"The impact of social media on the consumer decision-making process in the gaming industry. An analysis on male and female gamers in Ireland between the ages of 20-35."

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Abstract

"The impact of social media on the consumer decision-making process in the gaming industry. An analysis on male and female gamers in Ireland between the ages of 20-35 by Jennifer O'Brien, MSc in Marketing, National College of Ireland, 2022"

The video gaming industry throughout Ireland is growing in popularity each year among all age groups and demographics however this area has a lack of literature studies that are current and up-to-date alongside the use of social media marketing. With the increase of social media for the use of marketing a product/service to potential customers and current customers, video gaming companies have endless possibilities to create hype on an upcoming product in the marketplace. Video gaming companies can access information by using social media advertisements to understand the stages consumers go through before and after they purchase a game with them. It is now easier than ever for consumers to create reviews on a video game and share their opinion and thoughts through social media with one another.

This dissertation aims to gain an understanding of how consumers make their purchasing decision alongside the impact of social media on the video gaming industry in Ireland. Video gaming may be linked to the consumer decision-making process and the steps to making a final purchasing decision.

The researcher used a small sample approach alongside an inductive mono method to conduct in-depth qualitative measures for data collection purposes. Six in-depth qualitative interviews were taken place for the data collection purposes of this dissertation with gamers currently living in Ireland and between the ages of 20 – 35 years old, by using an inductive method to gain an understanding of the steps the participants take during the purchasing journey. One of the limitations that occurred throughout this dissertation was the lack of academic journals in the video gaming industry.

Keywords: *Video-gaming, purchasing, social-media, gaming, marketing, decision-making*

Declaration Form
Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland
Research Students Declaration Form
(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Jennifer O'Brien

Student Number: x21100560

Degree for which thesis is submitted: MSc in Marketing

Title of Thesis: *The impact of social media on the consumer decision-making process in the gaming industry. An analysis on male and female gamers in Ireland between the ages of 20-35.*

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Acknowledgments

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction to Dissertation and Research Topic

1.1 Background To The Study

1.1.1 The Growing Video Gaming Industry Marketplace

The video gaming industry is constantly growing and evolving alongside technology and the internet. According to Statista. (2022) the current global video gaming market value is averaging at over 178.37 billion U.S dollars as of 2021 and is estimated to grow to over 268 billion U.S dollars as of 2025. The video gaming market consists of various amount of companies that compete against one another with exclusive consoles for their audience to play. The best-selling console of all time as of July 2022 was the Sony, PlayStation's second console known as PlayStation 2 or PS2. Statista. (2022) suggest the PS2 console in its lifetime has sold over 158 million units worldwide competing with the Nintendo DS handheld console resulting in 154 million units sold.

1.1.2 The Impact Of Marketing Within The Video Gaming Industry

During the COVID-19 lockdown in the UK, the PlayStation brand came up with an innovative advertising campaign to reach potential customers for the latest PlayStation console released in the marketplace. The Sony, PlayStation brand used Guerrilla Marketing to display the brand's shapes such as triangles, circles, squares, and x across Oxford Circus in London train station. Warc.com. (2021) suggest this campaign resulted in over 2 million users signing up for interest in the latest news for the upcoming PS5 console. The Sony brand used Guerrilla marketing to get their target audience to take pictures/videos of the advertisements and share them amongst their followers on social media platforms such as Instagram to generate electronic word of mouth. Social media channels are used by video gaming companies to reach and engage with their audience through the use of advertisements and visual content. According to Bankov, B., (2019) *"The social aspect is one of the key factors in a game's success"*. Playing video games has in most recent years become a major social element for younger generations to play amongst one another and share on social media their gameplay on channels such as Twitch.

1.1.3 The Video Gaming Industry In Ireland

According to Video Games - Ireland. (2022) as of the year 2021 the highest revenue throughout the video gaming industry in Ireland came from users playing mobile gaming with over 112 million euros. The second largest revenue in this industry in Ireland came from users downloading games through the use of the internet and technology averaging over 48 million euros in 2021. Through the use of social media platforms, consumers have the power to share and discuss the latest video game they have played with their followers in an instant through visual content and storytelling. As of 2021 in Ireland Statista. (2022) suggest that over 4.14 million users were active on social media networks with an estimate to increase to over 4.7 million in the year 2027.
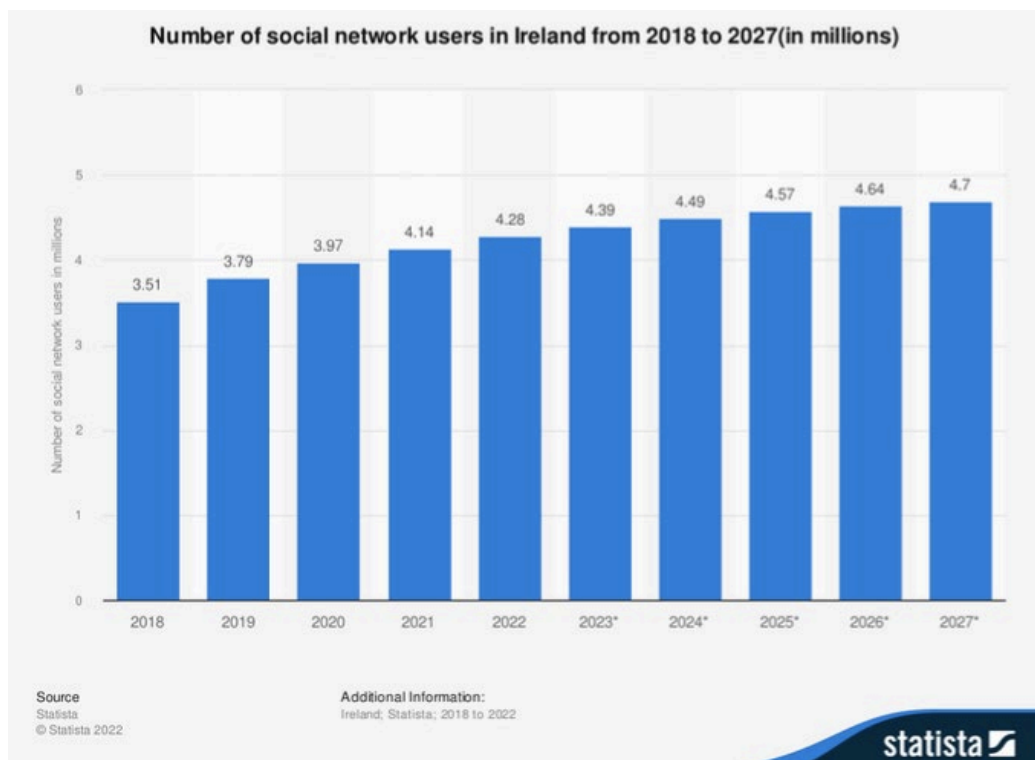
Image Source: (Ireland number of social media users 2027 | Statista)

1.2   Gaps In The Literature

1.2.1   Linking Social Media Marketing and The Video Gaming Industry

Social media marketing is evolving each year according to Needle, F., (2022) 77% of social media marketers suggest that using social media platforms for paid advertisements to reach their target audience affected their company in the year 2021. The video gaming industry is massive with over 2.5 billion active players playing video games worldwide. (Ireland esports. 2022). Video gaming companies may use social media marketing to reach and engage with their audience to promote the latest games and trends within the marketplace however recent existing literature lack to provide any information on this topic at hand. A gap in current literature exists and this is important for social media marketers to understand how to use platforms to engage and attract consumers to purchase in the video gaming industry.

1.2.2   The Linking Between Consumer Decision Making When Purchasing Video Games

Consumer Decision Making Process is a method used for brands to understand the journey consumers make when making a purchasing decision. According to Solomon, Askegaard, Hogg, and Bamossy, (2006) "*Some purchase decisions are more important than others, the amount of effort we put into each one differs*". However, finding any literature linking this process within the video gaming industry to gain an understanding of how consumers make their purchasing decision before purchasing a video game and what steps they take after is lacking in academic literature. This dissertation explores the possible linking of the consumer purchasing decision through the video gaming industry to fill this gap.

1.3   Academic Justification

As previously mentioned in section 1.2 there is a significant gap in video gaming academic literature to date related to understanding the consumer's decision to purchase and the video gaming entertainment industry. Video games are rising each year in popularity with the gaming companies releasing upgraded consoles and so on for their audience to purchase. A review of academic literature reveals that the video gaming industry as a whole is lacking in any up-to-date literature concerning social media and consumer purchasing methods.

1.4 Research Aim(s)

Providing the literature gaps throughout the video gaming industry previously discussed in this chapter. This dissertation aims to fill the explained gaps by using qualitative in-depth research to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers use social media channels to research upcoming video games and make their final purchasing decision. The gaps discussed are not explained thoroughly in recent literature, specifically in the country Ireland considering there are over 700,000 regular gamers in Ireland as of 2022 (Ireland esports. 2022). This study aims to answer the questions explained in the following sub-heading 1.5.

1.5 Research Questions

Due to the previous sub-headings 1.2 and 1.3, the researcher explained in detail the gaps in the literature following the video gaming industry and social media marketing. The five research questions listed below are used in the methodology section in chapter 3 to create research objectives based on each question asked. The following research questions are used to explore the gap in the video gaming industry.

1. How do consumers understand they need to purchase a video game in Ireland?
2. What methods do consumers use to search for the latest information on video games?
3. How do consumers evaluate gaming companies on social media platforms?
4. What do consumers use to purchase video games?
5. Are consumers using social media to review video games after purchasing?

To answer the five questions listed above the researcher used the following methods and scope explained in sub-heading 1.6.

1.6 Methods And Scope

1.6.1 Methods of Research

The methods chosen for this dissertation were used by Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) guidance through the research onion. The methodologies chosen to analyze the data are mono and qualitative approaches. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) explain that Mono method qualitative research may be used as a single data collection technique compared to using multi-method qualitative study which may be used by researchers that aim to use more than one qualitative data collection to gather information. The research philosophy chosen for this data collection is known as Interpretivism. This philosophy focuses on an inductive small sampling through in-depth qualitative measures of analyzing data collected. In-depth information on the chosen methods of reason can be accessed throughout Chapter 3: Methodology.

