Video Game Advertising from Announcement to Release using the AIDAS Model

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Bachelor's Thesis

International Business

2023

Degree Thesis

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Arcada University of Applied Sciences: International Business, 2023.

Identification number:

9214

Abstract:

The aim of this study is to understand how video games are advertised from announcement to release using the AIDAS model. With the focus on four developers who used different tactics in the video game marketplace to gain more awareness of their new product. The four developers are Respawn Entertainment, CD Projekt Red, FromSoftware and Iron Gate. Due to video games being a digital product of experience developers heavily rely on content marketing such as videos to generate interest which in turn also generates electronic word of mouth. The method used for this research is a qualitative content analysis with a focus on secondary data analysis which focuses on the digital content developers created to generate more interest and desire for their game. Surprisingly, heavily marketing a video game isn't necessarily needed to achieve high number of sales, yes, it's needed to create attention but in the case for a video game less is more. Video games are an experience product, it ultimately depends on the quality of the game for the players to be satisfied with the purchase. Essentially, developers should generate desire by providing fluid gameplay with minimal bugs and quality in-game mechanics that feel good for the player.

Keywords:

Advertising, AIDAS Model, Marketing, Video Game

Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

1 INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of technology there are many new inventions that have evolved into great works of art in all fields of business and entertainment. One example of entertainment that essentially started out in the research lab of scientists and has evolved since its invention in the mid-1950's is video games. (History, 2017) Video games are a form of digital entertainment where the consumer usually takes control of a character or object and must complete a certain achievement/objective in order to progress and "win" at the game. There is a plethora of genres when it comes to video games that all differ with different objectives in order to win, it depends on the type of genre that decides what the end objective of the video game is.

Nevertheless, the video game industry has become a multibillion-dollar industry and is consistently expanding (Agrawal, 2022). With a surplus of video games being made and released consistently on different platforms, gamers are exposed to different outlets of marketing tactics when a new game is announced. Traditionally, video games are announced a handful of years in advance due to video games being expensive to produce and can heavily rely on preorder sales to help fund the game (Rocketbrush, 2022). Since the industry has grown and evolved, it is wise to explore/understand the various strategies developers have recently used when announcing a new video game and what steps they take during development to market the game until its initial release. Understanding how it can impact the overall appeal of the game and the consumers experience when released and receiving it in their own hands.

1.1 Problem statement

Video games are a product of entertainment, products associated with entertainment heavily rely on customer satisfaction meaning that the consumer won't know if they like the product until they have first-hand experience with the franchise or developer. Just like other forms of entertainment products, books/movies/music, creators will provide samples of the product to generate awareness and interest to the target audience. This is highly prevalent in the gaming industry, originally consumers would go to stores, see a

game that caught their eye and inspect the front and back of the case to learn more about the game. If it was something the consumer was interested in, they would buy it or put it back on the shelf. It won't be until the consumer gets home and plays the game to know if it was to their satisfaction or not. The problem with the video game industry growing exponentially in a short period of time is that there's an overabundance of advertising for upcoming games. Yes, marketing is needed to gain attention and interest in this highly competitive market, but video games are an experience and overselling an experience that's determined by the player can lead to unrealistic expectations.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to understand different methods of advertising that can be utilized in the video game industry. Since video games are a product of experience, relying heavily on user experience, the main objective is to prove that heavily marketing a video game is not necessary for a video game's success. Video games are a complex work of art that have the possibility to bring out multiple forms of emotion that bring greater meaning to players. Is advertising the key to a video game's success, a steppingstone that can influence a purchase, or is it more related to the fundamentals of the core game itself?

The main research question for this study is how are video games that are in development advertised in today's gaming market. This is especially beneficial for anyone interested in pursuing marketing in the gaming sector or to give insight for an indie developer wanting to seek alternatives ways to advertise their game.

1.3 Demarcation

To specify, this research will investigate how video games are advertised before they are released to the public. To have a broad understanding of advertising in the video game industry, we will investigate four games released by four different developers. Some games may have a similar way of advertising while others may take advantage of new technologies or ideas. The video games this research will focus on are as followed:

- Apex Legends (2019) developed by Respawn Entertainment
- Cyberpunk 2077 (2020) developed by CD Projekt Red

- Elden Ring (2022) developed by FromSoftware
- Valheim (2021) developed by Iron Gate Studios

Advertising for a video games release is a crucial aspect for a game's success, the marketing team needs to know how to "hook" the players with minimal information without spoiling too much of its content.

1.4 Definitions

B2P – Buy to play, a business model for video games that can be played after its purchase.

F2P – Free to play, a business model for video games that can be played for free.

RPG – Role-playing game, a video game genre.

FPS – First-person shooter, a video game genre.

BR – Battle royale, a video game genre focused on multiplayer and being the last one standing.

Season Pass – A monetary function for F2P games to earn revenue, granting the player in-game rewards.

Live service – A video game that is designed to be played as long as possible, providing updates for years to come.

Soulslike – A subgenre of an RPG that emphasizes difficulty and environmental storytelling, popularized by FromSoftware's Dark Soul series.

Twitch.tv – Streaming website, allows users to watch and or stream content for entertainment.

AAA Game – Triple A games, video games most distinguished by their massive development and marketing budgets as well as their high-quality.

Indie Games – Independent video games are usually created by an individual or a small development team.

Bug – Software error or fault in a computer program or system that causes it to produce an incorrect or unexpected result, or to behave in unintended ways.

Preorder – The act of purchasing a product before it has been released or produced.

Mod – A new video game modification created by a player as opposed to the developer.

1.5 Presentation of the companies

1.5.1 Respawn Entertainment

Respawn Entertainment is an American video game developer that was founded in 2010 by Jason West and Vince Zampella, former co-founders of Infinity Ward and co-creators of the Call of Duty franchise. (Grant, 2010) Respawn Entertainment's first game was Titanfall, a sci-fi FPS that featured giant mechanized robots and parkour-like movement mechanics it was released in 2014, a critical and commercial success, winning several awards and selling over 10 million copies. (Karmali, 2015) Titanfall 2 was released in 2016, which added a single-player campaign and improved the multiplayer mode; praised by critics and players but suffered from lower sales due to its release date being sandwiched between Battlefield 1 and Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare, two competing FPS titles from EA and Activision. (Makuch, 2017) Respawn Entertainment then released Apex Legends on February 4th, 2019.

1.5.2 CD Projekt Red

CD Projekt Red (CDPR) is a Polish video game developer and publisher that is a subsidiary of CD Projekt, a company founded in 1994 by Marcin Iwiński and Michal Kiciński as video game distributors in Poland. (CD Projekt) CD Projekt Red was formed in 2002 to develop original games and its first project was based on the Polish fantasy novel series The Witcher by Andrzej Sapkowski. (CD Projekt) CDPR continued to develop games in The Witcher series, releasing The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings in 2011 and The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt in 2015, both were praised for their storytelling, gameplay, graphics and open-world design. (CD Projekt) The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt also won numerous awards, including Game of the Year and became one of the best-selling video games of all time. (CD Projekt) CDPR then released Cyberpunk 2077 on December 10th, 2020.

