social media content related to indie games with your friends/followers?**

*Check all that apply.*

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- 
12. **How often should indie game publishers post on social media to keep their audience engaged?** \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Daily
- Several times a week
- Once a week
- Several times a month
- Rarely
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

13. **Does social media impact your decision to purchase/play indie games?** \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes, social media impacts my decision because it provides more information about the game
- Yes, social media impacts my decision because it creates hype or interest in the game
- No, social media does not impact my decision to purchase/play indie games
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. **What suggestions can you give indie game companies looking to improve their social media presence?** \*

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15. **What social media content needs to be added to the indie game marketing?** \*

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