1.6.2 Scope of Research

Through analyzing the data collected for this dissertation study the researcher conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with six participants between the ages of 20 - 35 currently living in Ireland and that play video games regularly and follow gaming companies on social media platforms. Ireland esports. (2022) suggest that 80% of gamers today are over the age of 18 with 59% of gamers under 35 years old. Conducting six in-depth interviews allows the researcher to analyze the data from a small sample size as this dissertation has a strict time schedule due to deadlines.

1.7 Dissertation Structure

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The first chapter introduces the topic chosen by the researcher with detailed information on the gaps in literature throughout the video gaming industry and social media. The aims of this dissertation and the structure of the content to come are explained in this chapter.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Chapter two is based on two types of literature reviewed known as academic and industrial. The researcher used relevant literature to provide information on the video gaming industry, consumer decision-making process, and social media marketing throughout this chapter.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Chapter three consists of the research chosen by the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the research questions. The research objectives for this dissertation are explained in detail throughout this chapter with the data collected through in-depth qualitative measures. Information on the sample chosen and the process involved to measure the data is provided in this chapter.

Chapter 4 – Research Findings and Discussion

Chapter four is based on the research findings and discussion of the data collected from the in-depth interviews that took place. The researcher chose to combine the findings from the research and the discussion into one chapter. This chapter is based on the researcher explaining comments from the six participants interviewed and using relevant literature to back up statements made relevant to the research objectives.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

The final chapter of this dissertation is the conclusion and recommendations section. This chapter will conclude the dissertation and provide recommendations for further research and professionals.

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Introduction

According to Knopf, J.W., (2006) a literature review has many benefits for the individual's work as it can give the viewer an overview of the area of research that they may not be familiar with. A literature review can reveal research that has been done accordingly by many researchers resulting in an advantage in time and effort. Saving time is a key aspect of conducting literature as it can help determine if there are any problems or gaps in existing research and can develop any new ideas to use in one's research. The following literature review is structured into five headings based on reviewing the video gaming industry. The first heading is based on an industrial review of the current video gaming entertainment industry with the remaining headings two, three, four, and five based on an academic review of the video gaming industry and so on.

2.2 Videogaming Entertainment Industry

2.3 Industrial Review: Brief History Of Video Gaming Companies

As mentioned in 'The video game age: A brief history (2022) "*Six decades ago, few people could have imagined a US$150 billion (and growing) global video game industry that would marry technology, art, and business to reshape the way that we play.*" The most popular gaming companies to date are *Sony PlayStation, Nintendo,* and *Microsoft Xbox.*

2.3.1 Sony, PlayStation

The Sony, PlayStation brand was first launched back in December 1994 in Japan by Ken Kutargi by promoting their first ever gaming console known as the PlayStation One or PS1 for short. The brand currently provides 5-generation video gaming consoles and a range of accessories such as a virtual reality headset on sale for their target audience. PlayStation releases its original content in terms of gaming such as titles named *Rachet & Clank* and *The Last of Us* that are exclusive for PlayStation gamers. As stated by Brown, S. (2001) *"Customers crave exclusivity"* having exclusive games for customers creates a sense of luxury and tricks customers into thinking they are *"the lucky ones".* By marketing the product through social media and events PlayStation can create a buzz and generate awareness for any upcoming exclusive games. Alsop, (2022) states PlayStation's most

popular console PS2 is known as the best-selling video gaming console of all time to date sold a staggering 158 million units worldwide, with their most recent console PlayStation 5 disc and diskless version as of 2021 selling over 12.6 million units. (Jacob, L. M. 2020)

2.3.2   Nintendo

Nintendo is known as a multinational software company based in Kyoto, Japan. In the year 2001, the company Nintendo launched the GameCube and Gameboy in the US and Japan and worldwide the following year. The Nintendo brand is known for releasing handheld gaming devices for on-the-go gaming. Gaming devices created by Nintendo feature exclusive games and characters such as Super Mario, Zelda, and Pokémon. Since 2001 Nintendo has released a range of handheld devices and consoles such as the Nintendo Wii, DS, and Switch. The Wii resulted in 101 million units sold in its lifetime and the Nintendo Switch in the year 2021 sold 25 million units globally. As of 2021, Nintendo's net sales reached almost 16 billion US dollars. (Alsop, T., 2022)

2.3.3   Microsoft, Xbox

The original Xbox gaming console was launched to the public in the year 2001 and created by Microsoft and Bill Gates. Since its launch date, the console has changed and developed through advanced technology such as exclusivity and adding value for its customers. The company used celebrity endorsements such as The Rock (Dwayne Johnson) to promote their first console in Las Vegas with their exclusive game known as Halo. Celebrity endorsements are an effective method used to gain awareness by consumers and increase loyalty in an overpopulated market such as the gaming industry. (Hung, K. 2014) Since the console's release Xbox has created a further four gaming consoles known as Xbox 360, Xbox 1, Xbox Series X, and Xbox Series S. The gaming console is similar in ways to the PlayStation as they both provide exclusive games and online services. Alsop, T., (2022) suggests the Xbox 360s lifetime sale is over 65 million dollars with their gaming hardware revenue over 4 billion dollars as of 2022. (Staff, H., 2021)

2.4   Current Videogaming Situation

Kirriemuir, J., (2002) suggests that *"video gaming and computer games are often used interchangeably"* gaming consoles can be accessed with a screen such as a television, monitor, or an LCD by inputting accessories such as a wireless or wired controller, joystick or keyboard depending on the type of console or game the user is playing. The video gaming industry has grown and developed throughout the years alongside technology. As stated by Statista. (2021) as of 2021 the value of the video gaming market in the United States alone is over 85 billion dollars with consumers spending over 11 billion dollars in Q2 2020 on gaming such as content, hardware, and accessories.

As suggested in 'The video game age: A brief history' (2022) 70% of kids (under 18) and 64% of adults (18 and older) in the United States are video game players. The most recent PlayStation 5 console came out in the market worldwide in the year 2020. The Sony company did not meet the supply of demand with the console selling out in a matter of minutes. To date (2022) it is difficult for consumers to purchase this console as it is popular and sells out within minutes from supplies such as GameStop and Smyths. Games today come in many forms such as single-player, multiplayer, and MMO (Massive multiplayer online) forms.

According to McGonigal, J., (2011) "*Games today come in more forms, platforms, and genres than at any other time in human history*". Games can include mini forms such as 5-second games, and 8-hour sessions or some can vary to hundreds of hours of gameplay such as Elder Scrolls, and Skyrim. Games can make the player's happy emotions shine however it can come with a negative approach as many players get stressed out playing and it can take time away from their friends and family members. "*It comes with too much criticism. We're afraid of failing*". Children today are born in 1990 and later grew up around the technology and are known as *"Digital born"*. These individuals wish to play video games in a way the generation before don't. As a result of this children may wish to learn through interactive learning compared to traditional methods in a classroom and combining gaming and learning can lead to a fun environment.

2.4.1 COVID-19 Pandemic And Videogaming

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and consumers in lockdown at their homes, the gaming industry has grown massively as a result of this. It was predicted that the gaming market would reach over 5 billion in sales by the end of 2020. As reported by Mena, (2020) *"The UK gaming market grew by 4.5 million video game players in the nine years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic (an increase of 21% since 2012)"* with studies suggesting that the growth continued to rise throughout the pandemic that video gaming played a role in many people's lives throughout the globe by many testing out trials for new games and so on. In the UK alone there are 26 million gamers between the ages of 6-64 this results in more than half the population resulting in 54% gaming in the past 12 years. Out of the gaming companies previously mentioned Nintendo found the greatest success throughout COVID-19 with the sales of their Switch console rose by 24% from 2020, this occurred due to the release of their original game Animal Crossing New Horizons.

2.5   Videogaming Target Market

The video gaming industry is divided between male and female players with 54% male and 46% female. A wide range of the population play videogames with 40% of the market for millennials, 21% for baby boomers and Gen Z. Suggested by Marketing To Gamers: What To Know About The Ever-Expanding Market, (2021)*"men spend more time per week playing video games compared to women, with an average of 7.9 hours compared to 6.3 hours"*. According to Gaming reach worldwide by age and gender 2021 | Statista, (2022) *"Share of internet users worldwide who play video games on any device as of 3rd quarter 2021, by age group and gender"* suggests that the male population was between the ages 16 - 24 with 91.1% and the female population ages 16 - 24 at 86.4%.

2.6   Academic Review: Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour defined by Solomon, M. R. (2016) "*is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires.*" Consumer behaviour is a process that is ongoing between a brand and consumer.

2.6.1   Consumer Decision-Making Process

The Consumer Decision Making Process is based on five steps such as *1) Recognition of Need/problem awareness, 2) Information Search, 3) Evaluation of Alternatives, 4) Purchasing Decision and 5) Post Purchase Evaluation.* This model is important in terms of any marketing actions made by a brand. It is used by the marketeer to make decisions when considering the buying process than focusing on the decision-making process alone. This model suggests that each customer steps through the process of their purchase. In some cases, depending on the purchase and customer some may skip a step such as purchasing a soft drink from a vending machine.

As suggested by Panwar, D. et al. (2019) *"The challenge for the organizations is to identify which information sources are most influential in their target markets to satisfy the customer in the competitive environment.".* While Clow, K. E., and Baack, D. (2015) suggest that "*Finding ways to influence the consumer purchasing process continues to be a vital marketing communications activity".* Concerning IMC (Integrated Marketing Communications) the consumer decision-making process relates to two of the stages such as information search and evaluation of alternatives. These two steps seek information on how customers are searching for a brand and how they evaluate any information they may find, this is an important step for marketers and how they create effective marketing campaigns as a result.

2.6.1.1   Step 1: Recognition Of Need/Problem Awareness

The first step is based on recognition of a need or known as problem awareness, this may come from a functional or an unpredictable need. This step is based on consumers purchasing based on emotions or dreaming about how the experience will make them feel. Marketers may use this step to promote products/services to consumers based on emotional

needs. This step is the first in the decision-making process as is based on a consumer's need/want.