1.5.3 FromSoftware

FromSoftware is a Japanese video game development and publishing company that was founded in 1986 by Naotoshi Zin as a business software developer. (FromSoftware) The company then shifted to video game development in the early 1990's and released their

first game, Kings Field for Sony's PlayStation in 1994. (FromSoftware) In 2009, FromSoftware released Demon's Souls, a dark fantasy RPG that was critically acclaimed for its challenging gameplay and immersive world design. Demon's Souls spawned a series of spiritual successors, known as the Soul series, it includes the Dark Souls trilogy (2011-2016), Bloodborne (2015) and Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice (2019). FromSoftware then released Elden Ring on February 25th, 2022, another member of the Soul series.

1.5.4 Iron Gate

Iron Gate Studio is a Swedish indie video game developer founded in 2019 by Richard Svensson and Henrik Tornqvist. (Conditt, 2021) Svensson and Tornqvist were originally co-workers at another development company Pieces Interactive, Svensson left in early 2018 to fully work on his own project and Tornqvist joined Svensson in late 2018. Iron Gate then released Valheim in early access on February 2nd, 2021.

2 THEORY

This chapter will briefly go over what a video game is and the expansion of the gaming industry. It is also important to note the methods of theoretical framework that will be discussed in this chapter. The framework mentioned is the AIDAS Method which is an advertising model that identifies the stages a person goes through when purchasing a product. Also, an overview of content marketing and word of mouth is needed due to video games mostly utilizing content to gain awareness for a new game with a heavy emphasis on word of mouth marketing.

2.1 What is a video game

Simply put, a video game is a form of digital entertainment where the user interacts with an interface to generate audio and visual feedback on a screen with the goal of completing a certain task. Back in 1940s and 1950s, one of the early concepts of a video game was tic-tac-toe and William Higinbotham's 1958 Tennis for Two; this caused more games to be created such as "Spacewar" but due to the era, computers that could play these games were only available in universities and large companies since they were the only ones who could afford a computer at the time. (History, 2017)

Fast forward half a decade, computers and video game consoles are now a common household item and there is a plethora of video game genres such as Action-Adventure, RPG, FPS, RTS, Simulation, Sports and many more. Not only has the quality of video games expanded but the business model has shifted a bit as well, usually video games are B2P, but some games have been released as F2P. Free to play games usually have an in-game currency for players to buy, this currency allows players to unlock more features for the game that are behind a paywall.

The gaming industry has grown exponentially in various fields of business such as developing and marketing video games. The gaming industry now is a multibillion-dollar industry (Agrawal, 2022) with a variety of different types of games and genres in the market, essentially something for every type of consumer to enjoy. The industry has evolved in numerous ways since the creation of the first video game in the 1940's and 1950's.

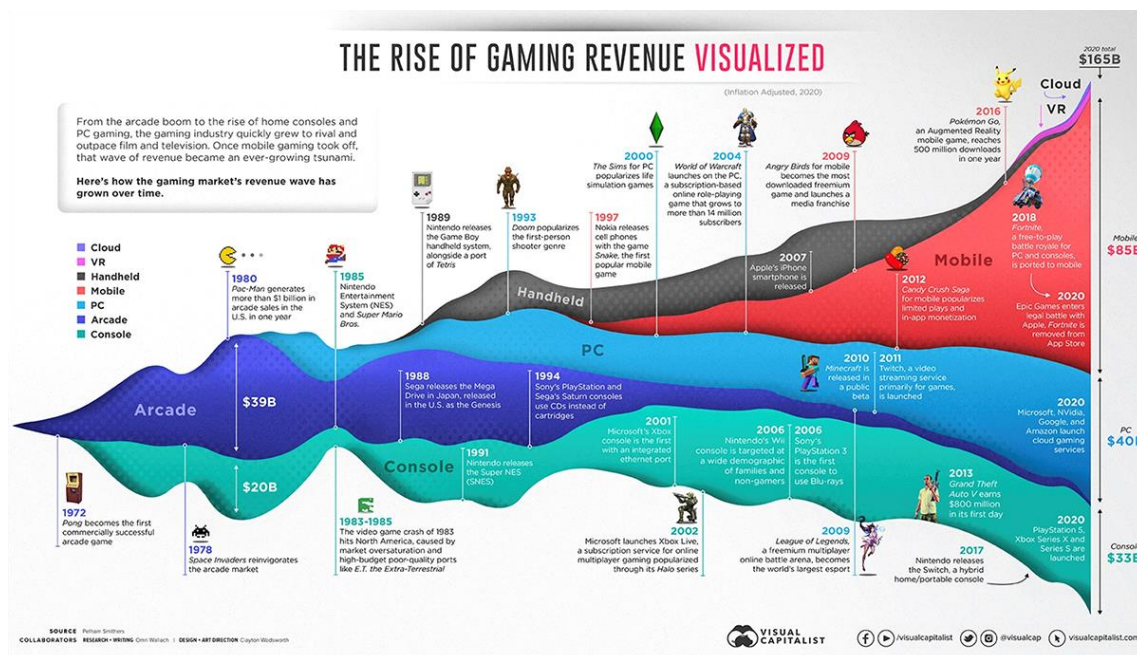*Figure 1 Revenue growth in the gaming industry (Wallach, 2020)*

Modern video games are a complex form of digital art and immersive experiences for the player which can be played on a variety of platforms such as home consoles, personal computers and mobile devices. Video game developers are constantly pushing the boundaries of what is possible in terms of gameplay mechanics, graphics and storytelling.

Video games have become so popular that certain games have their own eSports teams and competitions, professional gamers who compete against each other for high stakes rewards.

2.2 AIDAS Model

The AIDAS model is an advertising effect that identifies the stages an individual goes through during the process of purchasing a product or service, the model stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. (Sellers, 2021) It was developed by an American advertising advocate Elias St. Elmo Lewis to explain how personal selling works, he was inducted into the Advertising Hall of Fame in 1951. The AIDAS model is a simplified theoretical framework in marketing where the sole purpose is to gain attention, maintain interest, create desire which will then lead to the action of a purchase. The model has different variations of itself, one of which is to include Satisfaction stage after Action, video games are product of experience which is why this research will also be including the Satisfaction stage making it the AIDAS Model. (Bhasin, 2015)