2.6.1.2 Step 2: Information Search

The second step in the consumer decision-making process will commence once the problem awareness is strong. Through this step consumers may begin searching for information this may be due to a memory, marketing message, or very own personal experience they previously had with a product/service. Consumers may find information through their friends and family members or advertising messages. Social Media Marketing has influenced information search greatly throughout the evolution of technology as consumers may compare products online through reviews from previous customers and advertising makes it easier than ever for brands to build awareness. An example of a company that strives on information search through technology is Booking.com as this website is used to scan hotels and provide the user with the best deal possible.

2.6.1.3 Step 3: Evaluation Of Alternatives

This step is based on reducing awareness to a minimized group of options for consideration, this may be known as an evoked set. An evoked set is based on products/services a consumer may consider buying before making a final purchase. How a consumer is involved with a brand may impact the evaluation. Low involvement purchasing may be a difficult task for brands to come to customers' minds as when purchasing everyday items such as breakfast cereals or washing up liquid a customer may think quickly and base their purchase on price compared to quality or brand. High involvement purchasing occurs during high expenditure this is based on purchasing expensive items such as a home or a new car.

According to Fahy, J., and Jobber, D., (2015) *"The distinction between high-involvement and low-involvement situations is important because the variations in how consumers evaluate products and brands lead to contrasting marketing implications"*. An evoked set is an important method when it comes to evaluating alternatives as consumers may have a list of brands they would consider purchasing. An evoked set may be considered when a consumer is searching for information or evaluating through the steps of the decision-making process. Brands may use marketing messages to get their brand name in the evoked set of potential customers and this may be their primary goal to achieve.

2.6.1.4   Step 4: Purchasing Decision

This step in the purchasing process is based on the consumer stopping their search for a product and making a purchasing decision. This is an outcome of the evaluation step meaning that the consumer has developed an intention of purchasing. This step does not mean entirely that the consumer has made an actual purchase. This step is based on the consumer deciding on the brand they are choosing to purchase from and they must implement this decision and purchase the final product.

2.6.1.5   Step 5: Post Purchase Evaluation

Post-purchase concerns or cognitive dissonance are known customers to have after purchasing a product/service. This may occur when a customer is debating if they made the right purchase decision by comparing the product to alternatives with various features lacking. The consumer decision-making process does not necessarily end once a consumer has made a final purchase.

2.7   Social Influences On Purchasing

The three main social influences based on consumer behaviour are known as *1) Reference groups,2) Social classing,* and 3) *Culture.*

2.7.1   Reference Groups:

Reference groups are known as a group of individuals that have the power to influence another's attitude or behaviour when it comes to purchasing. Reference groups can be categorized into formal and informal groups such as a club or family/friends that share the same interests as one another. As stated by Fahy, J. and Jobber, D., (2015) "*The role of reference groups is now more important than ever given that certain groups choose to live a very 'public' life through social networks".*

Consumers are known to follow the crowd to fit into society and impress their reference groups, marketers and brands are aware of this and are constantly researching methods to exploit their product/service to the group. Brands that use websites and social media profiles to sell and promote their products to their target audience may use a feature that suggests *'other customers purchased this'* with a range of various products underneath in

a tab button. In the gaming industry, reference groups play a major factor when it comes to online word-of-mouth and consumers sharing their experiences based on an upcoming game and so on. This is done through social media networks and streaming platforms for gaming known as Twitch. Twitch is used for gamers to live broadcast their game and communicate with their followers about their experiences and this may lead to a close group.

2.7.2   Social Classing:

Social class is based on the consumer's occupation and this is one of the most important factors of consumer behaviour. This is a method marketers use in research by placing consumers into categories based on their social class such as upper, middle, and low class. This method has been criticized as placing consumers into categories based on their income may not sorely relate to their circumstances for example many people are self-employed.

2.7.3   Culture:

Culture relates to traditions, taboos, basic attitudes of consumers, and the value they hold in society. This is based on the lifestyle the individual leads and how they may consume a product. Within cultures, there may be sub-cultures that are known to influence purchasing decisions and consumer behaviour. Throughout the decade products/services throughout the globe are known to increase international consumption. An example of culture explained by Fahy, J. and Jobber, D., (2015) "*Speciality cuisines like Japanese sushi, Korean barbeque and Cajun food can now be found in major cities throughout the world*".

2.8 Social Media Marketing

2.8.1 What Is Social Media And How It Is Used For Marketing?

Social media is based on internet access through devices and is a tool that gives the user access to interact and communicate with other users by sharing their opinions and visual content. A brief definition of social media is stated by Fahy, J., and Jobber, D. (2015) "*It is online content created by people*" while they also define social media marketing as "*The use of social media for communicating with and engaging customers online*". Stanley, P. and Choudhary, P. (2021) define social media marketing as "*the practise of using social media and social networks to promote a company's products and services (SMM).*" Marketers use social media to reach potential customers and raise awareness based on a product/service they are promoting.

The main principles associated with social media reach are *accessibility, usability, immediacy,* and *permanence.* Social media gives the marketeer the freedom to reach potential customers on a global scale for an instance through paid advertisements and electronic word-of-mouth methods. A company needs to use the social media channels that reflect its brand and where the target audience is such as Instagram and Facebook. Marketers may use social media profiles to engage with their followers and reach potential customers by promoting their product/service and their brand value, culture or mission instantly. Compared to using traditional methods of advertising to reach an audience social media helps brands reach a mass audience by using a percentage of their marketing budgets for social media advertisements.

2.8.2 How Gaming Companies Are Using Social Media

Gaming companies are using social media to promote their latest consoles, games, and features to their followers through visual content to create a buzz. According to Nielsen.com. (2018) "*Gamers generally are more likely to be members of social media than the general population, favoring Facebook as their top social media destination. This year, Instagram overtook Twitter in popularity, claiming 51% of gamers compared to Twitter's 47%.*". Instagram is one of the most popular social media channels with PlayStation currently having 28 million followers, Xbox with 12 million, and Nintendo with 7 million followers on this social media channel alone. PlayStation uses social media to promote their showcase event each year that promotes the upcoming releases and consoles. This event creates hype and a

buzz across social media platforms with gamers sharing their opinion and engaging in conversation.

2.8.3   Influencer Marketing

An influencer is defined by Fahy, J. and Jobber, D., (2015) as "*The person who attempts to persuade others in the group concerning the outcome of the decision. Influencers typically gather information and attempt to impose their choice criteria on the decision.*". The social media channel Instagram is used by gamers to share content and follow influencers. An example of a well-known globally American gaming influencer is Ninja. Ninja has over 12 million followers on the gaming streaming platform Twitch and over 13 million followers on Instagram. Ninja is known for streaming his gameplay playing the popular free-to-play game Fortnite. Ninja receives sponsorship from the brand Red Bull and collaborated with Primark (Penneys) in Ireland and as a result of this success, he earns millions of dollars per year as a gaming influencer. According to Statista (2021), the age group 18-24 years old worldwide are following gaming influencers at 21% with 15% between the ages 25-34%, and so on.

2.9   Advantages And Disadvantages Of Using Social Media Marketing

2.9.1   Advantages

Social media marketing has a wide range of advantages for a brand to communicate with its target audience. Many companies are now using social media channels to reach and engage with their customers compared to their websites. Marketing through the use of social media has many advantages for a company however it can come with a lot of disadvantages too. The main advantage is the reach a brand has to receive new followers and retain its current following and doing so with a reduced cost. Using social media channels to market to followers is a lot lower than using traditional methods such as hiring a salesperson. Marketing can be used through social media to provide information to potential customers without any human interaction. Quoted by Nadaraja, R. and Yazdanifard, R., (2013) "*This is an advantage over other forms of contact because the amount of information that can be provided is much greater than in any other form of communication.*". Social media can be used for customization information for customers by providing information for the individual based on their needs.

Nadaraja, R. and Yazdanifard, R., (2013) suggest that there are five advantages needed to succeed in the social media marketing field such as *1. Cost-related, 2. Social interaction, 3. Interactivity, 4. Targeted market, 5. Customer service.*

1. Cost-Related: Using social media marketing can be a cost-effective method compared to other methods of marketing. Some social media advertising tools can be free for businesses compared to spending thousands or even millions on marketing campaigns. Using pay-per-click advertisements on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram can be used to geo-target audiences according to their location and demographic.

2. Social interaction: Nadaraja, R. and Yazdanifard, R., (2013) suggest that consumers spend a quarter of their time online communicating in activities such as instant messaging and using social media networks. Social media channels are now the most popular internet destination to date for users to communicate with one another and individuals to be persuaded by brands to purchase.

3. Interactivity: Compared to a user watching TV or listening to a radio channel, using social media channels lets the user participate and interact with brands. Examples such as filling out online forms/surveys and clicking on links to purchase.

4. Targeted market: Marketers may use social media channels to target consumers based on their interests and reach customers who are interested in a product they are offering.

5. Customer service: Customer service is an important element of social media marketing as it consists of linking viewers to FAQs (Frequently asked questions) and links to online chat forums for customers to receive any information or help during their purchase.

Sajid, S.I., (2016) suggests there are two advantages companies gain by using social media such as *1. Reducing the cost as a result of less staff time, 2. Increasing the likelihood of creating revenue*. They also discuss the advantages of using social media as a marketing platform with three advantages such as *1. Brands to pay attention to what their customers*

desire, 2. Marketers can reach out to influencers, 3. These methods can be done at little to no cost. Sajid, S.I., (2016) *"However, SMM is a very customized way of marketing and promotions can be targeted only to particular categories which have an interest in a particular domain, quite unlike conventional marketing"*

2.9.2 Disadvantages

Social media marketing has many opportunities for businesses to succeed however, it may come with some disadvantages. The five main disadvantages suggested by Nadaraja, R., and Yazdanifard, R., (2013) are *1. Time intensive, 2. Trademarking, 3. Security issues, 4. UGC(User Generated Content), 5. Negative feedback.*

1. Time intensive: Using social media to engage and communicate with followers daily takes time and effort from brands. Hiring an individual to handle social media channels such as monitoring each platform, responding to all comments and queries, and posting on each channel can be a value and a strain for a brand. Time must be managed accordingly when it comes to using social media as a marketing tool.

2. Trademarking: By brands using social media to market to their followers, they must protect their brand by trademarking and copyrighting when they are planning to promote their products/services.

3. Security issues: It is easier than ever for brands to copy one another by viewing their branding on social media. Brands must be cautious when sharing information on their product/service on social media as this may impact any security issues relating to trust, privacy, and data.

4. UGC: User-generated content consists of the user sharing their thoughts on a product/service with one another through the internet and social media channels. This can be done through photos, videos, reviews, online blogs, articles, and so on. UGC can be used as a marketing tool for a brand to collaborate with the user and the user may share information based on the brand with their followers. Using UGC for marketing may come with some risks and legal concerns according to Nadaraja, R. and Yazdanifard, R., (2013*) "Soliciting user-generated content in connection with a*

marketing strategy comes with some risk of incurring legal liability for content created by an individual participating in the campaign"

5. Negative feedback: Customers have the free will through social media to express their experience with a product/service to their followers this can be either positive or negative for a brand. Unhappy customers may express their experience through social media and this is possible to lead to damage to a marketing campaign and increase negative word of mouth.

Sajid, S.I., (2016) suggests that manufacturers can use social media marketing to decrease any negative PR based on a product/service. *"The manufacturers will have to be cautious here as overdoing it may further aggravate their clients/stakeholders".*

Reynolds, G. W. (2019) explains the disadvantages of using social media for marketing purposes relating to ethical issues such as cyber abuse/harassment and stalking.

1. Cyber abuse/harassment: This occurs as a form of mistreatment that may cause harm or distress to an individual through the use of technology and social media. Harassment is a method of cyber abuse that includes any aggressive behaviour towards an individual. This can be a form of bullying that can hurt and upset an individual's mental health. As explained by Reynolds, G. W. (2019) ¾ of the US has received some form of online harassment and 47% experienced some form of online abuse in their lifetime.

2. Cyberstalking: This is based on cyberbullying however it is long-term of unwanted attention on social media. This consists of one individual stalking another that may cause some fear and scare an individual. This may include a user receiving messages from another user stating they are going to get them or any threatening messages.

2.10 Videogaming And Advertising

2.10.1 Why Do Consumers Play Videogames?

Consumers play video games for several reasons ranging from the social aspect with their friends and family members online through the use of the internet or playing together on one console with numerous controllers attached this is known as 'couch play'. The gaming community is massive on a worldwide scale with gamers from various countries making friends through the community on social media or the games themselves. Many consumers like to play alone for the fun and thrill of the game itself. Videogames can be a fun learning experience for many adults and children to learn life and social skills.

Terlutter, R. and Capella, M. (2013) suggest that consumers are influenced by family and friends in many areas throughout consumer behaviour and how they purchase. Throughout the gaming industry advertising plays a factor in marketing to potential customers and this is influenced by multiplayer online games such as MMORPG, role-playing games, and so on. These types of games include hundreds of players playing together in a lobby through the use of technology and the internet. The gamers play simultaneously at the same time and may communicate and discuss the latest trends in the gaming industry. Reference groups are a group of individuals that encourage behaviour amongst each other. This may be a positive or a negative method as members of a reference group may change their attitudes and morals to fit in.

2.11 Possibility Of Gaming As An Advertising Medium?

Product placement can be used as an effective advertising medium throughout the video gaming industry to reach potential and existing customers smartly and subtly as defined by Warc.com. (2021) as a *"Subtle form of advertising used to promote branded products or services in a non-traditional way. In contrast to explicit TV advertising, product placements usually appear in movies, TV shows, a game, and increasingly, in online content.".* As the COVID-19 pandemic hit many individuals turned to video gaming as a hobby to pass the time during the lockdown. Marketers were aware of this and used product placement to attract attention by using popular games such as Animal Crossing on the Nintendo Switch console. Singapore's holiday island Sentosa closed its attractions and beaches during the lockdown and resulting in losing millions of visitors.

This resulted in Animal Crossing creating a virtual beach in the game for visitors to come and chat with fellow players. The users could virtually escape to a paradise island and create their very own island. According to Ash, R., (2020) *"It took the best of Sentosa and what people were missing the most to provide the ultimate island escape."*. As a result of this marketing tactic, Virtual Sentosa destination resulted in over 2.6 million dollars in PR value with over 15K individuals registering for a chance to fly to the island post lockdown. Videogaming may offer marketers the opportunity to reach a younger demographic as they are relaxing and enjoying their free time playing a videogame in the comfort of their environment. The use of product placement may represent a unique and current method to reach this target market.

Clow, K. E., and Baack, D. (2012) 40% of gamers today are females equivalent to over 130 million worldwide. This has an advantage for gaming companies to create and promote games targeted toward a female audience. A website known as www.womengamers.com provides information on the latest games, reviews, and any comments female gamers have, this may be an opportunity for marketers to reach out and target females. *"The ability to reach girls, young women, and mature women with products placed in the games or advertising messages embedded in them presents a potentially powerful new method"* This method can raise brand awareness and increase loyalty for video gaming as an advertising medium.

2.11.1 In-Gaming Advertising

As defined by Terlutter, R., and Capella, M. (2013) in-game advertising, known short as IGA is *"The inclusion of products or brands within a digital game"*. In-game advertising is similar to using product placement throughout the entertainment industry however gaming companies offer advertisement slots in their game themselves to reach an audience. Using IGA can be in the actual gameplay itself subtly and cleverly or it can be in loading screens at certain times throughout the game. Using IGA has its advantages and disadvantages for advertisers. Advantages are this advertising method does not need the use of online technology to reach an audience as the images/text are built into the game. The disadvantages are once the game has been launched to the public there can be no edits made.

2.12 Problems Associated With Advertising In The Gaming Industry

While the gaming industry has a range of advantages and opportunities in terms of marketing and using social media marketing to target and reach many gamers it can also have disadvantages and ethical issues when marketing to an audience.

2.12.1 Online bullying/Cyberbullying

The use of online gaming can include some form of cyberbullying as gamers may use their headsets and chat boxes to communicate and chat with one another throughout the game. In the gaming world, gamers are ranked on their gameplay such as rank 1 or 100 depending on the level of time put into a particular game doing quests, killing players, and so on. New players who begin at rank 1 may be a target for bullying compared to higher level gamers this can be known as a type of *"social dominance"*. McInroy, L. and Mishna, F. (2017) discuss a campaign known as #GamerGate against online harassment and bullying. #GamerGate began in September 2014 and was used as a hashtag # on the social media platform Twitter. Ballard, M. E., & Welch, K. M. (2015) suggest that "*Social dominance theories of aggression suggest that higher rank or status supports aggressive behavior in a group"*.

Fryling, M., et al., (2015) suggest that 62% of games are known to be with other gamers or online. Gamers may use online gaming to make friends through the virtual world and this enhances their experience. Gaming may be a fun experience for some however it can be a cruel and horrific experience for others. Gamers that receive any online abuse/bullying may have mental health issues as a result of the nasty comments and some may reach suicidal tendencies. Cyberbullying can create a long-lasting impact on individuals by decreasing their confidence and how they behave. Compared to traditional face-to-face bullying the online threats can impact greatly as they are online for everyone else to see and comment on. This can impact the user's anxiety levels and can harm their psychological state. Marketers that use social media marketing tools to reach potential customers in the gaming industry must be aware of the abuse gamers can receive.

2.12.2 Microtransactions

As the video gaming industry is growing businesses are looking for ways to generate revenue. According to KONHÄUSNER, P., SEMMERAU, S.-M. and GRUNERT, M. (2021) in 2020 the gaming industry in the US resulted in 175 billion dollars in revenue. This revenue was due to selling the game itself for a set price, subscription-based models, in-game advertisements, and microtransactions. Microtransactions are in-tangible in-game goods such as skins or weapon upgrades. In-game purchases resulted in 3.2 billion euros in the year 2020 studies suggest this is down to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A free-to-play game that is known for its microtransactions is Fortnite. Users can download this game free on their console and purchase skins (outfits) for their virtual character and this may lead to addiction. Due to microtransactions in the year 2018 Fortnite received over 5 billion US dollars in revenue. Statista, (2021) suggests that 62.7% of Fortnite players are between the ages of 18-24. However, many children under the age of 18 are playing Fortnite daily and becoming addicted to purchasing to impress their friends and this can have an effect on their mental health and their understanding of gambling and how dangerous it is for an adult's well-being. According to Statista, (2022) 77% of users answered Yes to spending money on in-game purchases in the Fortnite game while 21% answered with No and 2% prefer not to say.

2.12.3 Advertising To Children

Clow, K. E., and Baack, D. (2015) children represent a massive level of spending and purchasing power with over 20 billion dollars on an annual basis. This is a controversial issue when it comes to marketing/advertising to children. Marketing to children and 'selling' videogames may put pressure on parents to purchase.

In conclusion, this literature review section has influenced the commencing section known as the Methodology by explaining in detail through the use of academic literature what the Consumer Decision Making Process entails this will impact the following method of work by connecting the literature with the practical method of work such as the researcher conducting one's research through qualitative measures.

3 Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Introduction

Quinlan, C. (2011) Research methodology is known as the way research is carried out in terms of assuming a philosophical approach to underpin the research. As Research Methodology is a broad term Agarwal, B. (2015) defines this method as *"A scientific procedure of systematic and thorough investigation in a field of knowledge to unravel certain hidden facts or establish principles envisaged by experience, theorization or observation. Research also suggests ways for achieving the objectives."* Research methodology may include conducting research such as case studies, surveying, attitude research, ethnographical research, action research, grounded theory, image theory, and feminist researching. Conducting any form of research is done so in almost all areas of a subject or field and how it is used varies based on research and the purpose of the research matter or equipment used. Research methodology is based on a set of procedures that may be adhered to complete an objective based on the research. This chapter is going to explain the research conducted with appropriate methods to suit the research topic discussion. Based on the research conducted throughout Chapter 2 this 3rd Chapter known as the research methodology will discuss any further information based on the research topic.