Video games are a product of entertainment that can have a lasting experience on the player, a product which the consumer won't know if they truly like until it is in their hands to play. When a video game developer first announces a game, it generates awareness that they are now developing a new game, they then must release content such as screenshots or trailers generate interest for the target audience. Interest and desire can be achieved simultaneously, after interest is created it is important to entice the consumer on why they need the game. If the marketing succeeded with all three stages of the AIDAS model, then it should lead to the action of a purchase. Finally, there's the satisfaction the player can get from playing the game which can overall impact the image of the game and developer.
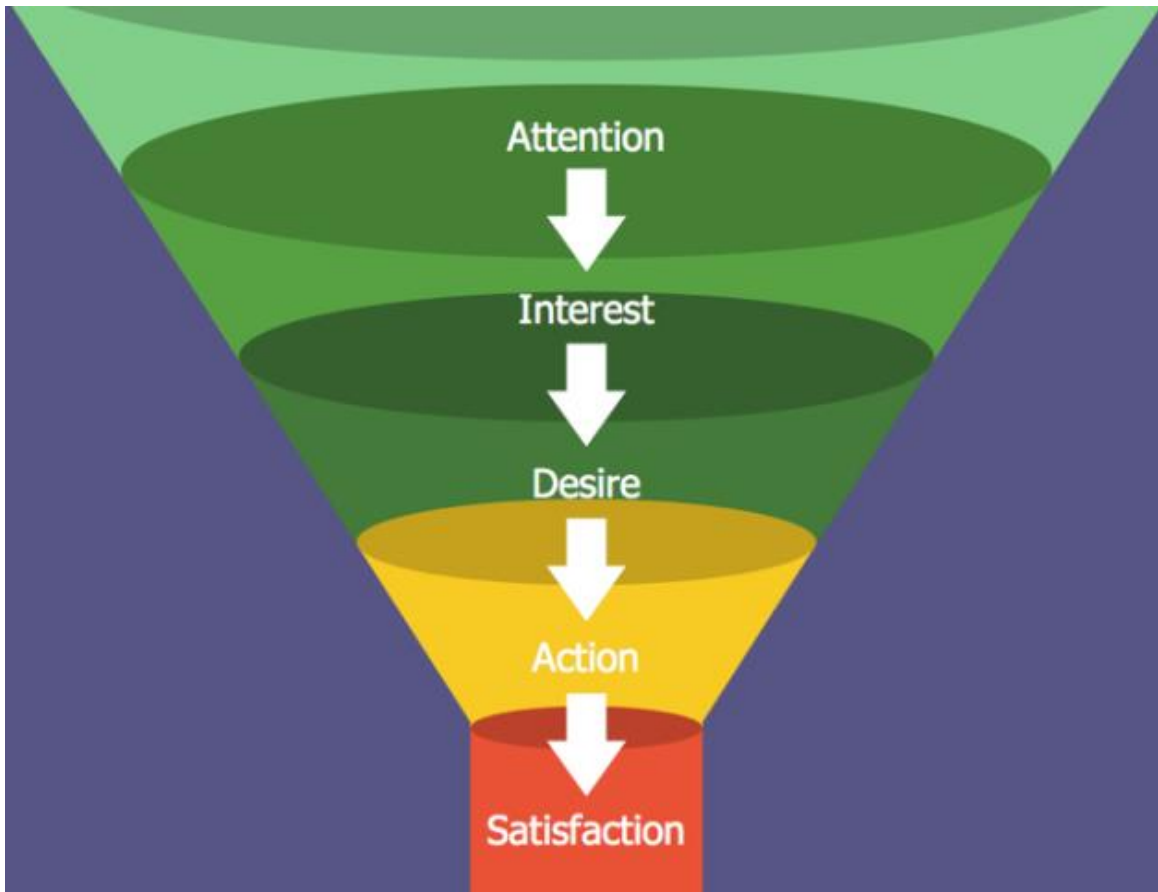
Figure 2 Marketing funnel of AIDAS Model. (Funnel Diagrams, 2023)

Attention is the first stage of the model; this is the early stage for a video game where the developers should focus on creating awareness of the game in development. (Sellers, 2021) If it's an indie developer or a new studio, they will put much more emphasis on the actual game content to draw in an audience. While a seasoned developer can tease the audience due to already having a reputation for themselves and can rely on brand loyalty. Some examples to gain attention when announcing a game.

Table 1 Attention examples for early development

Attention	• Releasing a teaser trailer • Showing concept art • Announce game development • Announcing promises/goals for the game • Collaborating with a celebrity • Updating websites and social media

Interest, the second stage and Desire, the third stage are two sides of the same coin when it comes to video games. There is an abundance of genres in the gaming industry, giving a large variety for players to pick and choose from. We all have preferences and gamers are no exception, some might be interested in run and gun FPS titles with no story while others want to be immersed in an open world RPG with a captivating story. Advertising's job is to gain the interest of potential customers but are also tasked with creating a desire to want to play the game. Any game can peak someone's interest but the transition from interest to desire can be instantaneous hence why these two stages are combined for this section. (Sellers, 2021) Some examples to promote interest and desire for a game before being released.

Table 2 Interest & desires examples in advertising games

Interest & Desire	• TV, magazine, radio, billboard ads
	• Release screenshots cinematic/story/gameplay trailer
	• Announce release date
	• Reveal in-game mechanics and features
	• Increase social media engagement
	• Exclusive interviews/ questions and answers
	• Pre-order bonuses
	• Product collaboration
	• Community engagement
	• Beta/Demo access

Lastly, action is the fourth stage and finally the fifth stage, satisfaction. Action is the accumulation of good advertising that generates enough desire that promotes a purchase for the video game. However, video games are an experience, no amount of advertising or promises can make a game good. Satisfaction relies on the consumer being satisfied with the product once received. If the consumer is satisfied with the quality of the product, there is potential for brand loyalty, which is a pattern of consumer behavior in which consumers get committed to specific brands or products and make a repeat purchase.

(Sellers, 2021) This is something video game developers should strive for due to the possibility of a repeat purchase for their next title. If, however, a consumer is not satisfied with the product, the potential to gain a repeat customer is low. This is why developers need to openly communicate and accept feedback from their player base and ensure them that changes/fixes are coming.

2.3 Content Marketing and WOM

Firstly, word of mouth (WOM) marketing can be classified as the holy grail of marketing, in Katz and Lazarsfeld's book (as cited in Huete-Alcocer N, 2017) WOM can be described as the exchanging of marketing information between consumers in such a way that it plays a fundamental role in shaping their behavior and attitudes towards a product. However, with the advancement of technology and the online medium, a new form of WOM has emerged and that is electronic word of mouth (eWOM). (Huete-Alcocer N, 2017) WOM and eWOM are major influences in the gaming industry especially since video games are an experience product, it is more likely for consumers to share their experience with the product. This can also happen at all the stages of a games release cycle, if a developer announces something exciting it can generate buzz which can cause eager fans to communicate it to likeminded friends. eWOM is more prevalent in the industry due to the large outlet of websites that cover video game related topics and with websites like Reddit and Discord that allow people with similar interest to join communities and express their opinion. Both versions also play a vital role in the games release due to the number of players who purchased the game and with online reviews of the game for consumers still on the fence of a purchase.

The video game industry revolves around content marketing which goes hand in hand with eWOM, content marketing can be defined as "a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience and ultimately to drive profitable customer action." (Content Marketing Institute, 2021) Content marketing and the AIDAS Model sound very much alike however, the AIDAS Model is the framework a consumer will go through before making a purchase while content marketing is the material or "content" to generate interest and desire. The most used form of content in the gaming industry when advertising a video game is video marketing, "he act of creating videos to market a

specific business and its products. Video games heavily rely on video content to generate interest, there are multiple types of video content developers will create such as teaser, story, cinematic and even gameplay trailers. Video game trailers should provide the necessary information to hook the audience's interest and hopefully transition it into desire for the game. Another form of content marketing that has aspects of video marketing is influencer marketing.