The methods that are used throughout this chapter have been chosen in correspondence with Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2015) by using their approach known as the 'Research Onion'. The research objectives were created in correspondence to the 'Consumer Decision Making Process' discussed in great detail alongside appropriate academic referencing in Chapter 2: Literature Review. This chapter will discuss the reason based on the research method and instruments used with an outlook on the sample selected. This chapter will discuss any limitations to the research and any ethical concerns that may have been raised throughout the qualitative measures.

3.2 Research Aims & Objectives

3.2.1 Overall Aim(s) Of The Research

According to Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) using aims throughout the research methodology has the power to influence the research to follow as it can help identify briefly the purpose of the research project. The aims are most often used as a small sentence stating the intention the researcher is going to achieve throughout the research. Research questions and aims are methods used to state what the research is about. Creating research questions can impact research by creating a more detailed investigative question that may be used to create research objectives. In conclusion to creating research questions and aims the research objectives may follow. As suggested by Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) using objectives in the research allows the researcher to '*operationalise'* the research question and state the steps that are going to be used to answer it. This study aims to gain an understanding of how social media marketing affects consumer decision-making throughout the video gaming industry in Ireland. The following five research objectives have been conducted through the consumer decision-making process discussed in **Chapter 2: Literature Review** and they will be used accordingly to achieve the overall aims of the research to follow.

3.2.2 Research Objectives

Research Objective 1	To investigate how consumers recognise that they have a need to purchase upcoming videogames in the Irish video gaming market
Research Objective 2	To assess how consumers search for information on the latest videogames and consoles in the Irish video gaming market
Research Objective 3	To explore how consumers evaluate alternative video gaming consoles through the use of social media
Research Objective 4	To understand how consumers make their purchasing decisions in the video gaming industry in Ireland
Research Objective 5	To examine how consumers use social media to conduct post purchasing evaluations in the Irish video gaming market

3.3 Proposed Research Methodology

3.3.1 Research Onion (Saunders)
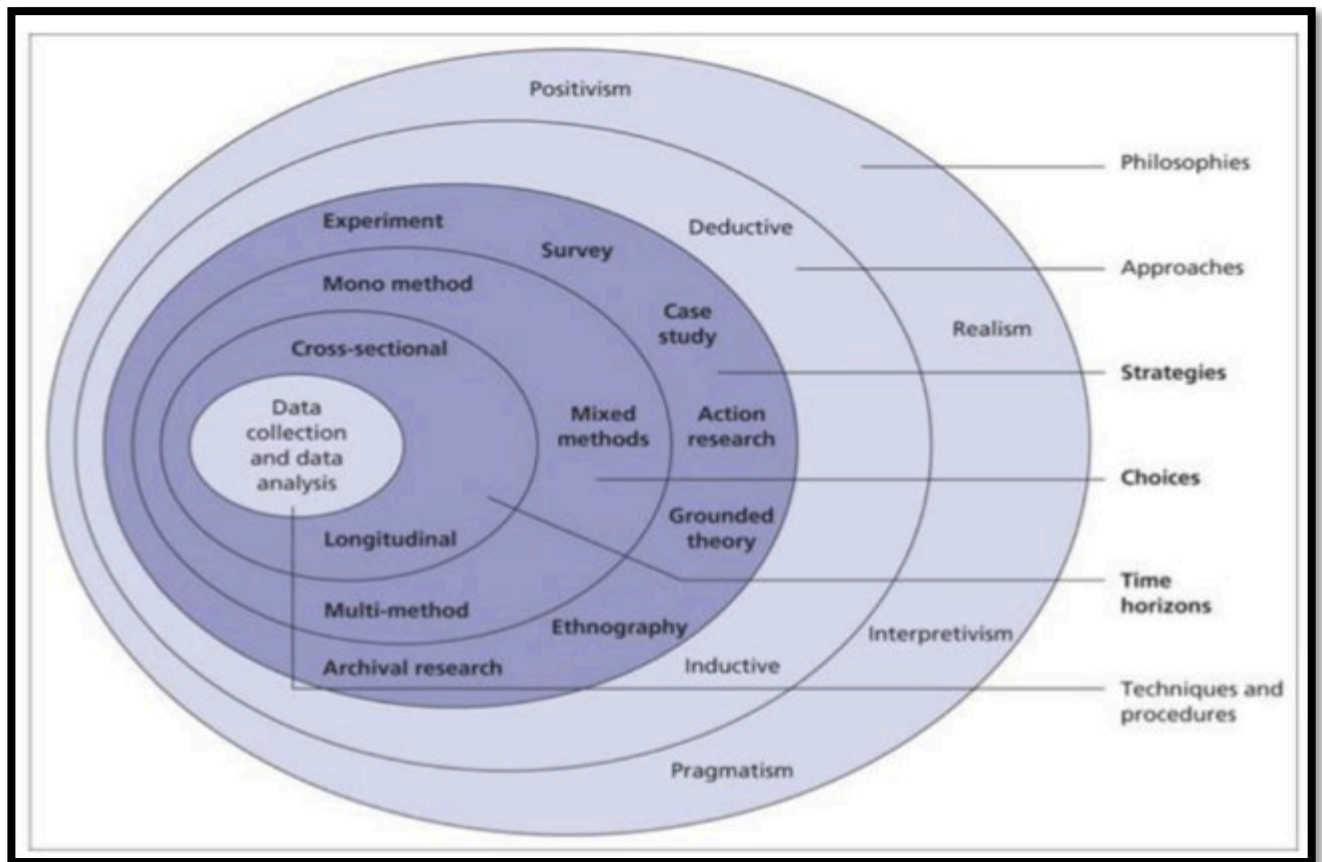
Image Source: Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2009)

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) explain how the research onion is used when collecting any data and this data belongs in the centre of the onion itself. Explaining and understanding each layer of the onion is important for undertaking research and explaining the purpose of the research in-depth. As stated by Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) "*In coming to this central point you need to explain why you made the choice you did so that others can see that your research should be taken seriously*". According to Melnikovas, A., (2018), the research onion consists of six main layers *Research philosophy, approaches to theory development, strategies, methodology choice, time horizons, and techniques* and *procedures.* This section will provide an overview of the research question discussed previously by using Saunders, et al., (2009) research onion as a tool to organize the research to follow.

3.3.1.1 Research Philosophy

The first layer or also known as the external layer of the onion is known as the research philosophy consisting of five elements. According to Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) the term research philosophy is based on a system of beliefs and assumptions concerning the development of knowledge. The main objective of the research philosophy is to develop knowledge before embarking on the research. Before making a philosophical choice the researcher must familiarize themselves with their own research beliefs and assumptions and become familiar with any research philosophies within the business and management sector.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) explain that there are three types of research assumptions that can influence the research question known as *ontology, epistemology,* and *axiology.*

Ontology is an assumption that is primarily based on the nature of reality or being. The ontology assumption may shape the way the researcher sees and studies their research objectives. These objectives may include; organizations, management, individuals, and events in organizations. This ontology reflects on how the researcher determines how they perceive the world in terms of business and management and concludes in the choice of research to reflect on the research project. Epistemology assumption is primarily based on what is used for constitutional acceptable knowledge and how this knowledge is communicated to others. While Axiology assumption is primarily based on the role of values and ethics within research. This assumption is based on how the researcher deals with their values compared to their participants and how they deal with this. Herron (1996) argues a case that one's values are the main reason for guiding human actions.

(Saunders, et al., 2015) (Herron 1996)

Throughout the research onion, the first layer of research philosophy consists of five major philosophies such as *positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, post-modernism,* and *pragmatism.* For this research, Interpretivism will be used and adapted as this approach is the most suited to inductive small sampling such as in-depth qualitative research in terms of interviewing participants. According to Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) the main purpose of an Interpretivist is to create a new, richer understanding by establishing an interpretation of the social world and context. "*Interpretivism is a subjective philosophy".* This philosophy's aims are used to understand the issue based on a social situation and how the individual has lived and experienced such as the video gaming industry, therefore, are most suited in terms of this research.

Postmodernism and Pragmatism had some elements to co-exist with the research however the researcher rejected these two philosophies as Interpretivism is the most suitable method concerning the research. Postmodernism is based on in-depth investigations and qualitative measures of data analysis and pragmatism consist of focusing on problem-solving and a range of measures such as qualitative and quantitative however this research is sorely qualitative.

3.3.1.2   Research Approach

The second layer of the research onion is known as research approaches. This layer can guide the researcher in identifying the tools that will be needed to answer the research questions. The theory discussed throughout the literature review may be used to identify an approach to direct the researcher in terms of investigating the hypotheses. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) provide an example that co-aligns with the research throughout this dissertation as they discuss an online retail store pre-selling a new gaming console. The store must consider three elements such as; the online store has limited stock based on the manufacturer, the customer demand for the product, and the online store provides a space for the customer to pre-order the console.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) state that there are four purposes used during asking the opposed research questions known as; *exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, or evaluative research.*

Exploratory studies are based on gaining an understanding and information on a topic of interest by asking open-ended questions. Questions conducted through exploratory are going, to begin with, the question asking 'what' and/or 'how'. Using exploratory studies is appropriate when the researcher is wishing to gain an understanding of the issue or phenomenon they are not sure about. This research may begin with a broad focus however it has the potential to narrow down the information as the research commences. Descriptive studies are based on gaining an appropriate profile of any events, person, or situation. Descriptive questions mostly, begin with asking the questions such as 'Who', 'What', 'Where', 'When', and 'How'. Descriptive studies are also known as descripto-explanatory studies and can be known as a means to an end. Explanatory studies are based on studying casual relationships between variables. Questions based on explanatory research may include asking 'Why' or 'How'. This study is based on researching a situation or a problem and analyzing the relationships between the variables included. Explanatory studies are based on a quantitative measure. While evaluative studies are based on finding out how effectively something works. The questions based on evaluative research may include both 'How' and 'What' and in the formation of 'To what extent. This study is based on understanding how effective something is and

asking the question 'Why' is it effective by comparing the explanation to current theory. (Saunders, et al., 2015)

Based on the above information exploratory studies were used throughout this dissertation to gain a deeper understanding through in-depth qualitative research by the researcher by asking open-ended questions to participants. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) also suggest that there are three approaches to consider known as; *inductive, deductive,* or *abductive.* Ghauri, P.N. and Gr, nhaug, K. (2005) suggest that these approaches are used to conclude.

The inductive approach is based on collecting data to explore a phenomenon by identifying any themes or patterns concluding in creating a conceptual framework. Ghauri, P.N. and Gr, nhaug, K. (2005) state that the inductive approach is based on *"empirical evidence".* The deductive approach is based on researching existing academic theory and literature concluding in testing that theory. . Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) suggest that this data collection is based on evaluating propositions/hypotheses relating to an existing theory. Ghauri, P.N. and Gr, nhaug, K. (2005) state that the deductive approach is based on *"logic".* However, the abductive approach is based on moving in between inductive and deductive approaches.

An inductive approach has been selected to guide the approach as Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) state this approach connects with the interpretivism as selected previously to the research philology. An inductive approach is mainly related to qualitative measures and research approaches as It consists of interviewing a small sample of the population to gain an understanding of the research question. Ghauri, P.N. and Gr, nhaug, K. (2005) define induction by stating that *"Inductive reasoning – the systematic process of establishing a general proposition on the basis of observation or particular facts".*

3.3.1.3 *Research Strategy*

The third layer of the onion is the research strategy or known as the strategies layer. This layer includes conducting research such as; experiments, surveying, action research, case studies, ethnography, ground theory, and narrative research. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) define research strategy as *"A plan of how a researcher will go about answering her or his research question.".* They also suggest that this strategy is a methodological link between the philosophy and subsequent choice of methods used to examine any data collected. The research strategy is known as the methodology linking the chosen philosophy and methods selected by the researcher to analyze the data collected. Conducting research may be done through strategies linked together by quantitative, qualitative, and/or mixed methods. Choice of the research strategy is

important for this dissertation as it provides answers for the chosen research question(s) and a method for the researcher to reach their objectives by linking together the chosen philosophy research approaches and the purpose of the study. Ethnography, action research, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry are the four main strategies linked to a qualitative research method. Layer six of Saunders, et al., (2015) research onion consists of conducting; Mono method quantitative or qualitative, multi-method quantitative or qualitative, and mixed methods simple and/or complex. The research choice for the research strategy is based on the mono method. According to Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) a mono method is known as *A single data collection technique*.

3.4   Qualitative Data Primary Collection

The researcher is planning to conduct in-depth interviews to collect data based on the research question and objectives discussed. Mono-method qualitative measures were used for this research choice as this is purely qualitative and doesn't contain any quantitative or mixed method research. To conduct research for this study the researcher conducted in-depth interviews to generate qualitative data to gain an understanding of the relationship between each variable. The research strategy known as Grounded Theory was used to collect data for this research as it is based on qualitative studies and an inductive approach. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) explain that grounded theory refers to a methodological approach, and methods of inquiries and may be used in terms of a research process. Grounded theory may be used to explain certain social interactions and processes in a variety of contexts.

3.4.1   Advantages vs. Disadvantages of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods contain advantages and disadvantages according to this dissertation and research question(s)/objectives. Qualitative analysis has a range of advantages following this dissertation as it includes in-depth answers from interviews and a deeper understanding as it is based on human interaction compared to quantitative measures such as surveys that take time, money, and effort to create. The researcher can understand body language and ask questions on the spot that may not be on the list, it is cost-effective and saves time as qualitative interviews can be done so online or in person. As qualitative analysis has many advantages it also has disadvantages in terms of this dissertation. From a critical perspective getting a specific date/time to conduct the in-depth interviews as many of the participants are working full-time and live across Ireland may be an issue and this can time consuming as the researcher must write up on the data collected. Quantitative analysis is based on graphs and stats and this is not included in qualitative analysis and may be useful for a quick analysis of the data collected,

conducting in-depth interviews may be a challenge as participants may be disturbed when answering a question or technology may be an issue when conducting interviews online.

(Saunders, et al., 2015)

3.5   Why Choose In-Depth Interviews?

In-depth interviews have been chosen for this qualitative research as the researcher believes that this type of research has a deeper human understanding relating to this dissertation and the population chosen. The researcher can ask questions not on the list and conduct an appropriate interview to suit all participant's needs compared to surveys. According to Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) in-depth interviews can provide the researcher with an opportunity to ask direct questions where they see fit if they want their participant to enhance their answer or build on their response. This may lead to a broader discussion which can enhance the researcher's data analysis and research questions by discussing topics the researcher may not have thought about in the first place. The questions the researcher asked throughout the in-depth interviews were open-ended as this gives the participants the freedom to freely explain their answers and opinion on video gaming. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) state that open questions or known as open-ended questions allow the participants to give their own opinion and answer in their way.

3.6   Population

The researcher concluded six total in-depth interviews. The population/sample interviewed for this dissertation was six video gamers currently living across Ireland to answer questions based on the research objectives. The six video gamers were used for the population sample. The participants selected for interviews must be active video gamers currently following gaming companies on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and/or Twitch, between the age of 20-35 and currently living in Ireland. Three interviews were done through Microsoft teams as the participants live outside of the researcher's area and three were done in person. The participants gave consent and permission to record before commencing the interviews.

Below is a graph displaying the gender, age, location, and list of preferred gaming consoles of the six participants interviewed. This information below is crucial to the data collection as the researcher wanted a variety of equal participants with 50% male and 50% female, a range of age groups, participants across Ireland, and a diverse group of preferred video gaming consoles as this information will lead to a range of answers throughout the interviews.

Gender	Age	Location	Preferred gaming console
Male	29	Enfield, Co. Meath	PlayStation
Male	27	Glasnevin, Dublin	Xbox
Male	27	Castlebar, Co. Mayo	PlayStation
Female	25	Santry, Dublin	Nintendo
Female	24	Swords, Co. Dublin	PlayStation
Female	35	Artane, Dublin	Xbox

The researcher took full responsibility for all data collected throughout the interviews such as personal information, recordings, and transcripts. The interviews conducted through Microsoft Teams were immediately exported to transcripts which made it easy for the researcher to look back and analyze the data collected. The researcher used these transcripts and recordings to analyze the data and create sub-headings for the research findings and discussion section.

3.7 Analyzing Qualitative Data

Once the interviews were complete the researcher listened back over the recording and carefully read through the transcripts to gain a full understanding of what each participant had to say. The researcher used Microsoft Teams for all of the six interviews as Microsoft Teams can be used to record the interviews and automatically creates a transcript. These techniques were appropriate as the participants are working full-time and it suited two of them to partake in an interview through the use of technology. As this research is done so through an inductive approach through grounded theory the data analyzed will be taken directly from the participants. According to Pope, C., Ziebland, S., and Mays, N., (2000) "*Qualitative research uses analytical categories to describe and explain social phenomena. These categories may be derived inductively—that is, obtained gradually from the data".* As the sample size for this research is small with six participants the researcher felt they did not need to use any computer package to analyze the data.

3.8 Ethical Issues & Considerations

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2015) state that ethics are a '*Critical aspect*' for the final success of a research project. Dawson, C. (2009) explains that providing a code of ethics forum to participants is crucial before commencing any form of research either qualitative or quantitative. Code of ethics is based on supplying the participant with information on what is to come throughout the interview and so on. The researcher must state the purpose of the research and how they intend to treat the participant with respect and honesty. Dawson, C. (2009) further explains that the code of ethics should cover: *Anonymity, confidentiality, the right to comment, the final report,* and *data protection.*

1. **Anonymity;** is based on the researcher making sure all participants have the option to remain anonymous and to explain the steps the researcher is going to take to ensure any personal information will not be tracked back to them once the in-depth interview is finalized. The researcher gave each participant the option to remain anonymous by not including their name in the final dissertation and the option to turn their camera off if they did not feel comfortable having it on throughout the interview.

2. **Confidentiality;** the researcher must ensure all participants understand that any information provided throughout the interview is private and will not be shared with any third party. Before each interview, the researcher sent each participant a document explaining what the data was for and a list of questions they were going to ask with contact details of the researcher if they wanted to ask any questions beforehand.

3. **Right to comment;** participants may wish to comment on the overall result of the report if they are unhappy with it as they have the right to do so.

4. **In the final report;** participants have every right to know where their information is going and what will happen with the final results. The participants should have the option to receive a copy of the final dissertation.

5. **Data protection;** the researcher must explain that they are familiar with the data protection act and they are going to abide by it throughout the interview.

(Dawson, C. 2009)

3.8.1   Ethics Guideline Handbook

National College of Ireland provides an Ethical Guideline Handbook to their students conducting any research containing any human interactions. The researcher reviewed this dissertation handbook before conducting any interviews. Before each interview, the researcher sent a 'Participant Information Sheet' to each of the participants with a list of questions they are going to be asked detailing the purpose of the study and how the information will be used throughout this dissertation. (See Appendix) A form containing additional information and signature through using the provided 'NCI Ethics Application Form' with consent was handed/sent to each participant to fill out before the interview commenced. Each participant had the option to remain anonymous and that the sole purpose of the interviews was for the researcher's MSC in Marketing Dissertation and nothing more.

3.9   Limitations to Research

As defined by Alf H. Walle, A. (2015) a limitation is based on "*A component of a write-up that acknowledges whatever gaps, problems, and limitations may exist in a research project".* This is a good idea to point out any limitations that occurred throughout the research as this may excuse any shortcomings or critics to come. Two major limitations impacted this research such as the lack of academic literature throughout the gaming industry and companies such as Nintendo and so on discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review, this affected conducting the research objectives and question(s). As the COVID-19 pandemic is still an issue to date this affected the research as the researcher contacted COVID-19 in the middle of writing this section of the dissertation and as a result was unable to conduct any work for several days. These two limitations impacted the work slightly however the researcher effectively finished the data collection.

4 Chapter 4: Research Findings And Discussion

4.1 Chapter Introduction

The literature previously discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review highlights various topics based on social media and the video gaming industry. Consumer Decision Making Process model was used throughout this dissertation to create objectives discussed in chapter 3 and these five objectives were used to create questions for the qualitative research. An inductive approach was used throughout this chapter as the researcher aimed to gain an in-depth knowledge of how the consumer uses social media to make a purchasing decision in the gaming industry.