An influencer is someone who can affect the purchasing decisions of others because of their knowledge, position or relationship to their audience (Geyser, 2023) Video game influencers are most relevant on YouTube and Twitch. Twitch allows the influencer to directly stream the game they are playing to the website which allows anyone interested to watch them play it live, this is also an opportunity for the influencer to actively engage with their audience. YouTube on the other hand can have a variety of different types of videos created by influencers such as let's play videos, video game reviews, trailer analysis and even lore videos about the games story. Influencers can potentially be a free marketing tool for developers during all cycles of the game's development, then upon a release, influencers can play a major role in gaining unaware audience members attention of this newly announced game.

3 METHOD

The aim of this section is to understand the methodological approach, how I analyzed the data and what methods used to find the necessary information for this research. This study is a qualitative content analysis approach with secondary data analysis, due to the nature of video games being a form of digital entertainment; there is a plethora of information available on the world wide web about the steps each developer took to promote their upcoming game.

3.1 Choice of method

The choice of method used for this research is a qualitative content analysis with a focus on secondary data analysis. Qualitative research is a method that produces descriptive data with gathering participants experiences, perceptions and behaviours; it answers the "how" and "why" instead of how many or how much. (Tenny et al., 2022) Content

analysis is a research method used to find the purpose, message and effects of communication content such as books, magazines, speeches, interviews, web content, social media posts, photographs and film. (Luo, 2019) Lastly, secondary data analysis is data that was collected by someone else, data gathered from published peer-reviewed papers, meta-analyses and private sector databases and datasets. (George, 2023)

Qualitative content analysis was chosen due to video games being a product of experience, which heavily revolves around web content, interviews, photographs and videos. Video games are a digital product and the only insight the consumer can get before purchase is through content analysis which is why a qualitative approach is needed to understand how developers' market to their audiences. Then secondary data relies on the performance of the game once launched, meaning overall sales and opinion of the game. The necessary tools are available to track player engagement and even views on Twitch which will provide a better understanding of the overall success of the game.

3.2 Research approach

Qualitative content analysis was used due to the gaming industry being almost entirely digital nowadays, whenever a developer would release anything new about their upcoming game, video game news sites such as IGN, Game Informer, GameSpot, etc. would favorably create an article for the game to generate click for their website, this doubles down as creating awareness for said game. All the important advertising tactics were simply observed and documented in a word file which was then transferred to this research with the necessary information added. The study was carried out by first figuring out how the developer chose to gain attention by announcing their game, then observing how the developer continued to generate interest and desire for the game until release.

Having background knowledge of video games gave me the upper hand due to the know how's in the gaming industry but for the not knowing, it can be a daunting task. Usually, developers announce a game by releasing a teaser or announcement trailer for their game, search engines provide the necessary tools that allow one to locate the specific time and date for these announcements. Simply searching the title of a game and announcement should provide the necessary information on the most common search engines. Now that one has the announcement date for the game, the research needs to simply search onwards

about the development updates of the game, meaning content the developers decide to share in order to spark interest. To one's surprise, there is a lot of information from news sites to blogs covering a games announcement, especially if it's from a AAA developer. Some of the information is repetitive but luckily Google has a tool called Google Trends, which is a website that analyzes the popularity of search terms in Google. (Hockman, 2022) It significantly narrowed down the search timeframe for the games in this research.
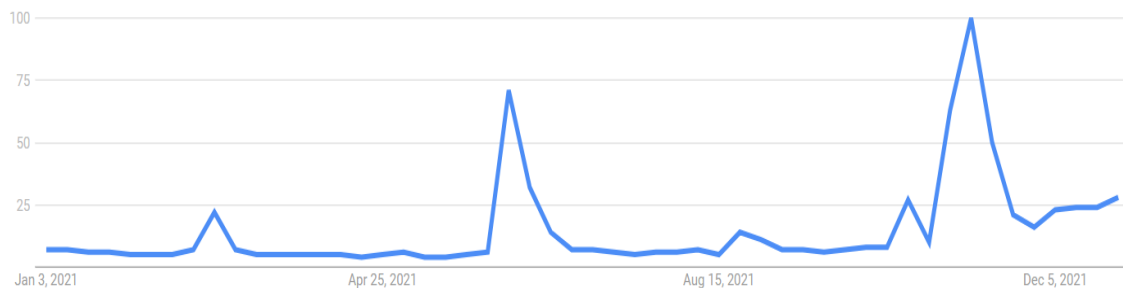

Figure 3 Interest over time for Elden Ring in 2021 (Google Trends 2023)

The figure above shows prominent spikes for Elden Ring at different times in 2021, this tool immensely helped find the content that was generating the most interest for the game during its development. Now with the specific dates in hand, going back to the search engine with the game's title and date will allow the user to see what content the developer has released to gain all attention. This method was used for all the games in the study, while some had more prominent peaks in the line graph others had gradual peaks which required more research.

3.3 Analysis of the data

The data that is analysed in this research is when the video game is released to the public and tracks how many views the game generates on Twitch.tv and players playing the game through Steam on its release date.

SteamDB was created to give more insight into the Steam database. We track updates for both applications and packages, we keep a history of all changes made to both applications and packages. We also have a range of other tools such as the Calculator to give people insight into their Steam accounts that would otherwise be impossible. (SteamDB, 2023)

The website provides essential graphs that allow one to see the success of the games when released, it also allows the user to see how well the game is striving due to real time player

tracking. This is however only for players playing off from Steam so there won't be any specific data on console players, but it should still give an overall outlook of the game's performance. The data will also include any announcements developers have shared about total sales of their newly released game.

3.4 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are two important factors for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the research. Validity refers to the extent to which the results can be reproduced and repeated under the same conditions, while reliability is how consistent a method can be used over time. (Middleton, 2019) Since this this research focuses on qualitative content analysis of video game advertising material and using the AIDAS theoretical framework to understand the stages a consumer goes through; we can see the similarities developers have when advertising their game. Reliability easier to assess due to video games having similar marketing strategies throughout the year, compared to validity being more complex due to the nature of not truly knowing what element entices a consumer to be interested in a video game in the first place.

3.5 Ethics

This research also values the importance of ethics for scientific integrity, mainly focusing on results communication, which can include plagiarism and research misconduct. Plagiarism is the act of submitting someone else's work as your own and copying someone else's work with out properly crediting the original source. (Bhandari, 2022) Next is research misconduct which is falsifying data or even misinterpreting the results of the research. (2022)

4 RESULTS

This chapter will go over the results of how each developer advertised their game before release, it will be broken down into sections of the AIDAS Model to show a clear understanding of how each stage was utilized when advertising.