The objective's main purpose is to gain an understanding of how participants use social media in terms of video gaming based on the proposed research question "*The impact of social media on the consumer decision-making process in the gaming industry. An analysis on male and female gamers in Ireland between the ages of 20-35*".

This chapter is going to compare and contrast any differences between this dissertation's qualitative data collection and the current literature in the gaming industry explained in detail in Chapter 2. Data conducted from the participants will give the researcher an insight into the individual's experience with gaming and social media. Quotation citations added to this chapter will be labeled accordingly from P1 up to P6 with their gender (Participant 1 female/male and so on) to remain anonymous.

4.2 Qualitative Research Findings

The questions the researcher asked each participant had an input on the following sub-headings that are used to back up the data collected (See Appendix). The qualitative findings from this research suggested that all six participants are influenced by social media channels when it comes to the steps before purchasing a video game.

4.2.1 OBJECTIVE 1: TO INVESTIGATE THE IMPACT VIDEO GAMING HAS ON THE CONSUMER THROUGH THE USE OF RECOGNITION OF A NEED/PROBLEM AWARENESS IN THE IRISH VIDEO GAMING MARKET

Objective one is based on how the participants each became familiar with video games and what steps they take to guide their purchasing decision.

4.2.1.1 *Understanding the need for purchase*

All six participants that the researcher interviewed had purchased video games in the past by taking numerous amount of steps before making the final purchase. By analyzing the data collected it was clear that each participant had used some form of social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to research information on the latest and upcoming videogames that can impact their need to purchase. Participant three explained that they would research social media platforms before deciding if they need to purchase an upcoming video game.

When asked what steps help guide their purchasing decision they explained *"I would look to various sites like YouTube, Tik Tok or online just to find any kind of gameplay that would be shown already to see what it looks like, and then I would go through and see if I can find anyone's take on how the game was, if they have looked at or played it themselves."*(P3, Male).

Social media channels are an effective tool when it comes to marketing or advertising the latest products in the marketplace as gaming companies can use paid advertisements to target and promote to their audience in an instant. Participant five suggested that they look at social media platforms such as YouTube to look at visual content such as trailers and gameplay to gain an understanding if they need to purchase an upcoming videogame. They explain that their friends would send information on games coming out in the next few months that can impact their decision if they need to purchase.

"I watch videos on YouTube and people would send me information on what's to come in the next few months" (P5, Male) Brands have the option to display advertisements under YouTube videos such as gameplay footage or tutorials to entice viewers to click and purchase. According to Julian Saunders, J., (2016) *"Some categories (beauty, gaming, new*

technologies of all types) have been transformed." YouTube as of 2016 had over 400 hours of video content uploaded every minute with over a billion users.

The researcher concluded from this sub-heading that it is clear the participants hesitate before making a purchasing decision. Social media plays an important role today in guiding the steps to understand they need to purchase a game as gaming influencers and word of mouth can have an impact on the recognition of a videogame.

4.2.1.2   Awareness Of Videogames In The Marketplace

This sub-heading is based on how the six participants became aware of the latest and upcoming videogames in the marketplace before making a purchasing decision. Participant one explains throughout their answer that they become aware of the latest videogames in the marketplace through both traditional and digital marketing tools. They explain that a recent game released Horizon Forbidden West was all over their social media newsfeed and billboards on bus stops.

"I remember when the Horizon game came out the big billboard posters would be all over bus stops" they further state that they feel attacked by the marketing messages. *"As soon as I leave my house and go to get my bus for college of work it was the Horizon billboard and it's just feeling like I'm being kind of attacked in a way with that game"*(P1, Female). Having a balance between both traditional and digital marketing toward a target market can have its advantages and disadvantages as consumers can feel very overwhelmed with information.

According to TODOR, R.D. (2016) they suggest "*Others consider that traditional marketing is still very much used and digital marketing is combining very well with it".*

4.2.1.3   Influencer Marketing

The researcher asked each participant if they follow any video gaming influencers on social media to gain an understanding of how influencer marketing can impact the need for purchasing in the gaming industry. Participant five explains that they follow a gaming influencer known as Sniper Wolf that uses social media to post her gameplay of the latest and trending games in the marketplace. *"She plays games like Fortnite and other RPG games and I watch her play"* (P5, Male). Participant three suggested that they follow a range of

influencers on a social media platform that plays PlayStation games to see what are the latest games coming out and see the games in action before they feel the need to purchase. "*I would follow them to see their take on the best games coming out and where you can find the consoles and stuff like that.*"(P3, Male).

Four of the participants are aware of gaming influencers from scrolling on their social media newsfeed however they do not particularly follow and keep track of their content. Participant one said *"No one really specific I follow, I just kind of look more at the games more than the actual streamers and influencers. It's more the product I look at rather than the person."* (P1, Female).

According to Kolo, C. and Haumer, F., (2018), gaming influencers focus on events with 63% of videos shown by the influencers displaying some form of a gaming event. The age demographic that is the highest and follows the most gaming influencers and/or celebrities on social media are between the ages of 26-35 years old. In conclusion to this sub-heading, it is clear that social media and influencer marketing have the power to influencer the need for purchasing in today's time as brands can communicate engagingly with their target audience as influencers can promote and create visual content based on a videogame to entice viewers to feel the need to purchase.

4.2.2 OBJECTIVE 2: TO ASSESS HOW CONSUMERS SEARCH FOR INFORMATION ON THE LATEST VIDEOGAMES AND CONSOLES IN THE IRISH VIDEO GAMING MARKET

Objective two is based on how the participants each search for information on the latest videogames and consoles within the marketplace. This objective aims to gain assess how impactful searching for information before making a purchasing decision can be in the gaming industry.

4.2.2.1 Information Search

Each participant was asked a question on how they find any information on the current and upcoming video games in the marketplace. All six participants answered this question similarly stating they use the internet such as social media platforms and Google Search to find out any information on a game of their choice once they felt they needed to purchase it. Participant four states "*I would find information on social media platforms such*

as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram" (P4, Male) Participant three explains that they would look at the PlayStation store itself for information on games and they would also use social media platforms to look for information. *"I would look on the PlayStation itself and I would look at various sites like Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook as a lot of gameplay would be shown on them and a lot of upcoming games coming out would be down on them with release dates and people talking about it and going through each step of the game"* (P3, Male)

According to Hunjet, A., Kozina, G. and Vuković, D., (2019), most consumers in modern times search online for recommendations before making a purchasing decision and buying a new product. Customers gather information from other customers by wanting to learn about their experiences before making their decision to purchase. *"Communication on social media is a major determinant in making the final customer choice"*.

4.2.2.2 Accessibility Through Search

After each participant explained how they gather information on current and upcoming videogames in their purchasing search the researcher asked them a question on how easy is this information to access. All six participants suggested that finding information on video games through the use of technology and the internet is easy to find and can happen in an instant. According to participant two *"It's quite easy to read this information particularly when you know what you're looking for".* (P2, Female).

4.2.2.3 Advantages & Disadvantages of Searching

Searching before purchasing a product can have advantages and disadvantages throughout the video gaming industry. The researcher asked each participant do they think it's a good or a bad thing to search for information before making a purchase. Participant two suggested that searching for information is a good thing stating *"I think it's a good thing because games are very expensive and I don't want to waste my money on buying them"* (P2, Female) they also explained that spoilers can be a problem throughout the gaming industry as *"Spoilers can ruin the game for me"*(P2, Female).

As mentioned by Thim, A., (2018) spoilers can reduce enjoyment for the user if presented before commencing the story. They also suggest that "*Spoilers make stories less suspenseful and less fun to experience*".

Participant four makes a point in their answer that in-store purchasing has not got the same effect as purchasing online as in-store has limited information such as the videogame box "*You go into shops and you are just looking at the box and it might give you a quick paragraph of what it is, you actually won't get to see much of the gameplay itself in action like you would if you were to search on the internet using the social media platforms*" (P4, Male). In-store purchasing may have its advantages as well as disadvantages as brands may use stores to engage and grasp the attention of their target market through the point of purchase.

As defined by Warc.com. (2022) "*Point of purchase (POP) and in-store is shopper marketing activities that happen at the time and place where a purchase is made.*" Point of purchase can also be on an electronic store however this method can be overwhelming for consumers as they may be targeted with numerous advertisements throughout their time on social media.

4.2.3 OBJECTIVE 3: TO EXPLORE HOW CONSUMERS EVALUATE ALTERNATIVE VIDEO GAMING CONSOLES THROUGH THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The goal of this objective was to gain an understanding of how consumers use social media to impact their purchasing decision throughout the gaming industry.

4.2.3.1 *Brand Loyalty*

The data collected for this sub-heading was based on asking the participants what gaming companies they follow on social media and why they follow this particular company. The reason for asking this question is to explore how the participants view the social media channels when comparing alternative games in the industry. Nutt, P.C., (1998) explains that strategic decision-making may often be used when evaluating any alternatives. All six participants collectively follow the video gaming company PlayStation on social media.

Brand loyalty was a common answer throughout this question with three of the participants stating they would follow a brand/company on social media to which they are loyal. Solomon, M.R. (2016) suggests when a consumer is involved at a high level with a product they have purchased this may explain that he/she exhibits a form of brand loyalty and this has the motivation to entice consumers to consider alternatives in the marketplace.

Participant four states in their answer *"PlayStation was my choice and network console growing up, they'd be the ones I would follow"*(P4, Male). Participant five answered that they follow a gaming company known as 'Square Enix' as they are loyal to this company and the games they produce. *"I follow them as they make games I play such as Final Fantasy, I follow them on social media and subscribe to their channels to find out in the next couple of months what's coming out and when they're gonna release dates"*(P5, Male).

For a brand to remain in its target market's mind it must be in its consumer's evoked set. An evoked is a set of alternative brands a consumer may have when going to make a purchasing decision, consumers may have a small number of brands in their evoked set. Participant three suggested that they have an evoked set when it comes to evaluating their decision *"I follow Nintendo, PlayStation Sony and Xbox, I would follow them mostly as they are the consoles I would look into more as they provide most of the games I play"* (P3, Male).