4.1 Attention

Apex Legends (2019), a F2P FPS BR developed by Respawn Entertainment that takes place in the same universe as their previously released games Titanfall and Titanfall 2. (Little, 2019) Apex Legends gained attention for its unconventional marketing strategy, Respawn Entertainment announced and released Apex Legends to the public on the same day through a livestream event. (Sinclair, 2019)

Cyberpunk 2077 (2020) a futuristic RPG that was announced by CD Projekt Red in 2012, a vide game adaptation of Mike Pondsmith's tabletop pen & paper RPG titled Cyberpunk. During the announcement CDPR made some promises about the newly announced game which were (CD Projekt RED Group Summer Conference 2012):

- A mature RPG for mature audiences set in a rich realistic and brutal futurist world.
- A gripping non-linier story filled with life and detail.
- Advanced RPG mechanics based on the pen & paper RPG system.
- Varied Selection of different character classes.
- Gigantic arsenal of weapons, upgrades, implants and cool high-tech toys.
- To set a new standard in the futuristic RPG genre with an exceptional gaming experience.

Then in January 2013 CDPR released a teaser trailer for Cyberpunk 2077 which featured a cinematic sequence of an augmented cyborg woman being shot and surrounded by heavily armed police of the city while a song titled Bullets by Archive was playing in the background. (Cyberpunk 2077, 2013)

Elden Ring (2022) is a dark fantasy RPG developed by FromSoftware which is the next installment in the Soul series. Elden Ring had an official reveal and trailer at the gaming event E3 in 2019 where the trailer shows off mysterious new characters and an unseen narrator explaining that the elden ring has been shattered. (PlayStation, 2019) However, the most surprising aspect of the reveal trailer was that Elden Ring would be co-created by George R.R. Martin, an American author of the famous fantasy novels A Song of Ice and Fire, which was then adapted into HBO's famous series Game of Thrones. (Pallardy, 2023)

Valheim (2021) is an open world survival game developed by the indie studio Iron Gate. Valheim started off as a side project by Richard Svensson which started back in 2017, with the then title Fejd. Svensson first posted a video of Fejd to his personal YouTube channel in September of 2017. (Svensson, 2017) He would continue to post progress clips of Fejd to his channel and then in September of 2018, commented on one of his videos that "Fejd is now known as Valheim" (Svensson, 2018)

4.2 Interest & Desire

Apex Legends, a F2P game that was announced and released simultaneously was readily available to all players to download. Respawn Entertainment provided a launch trailer showcasing the BR's elements of the game and the different personalities of the playable in-game characters. (Apex Legends, 2019) Apex Legends also generated more interest with the use of sponsoring video game influencers that posted their content on either Twitch.tv or YouTube. The sponsored influencers live streamed themselves playing Apex Legends on its launch, potentially generating more interest and desire for the newly released game.

Cyberpunk 2077 was silent in content and information until five years later when in 2018, CDPR revealed an official world premiere trailer at E3 for cyberpunk 2077. Cyberpunk 2077's world premier trailer showed off a lot of worldbuilding with a montage of clips showing events happening around this futuristic city and expressed that the city you'll be inhabiting is "voted the worst place to live in America, main issues sky-high rate of violence and more people living below the poverty line than anywhere else" (GameSpot a, 2018) Then in July of 2018 CDPR released a video with the original creator of the Cyberpunk the pen & paper RPG with Mike Pondsmith explaining the world of cyberpunk, it gave fans an opportunity to gain insightful knowledge about the universe in which the game takes place in. (GameSpot b, 2018) Shortly after in August of 2018, CDPR released a forty-eight-minute gameplay reveal video of Cyberpunk 2077. (GameSpot c, 2018) This is the bread and butter of video game announcements; gameplay trailers allow the consumer to fully experience what to expect when playing the game. This shows off gameplay mechanics, in-game graphics, character customization, body modifications, different weapon choices and various possibilities the player themselves can make to progress in the story.

Again, at E3 of June 2019, CDPR revealed a cinematic trailer for Cyberpunk 2077. Cinematic trailers are intended to give the audience a more concrete idea of what the main storyline or "campaign" of the game will be. The description for the trailer goes as follows:

> In the most dangerous megacity of the future, the real you is not enough. Become V, a cyber-enhanced mercenary outlaw going after a one-of-a-kind implant — the key to immortality. Customize your cyberware and skillset and explore a vast city of the future obsessed with power, glamour and body modification. The choices you make will determine the story and shape the world around you. (Cyberpunk 2077 b, 2019)

Then at the end of the trailer it was revealed that the actor Keanu Reeves, who has starred in multiple cinematic masterpieces would be one of the main characters in the game. Reeves also made an appearance on stage at E3 to promote the game, the event ended up becoming a meme due to one audience member shouting at Reeves "you're breathtaking" causing Reeves to go off script and proclaiming to the audience that "you're all breathtaking". Reeves then ended his speech with the announcement for Cyberpunk 2077 to be released on April 16th, 2020. (GameNews, 2019) Cyberpunk 2077 also had multiple limited-edition products that gave off a distinct esthetic that was related to the game. This allowed eager fans to customize their own setup in a Cyberpunk 2077 fashion which included a Samsung TV, Microsoft's Xbox One X, Xbox controllers, gaming headsets and even a variety of common items such as clothing and mugs. Cyberpunk 2077 even had sponsor deals with one of Americas largest male grooming brands Old Spice and even a collaboration with the Coca-Cola company in Poland to promote their drink Sprite with Cyberpunk 2077 themed cans. (Baker, 2021) Unfortunately, CDPR had to delay Cyberpunk 2077 a total of three times due to the state of the game, initially to be released in April the game was now set to release on December 10th, 2020. (Williams, 2020) To ease the worries of avid gamers waiting for the release of Cyberpunk 2077, CDPR started a monthly series on YouTube in June 2020 called "Night City Wire". These episodes provide prominent information about the world of Cyberpunk 2077 and showcase new characters, vehicles, weapons, life paths and more juicy content for fans to soak up until the games release. (Cyberpunk 2077 c, 2020)

Elden Ring's reveal trailer gave the bare minimum of information, it provided unique character designs and showed minimal glimpses of this new world. Then at The Game Awards 2020, Elden Ring won the Most Anticipated Game Award, with little to no new

details about the game and still being in a shroud of mystery. (Kain, 2020) With any popular AAA title, it is common for leaks and rumors to surface on the internet, especially when a video game hasn't had anything official released for years. This was the case for Elden Ring, little tidbits of information would appear online, some of it would be credible while others complete nonsense, it even had fans create their own lore for the game with combining elements of the Soul series and works from George R.R. Martin. (Cass, 2019) FromSoftware finally released an official gameplay reveal video for Elden Ring on June 10th, 2021, and announcing an official release date for Elden Ring to be on January 21st, 2022. (McWhertor, 2021) Unfortunately in October of 2021, FromSoftware announced that they must delay Elden Ring's released date to February 25th, 2022, but also announced that they would be hosting a Closed Network Test for Elden Ring. A closed network test is meant to test the game's online servers, it can also be seen as a beta or demo since some players will get an hands-on opportunity to play an early version of the games build:

> "Selected fans will be able to experience the opening hours of the long-awaited title to get a hands-on glimpse at what the full game will have to offer while assisting the development team in testing the game's online servers ahead of its release date" (Plante, 2021)

In December at the 2021 Game Awards, FromSoftware released a cinematic trailer for Elden Ring, this was the first news about the game's story that was co-created with George R.R. Martin and was revealed that GRRM was responsible for Elden Ring's mythos. (A Look in the history of Elden Ring, 2021)

Richard Svensson, the creator of **Valheim** released an alpha version of the game in June 2018 to the website itch.io. (Dvoid, 2018) Itch.io is an open marketplace for independent digital creators with the focus on independent video games, a platform that enables anyone to sell the content they've created. (itch.io, 2023) Svensson would continue posting clips of Valheim to his personal YouTube channel up until January 2020, he then stopped and continued to show the game's progress on the new YouTube channel Iron Gate. Some of the videos on Iron Gate's YouTube channel had a description of "Subscribe, Like, Comment and join the Discord for a chance to get BETA ACCESS!!" (Iron Gate a, 2020) Discord is a social media platform that allows users to communicate with voice calls, video calls, text messaging, media, in private chat or in a community server. Then in June 2020, Valheim revealed a trailer for the 2020 PC Gaming Show, an annual event that showcases new games and hardware for the PC side of gaming. (Iron

Gate b, 2020) On January 18th, 2021, Iron Gate posted an Announcement Date Trailer to their YouTube for Valheim. The trailer showcased how brutal a reborn Vikings life will be in the world of Valheim with a metal song titled "Shield Wall" playing in the background by Swedish Viking Death Metal band Amon Amarth (Iron Gate c, 2021) Iron Gate also posted a Valheim Release Trailer on their channel and the game was released in early access for PC on February 2nd, 2021.

4.3 Action & Satisfaction

Apex Legends is a F2P BR FPS by the studio Respawn Entertainment which was released on PC, PlayStation 4 and Xbox One. The game relies on in-game microtransactions for the studio to make a profit, these microtransactions can range from a variety of things such as season pass or in-game cosmetics for characters/weapons.

Figure 4 Twitch.tv views when Apex Legends was released. (Apex Legends Chart, 2023)

Unfortunately, SteamDB could not track the player count on PC when Apex was initially released due to the game only being available on EA's own platform Origin. However, within 72 hours of the games launch, Apex Legends had amassed 10 million users and a peak concurrent player count of 1 million. (Webb, 2019) Apex Legends ended up winning Best Multiplayer Game in 2019 at the Game Awards. (Bankhurst, 2019)
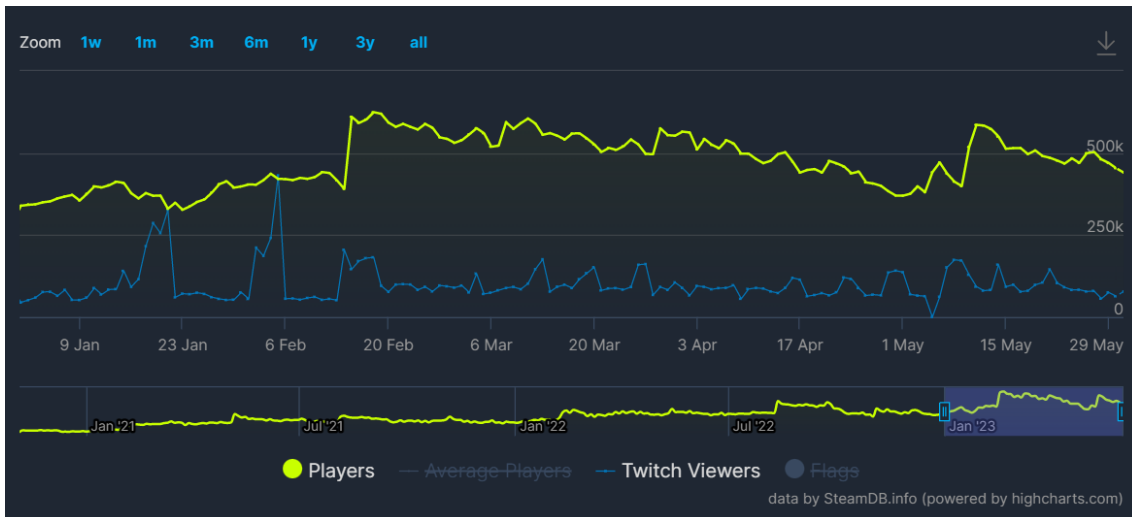
Figure 5 Steam Player and Twitch engagement of Apex Legends from Jan-May 2023. (Apex Legends Chart, 2023)

Four years later and Apex Legends is still one of the top BR being played today, not only did Respawn Entertainment release a quality game but have been able to maintain a solid and growing player base.

Cyberpunk 2077 is a traditional B2P Action-Adventure RPG set in the future, playing as V, a mercenary trying to make a name for themselves in one of the most dangerous cities in the country. When Cyberpunk 2077 released it sold over 13 million copies within two weeks after its launch and had more than 8 million pre-orders. (Statt, 2020)

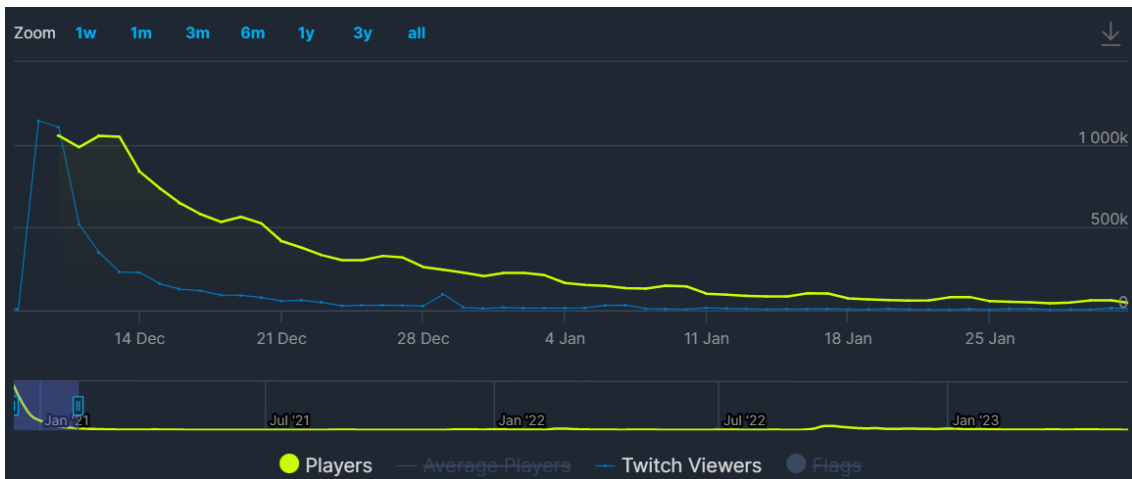*Figure 6 Steam Player and Twitch engagement of Cyberpunk 2077 on release. (Cyberpunk Chart)*

Unfortunately, the highly anticipated game by CDPR was riddled with bugs and had major performance issues on PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, the only way players could enjoy Cyberpunk 2077 on launch was if they had a high-end gaming PC. Cyberpunk 2077 had so many issues that Sony ended up pulling it from the PlayStation Store and offered

refunds to players that bought it digitally. (Peters, 2020) CDPR might have had a rocky start with Cyberpunk 2077's release but the studio stayed dedicated to fans and focused on fixing in-game bugs and performance issues. As of September 2022, Cyberpunk 2077 has sold 20 million copies worldwide. (Obedkov, 2022)

Elden Ring is a Soul series dark fantasy RPG B2P by the developer FromSoftware who popularized the genre Soulslike, a subgenre known for its high level of difficulty and environmental storytelling. Elden Ring managed to sell over 12 million copies worldwide two weeks after release, which was FromSoftware's bestselling game to date (Clement, 2023)
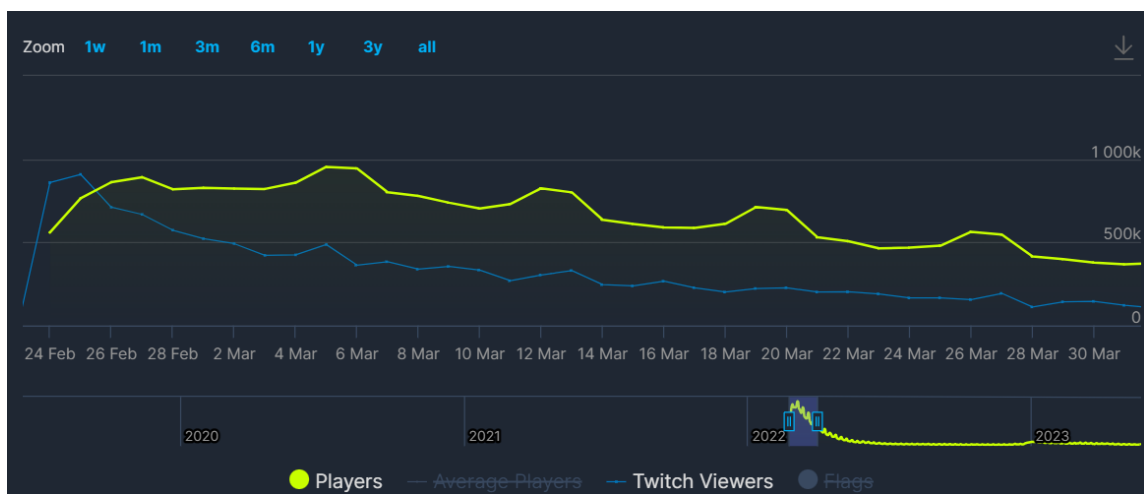
Figure 7 Steam Player and Twitch engagement of Elden Ring on release. (Elden Ring Chart)

At the 2022 Game Awards, Elden Ring ended up winning three awards which were, Game of the Year, Best Game Direction and Best Art Direction. (Plant,2022) As of March 2023, Elden Ring has sold over 20.5 million copies worldwide which is FromSoftware's most successful game yet. (Bonifacic, 2023)

Valheim is an open world survival B2P game developed by indie studio Iron Gate and was released in an early access on Steam. Valheim ended up selling 5.7 million copies within five weeks of release, which is an astound accomplishment for a studio comprising only five employees. (Conditt, 2021) Valheim won PC Game of the Year in 2021 by magazine and website PC Gamer (Morton, 2021)

Figure 8 Steam Player and Twitch engagement of Valheim on release. (Valheim Chart)

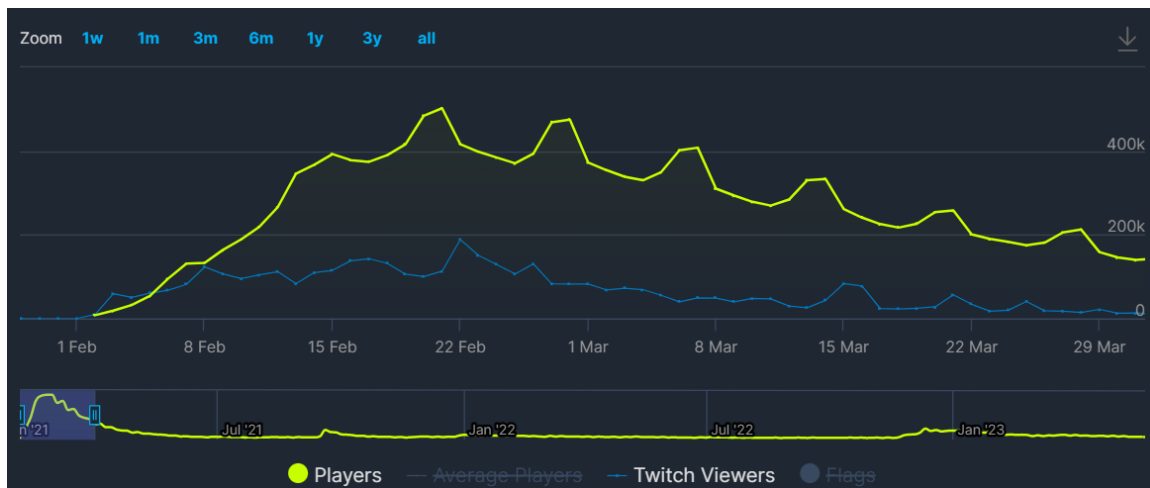Valheim is still in early access but has also been released on Xbox and has accumulated at least 10 million sold units since April 2022. (D'Angelo, 2022)

5 DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the results of advertising techniques the four developers used for their games. Comparing the similarities and differences with the content they chose to create in order to gain more attention of their game. Also explaining the theoretical framework's each developer utilized when promoting their game and understanding the benefit that come from them.

5.1 Discussion of results

5.1.1 Apex Legends

Apex Legends had a surprise announcement and release, this is uncommon in the gaming industry. Games are usually announced a handful of years prior to generate interest and to promote pre-order sales for the developer to get a good understanding of the desire for the product. Respawn Entertainment utilized influencer marketing, three days before launch, Respawn Entertainment flew 100 of the top influencers from around the world to Los Angeles to see the game. (Webb, 2019) This allowed the influencers to have proper knowledge of the game and could provide useful information to their viewers about the game. When Apex Legends launched it was all the rave in the gaming community due to the surprise factor and with the most popular video game influences playing it. Since it

was F2P it gave more incentive for people to just download the game and try it for themselves without losing anything in return.

However, this method of marketing is not advised, yes it worked for Respawn Entertainment, but this method could be seen as a double edge sword. Respawn Entertainment chose this method because they were in the development phase of creating the next Titanfall game, the way they work is by finding the fun. (Sinclair, 2019) This was also during the time where BR were gaining popularity in the gaming industry thanks to Player Unknown's Battlegrounds and Fortnite. Respawn knew that if they announced a Titanfall branded BR prior it would receive mixed reviews and look like they wanted a share of the BR publicity, especially since fans of the first two games are expecting a third installment. Respawn Instrument brought to light the impact influencer marketing can have in the gamin industry, which is something most developers should consider depending on their budget.

5.1.2 Cyberpunk 2077

Out of all the games in this study Cyberpunk 2077 was the most heavily marketed game but it did pay off in the end. Due to the constant marketing campaign of the game Cyberpunk 2077 amassed 8 million pre-orders and those sales alone exceeds all Cyberpunk2077's production costs and marketing/promotional costs for the year 2020. (Hall, 2020) With 8 million pre-orders before a games release, it gives more incentive for CDPR to collaborate with other companies with the Cyberpunk brand. Which was the result of multiple limited products such as hygiene, clothing, televisions, drinks, gaming equipment and even a limited-edition Cyberpunk 2077 themed Xbox One X. CDPR even used a form of influencer marketing by adding the celebrity Keanu Reeves into the game. They created a ton of video content to truly showcase Cyberpunk 2077, from cinematic trailers, informative videos about the universe to lengthy gameplay trailers to give the audience a proper feel of the in-game mechanics. For a game that was announced 8 years before release and properly started pumping out marketing content in two years prior to release, CDPR did not skip a beat wanting everyone to know about their upcoming game.

Unfortunately, Cyberpunk 2077 was released in a horrible state on the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, causing multiple negative reviews about the game. If a retail price B2P game

on release barely runs on the announced consoles, there's going to be backlash due to receiving a faulty product. CDPR did delay Cyberpunk 2077 a few times but at no point did they communicate the state of the game and how it could barely run on consoles. The highly praised CDPR that did an excellent job on the Witcher series now tarnished their credibility with Cyberpunk 2077's release. This event brought to light the negative side of pre-ordering games, CDPR had to re-gain the trust of those who they wronged by tenaciously fixing Cyberpunk 2077.

5.1.3 Elden Ring

FromSoftware's next instalment of the Soul series is Elden Ring, which used the basic promotional material for video games which is video marketing. Similar to CDPR, FromSoftware revealed that Elden Ring would be co-created by celebrity author George R.R. Martin. This was completely different for FromSoftware, all the games in the Soul series have been in the hands of Hidetaka Miyazaki, who has been mostly credited to the game's story and atmosphere. This generated interest and desire to know more about the upcoming game, FromSoftware mostly provided basic trailers for Elden Ring showing off gameplay and revealing relevant information about the story. They also gave eager consumers an opportunity to participate in a closed network test to ensure the game launched with no server-side issues, something CDPR should have done. Most single player games usually have linear storytelling while the Soul series, besides Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice, are non-linear. Essentially there are clues and non-player character dialogues throughout the Souls series that the player themselves must discover in order to unravel the story of these games. Unlike CDPR, FromSoftware deliberately didn't provide any information about the game due to its nature, even though it is a new game with no connection to FromSoftware's other titles.

5.1.4 Valheim

Valheim, a video game released in early access on Steam by the indie studio Iron Gate managed to draw in one million sales a week for five weeks when released. Valheim is a passion project by one of the co-founders of Iron Gate by Richard Svensson, he would post clips on video sharing sites like YouTube with progress of the game. Iron Gate utilized community websites such as Discord, giving interested consumers a chance to participate in a beta version of Valheim. Iron Gate knew from the beta period that the

game was well received by players which gave them positive expectations, they were confident that the game would do well and sell tens of thousands in the first week. (Conditt, 2021) Iron Gate also had open dialogue with its Discord community during most of the development of Valheim, they influenced the direction of the game and even implemented some ideas from the community while also tweaking some features based on their input. Valheim not only used video marketing in the early stages of development and later with proper trailers for the game but also communicating with the community of beta testers. Another factor for the game gaining so much popularity is that the price of Valheim is one third the price compared to normal retail games, then with the game still being in early access gamers would be more understanding about bugs and other graphical issues since it was clearly stated.

5.2 Discussion of method

The choice of qualitative content analysis with secondary data analysis was a good choice for this research topic. It allowed a more in-depth look and understanding of the steps the developer took when advertising their game. The issue however was that there was almost too much data available when it came to promoting a video game, having to understand what was more necessary for the research. Luckily, video games are a product of experience which narrows down the data to what content best conveys the games experience for the player. Which in this case are mostly videos and some web content, these two should be enough to provide what a video game will entail upon release.

More ideas did arise during the research and writing of this study, comparing four developers is extensive. The idea was to understand the different ways to advertise an upcoming game and with the four developers all using different methods to attract attention. It would have been more beneficial to simply compare one AAA developer and one indie developer using the AIDAS Model in a qualitative content analysis approach. Most AAA developers already have a reputation in the industry which can give them an advantage of consumers with prior experience while an indie developer is fresh to the market. Then there is also the fact that AAA developers have much more funding to spend on proper marketing while an indie developer has the bare minimum. As this study shows, even an indie developer can compete with the big leagues with the fraction of their budget.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Video games have come a long way since their early iteration of an arcade machine, now a multibillion-dollar industry, video games are more prevalent than they ever were. With this newfound fame and attention, developers need to attract gamers to their new projects but in a sea filled with fish how can one stand out from the rest? The goal of this study was to understand the different methods the four developers used to advertise their game before release and to understand if heavily marketing a game is essential to a video games success. The process of promoting an experience product such as a video game can be a challenging task due to it ultimately being the players choice in the end. Developers need to provide the necessary hooks when advertising their games and the most prevalent material needs to be in a video format to give the target audience a proper feel of what the game will entail once its in the players hands. This research observed different types of marketing methods used the gain the interest of unaware players from influencer marketing to full blown advertising with collaborations of the video games brand and openly communicating with community members during game development. All games had in common was that they provided some form of cinematic trailer and provided gameplay to give an idea of the in-game mechanics. The marketing strategies used by the developers did prove that a game can be successful without heavily marketing a game, however all developers took advantage of their own niche in the market. Another thing to mention is due to the digital landscape, video game news/blog websites will usually provide reviews and information about the newly released game which can generate more interest and desirer. All the games gained more players/sales after a period from its original release, meaning that some interested players will wait until there is more conclusive information about the game to make a purchase. In conclusion, marketing is somewhat needed to show off the qualities of a game but an overabundance of promotion is not needed due to the difficult task of selling a digital experience product.

6.1 Limitations of the study

One limitation for the study was not being able to track the views each video game trailer from a certain time period. Videos are the main source of material used to show off a video game, it would have been more beneficial for this research to see how many views each video gained upon the videos release or specific timeframe; we only see the total

accumulation of views since videos initial release. Another limitation was that there is more to a video games success than just relying on advertising, the many elements that encompass a video game can factor a consumer's buying decision. These could be from the genre, in-game visuals, overall story, theme or even the developer, its hard to gain the interest of someone who is mostly interested in a specific type of game. Yes, we know how the developers advertised their game to create interest and desire but we don't understand how and why the consumer chose the game in the first place.

6.2 Suggestions for further studies

To truly understand the gaming market and its consumers, a phenomenal research would be a quantitative approach to figure out what makes a player get interested in a new game.

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