4.2.3.2   Content Marketing

The six participants each explained that they follow gaming companies on social media platforms with Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook as the three most popular channels. Gaming companies use social media to post and share visual content with their followers to create hype based on an upcoming game. Participant three states *"The live gameplay of people actually playing the games is quite useful."* (P3, Male) Participant two also explains *"PlayStation give snippets of the gameplay and trailers about the game and this would impact my decision on if I would go and purchase or not"* (P2, Female).

According to Pavel, C., (2014) customers like images the most when it comes to visual content. They further suggest that *"Marketers who are embracing visual content are seeing huge returns in terms of customers and of course, revenue"*. Technology has made it easier than ever for brands to share visual aids with innovative storytelling with their

followers. Customers are more interested in viewing information rather than reading text. Pavel, C., (2014) explains that 90% of information to the human brain is visual with visuals processing around 60,000 times faster compared to reading text.

4.2.3.3   Evaluation Through Social Media

The data collected here is based on how the participants use social media to evaluate any alternative videogames. Collectively the participants agreed that social media platforms are an effective tool for comparing alternative videogames through the use of electronic word of mouth to evaluate what other customers are saying about a videogame. Participant two stated, "*Instagram and Twitter is great as you would get a lot of people making statements about the games and I would compare both reviews on them*" (P2, Female). Participant three explains "*I would use Twitter or Facebook more as there would be a lot more talk on the games itself with a lot more people commenting there compared to Instagram*"(P3, Male).

(Jalilvand, M.R., Esfahani, S.S. and Samiei, N., 2011) Electronic word of mouth is a powerful tool for brands to get their followers to engage in conversation on their products/services. The internet and social media have opened many doors of communication for brands and their consumers allowing them to share information from a B2C and C2C perspective.

4.2.4   OBJECTIVE 4: TO UNDERSTAND HOW CONSUMERS MAKE THEIR PURCHASING DECISIONS IN THE VIDEO GAMING INDUSTRY IN IRELAND

This objective was used to gain an understanding of how consumers that play video games make their final purchasing decision.

4.2.4.1   Power of Online Reviews

Online reviews made by customers are a type of electronic word of mouth and may involve negative or positive comments made by customers that had a previous experience with a product/service. Reviews can be helpful for customers as they can impact their decision-making on purchasing as it provides how previous customers experienced the product/service in the past. According to Jalilvand, M.R., Esfahani, S.S. and Samiei, N., (2011) "*An online consumer review as a route for social influence plays two roles (informant and recommender). As an informant, online consumer reviews deliver additional user-*

oriented information. As a recommender, they provide either a positive or negative signal of product popularity". Participant two answered *"Everybody has different views on games so no it wouldn't really influence me. If I really like the game I would buy it myself"* (P2, Female) Participant three said *"It would as it would show you what you're getting into before you purchase it. If a lot of people didn't like the game I wouldn't purchase it"* (P3, Male)

Jiménez, F.R. and Mendoza, N.A., (2013) explain that online reviews are content written by customers through the use of the internet and it is single handily the most important form of electronic word of mouth. They further suggest that customers shopping online rely heavily on reading online reviews before making their final purchasing decision.

4.2.4.2 *Purchasing Decisions Within The Gaming Industry*

The data collected for this sub-heading is based on a question the researcher asked the participants if a negative review on social media would impact their decision to purchase a videogame in the future. Participant three stated *"A negative review would push me away from purchasing it because they are quite expensive at the moment." (P3, Male).* Five of the participants explained that a negative review would impact their decision to purchase however participant one stated that a negative review would not impact their decision to purchase explaining *"No, well it would kind of make me curious to be like why? I'm a bit more opened minded to gaming so the opinions of others don't really affect me"* (P1, Female).

4.2.4.3 *Gaming Perks*

The researcher asked each participant if there were any additional perks they receive from a gaming brand that would make them re-purchase again in the future. Participant three explained how PlayStation have a range of perks available for their customers. *"PlayStation would show off their free games on their social media that would influence me to get more games of them and continue playing with their networks"*(P3, Male).

Participant four also spoke about the PlayStation brand stating *"PlayStation are great for it as you have the bundle deals if you go to buy the game early before release they give you the bigger package deals"* (P4, Male). They further explain the deals they received when pre-purchasing FIFA football games each year directly on the PlayStation store to receive

additional players and perks for in-game. According to Lisjak, M., Bonezzi, A., and Rucker, D.D., (2021) perks are a term mostly used when consumers refer to additional gifts or benefits that are given to customers ranging from free items and so on. Throughout the gaming industry loyal gamers receive perks and gifts from companies such as PlayStation as the brand provides a subscription-based service that gifts customers free games each month and exclusive discounts to purchase on their e-commerce store.

4.2.5 OBJECTIVE 5: TO EXAMINE HOW CONSUMERS USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO CONDUCT POST-PURCHASING EVALUATIONS IN THE IRISH VIDEO GAMING MARKET

The data collected throughout this objective are based on what post-purchasing messages the participants receive after they have purchased a video game online. This objective is to analyze how impactful post-purchasing messages are for enticing a consumer to re-purchase again in the future.

4.2.5.1 Post-Purchasing Messages

This sub-heading was based on asking the participants to explain any post-purchasing messages they have received in the past from a video gaming company after they have purchased online from them. Solomon, M.R. (2016), explains that post-purchase experiences play an important role in consumers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a product/service they have purchased. Post-purchasing evaluations can impact how consumers purchase in the future if they will re-purchase again with the same brand. According to Solomon, M.R. (2016) "*Post-purchase evaluation closes the loop; it occurs when we experience the product or service we selected and decide whether it meets our expectations*".

When asked the question for this objective on what post-purchasing messages they have received after purchasing online participant four stated, *"Last time I purchased a game online I got quick message to write a review of how good and how easy the process was of ordering online and I found it extremely easy to order online compared to in-store as it downloads directly onto your console itself".* (P4, Male).

For a brand to reach out to previous customers with marketing messages and follow-up material this can benefit how the consumer evaluates the experience. Participant six stated, "*On the PlayStation store they generally send you a confirmation e-mail and then they might*

send you a few more emails advertising similar new games as well". (P6, Female). Participant one also suggested *"I get promotional emails on my email saying this is coming out you will have to have a look at this" "I remember when I purchased the Sims game I received an email with visuals displaying games similar to The Sims"* (P1, Female)

4.2.5.2   Pre-purchasing

Participant one discussed how 'Sale and Excitement' are the main factors evaluating their need to purchase again from a brand. "*Sale, and keeping that excitement about games, I'm not just talking about advertising itself just the actual gaming experience"*(P1, Female) while participants three and four explained that pre-ordering video games and receiving additional package deals is how a brand would entice them to pre-purchase again in the future.

Participant three discussed *"They would add on extra bits, so they would do a deluxe version to the game and if you pre-ordered the game you would only get them extra bits"* (P3, Male) with participant four stating *"Those package deals that you get from ordering early and pre-ordering game is very enticing to want to get in there before everyone else without going into the shop"* (P4, Male). Game Preorders. (2022) explain that pre-ordering video games give the consumer additional bonuses, and collectibles and save some money in the process. Gaming companies give their customers who pre-order the game exclusive content by shipping or downloading the game before it's released fully to the public.

4.2.5.3   Reviewing Videogames

Hu, N., Liu, L., and Zhang, J.J., (2008) explain that online reviews on products created by previous customers who have recently purchased a product or used a service have become one of the major sources of information by consumers and marketers searching for product quality. When asked the question if they would use social media to post a review of a video game they recently purchased participant three said *"I would because as I said I like myself to see beforehand what other people think of the game. If they have purchased it. So I would put up a review myself"*. (P3, Male)

Participant four also said yes to the answer *"Yes, I would, especially if I really liked the game, I would tell everyone how good the game was and tell everybody that they should go out and purchase and see what it's like for themselves"* (P4, Male). Creating reviews on products purchased in the past can play an important role in conducting any post-purchasing evaluations in the video gaming industry as consumers use social media to interact and share how they felt playing a game and this can impact if a customer would re-purchase again with the same company or go to a competitor brand.

5 Chapter 5: Conclusions And Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion Overview

For this dissertation, the researcher assessed up-to-date literature on the video gaming industry and how social media marketing can impact purchasing decisions in the consumer decision-making process. The limitations related to academic literature were discussed in this dissertation. The overall aim of the objectives was to examine how consumers make their purchasing decisions in the video gaming industry with a detailed examination of the steps and stages a consumer goes through on their journey. By analyzing the objectives the researcher could look at the gaps in the literature that may need an update. The objectives explained throughout this dissertation were used to conduct the research question.

The data collected through the in-depth qualitative measures in this dissertation suggest that consumers use social media to research video games before purchasing as games are costly. The secondary data looked at does not mention entirely the steps consumers take to research information on an upcoming video game or console. One of the gaps mentioned in Chapter 1: Introduction suggests that there is no link between social media marketing and the video gaming industry in current literature.

The gaps in current literature as previously explained in detail throughout Chapter 2: A literature review was concluded from the collected data through academic and industrial secondary research. The three sub-headings recommended for examination are *1. Social Media Marketing In The Gaming Industry, 2. The Effect of Costing* and *3. The Power of Word of Mouth in Consumer Purchasing Decisions.*

5.1.1 Social Media Marketing In The Gaming Industry

Current literature provides inadequate information on the power social media marketing provides for the video gaming industry to reach customers and create hype on an upcoming game or console by gaming companies. The literature has a lot of information on the power of social media marketing however there is not enough literacy on social media combined with video games. Each participant interviewed for this dissertation's data collection stated they follow a video gaming company on social media and use social media platforms to research information before purchasing a game of their choice. (Nazir, M.,

2016), Social media is a powerful marketing tool at the current time and can reach millions of potential customers in an instant with over 2 billion users globally equivalent to 31% of the global population.

Bankov, Boris. (2019) explains one of the biggest factors for a video game's success is the social element of sharing through the use of social media. They further suggest that gaming companies each year are constantly adjusting to the rise of technology and social media and are researching new ways to attract potential customers to purchase from them. An example of a video game that collaborates directly with the social media platform Twitter is Warcraft. The popular video game grants the user the ability to share screenshots directly from the game to their followers on Twitter. Giving the user permission to share their gameplay directly on social media platforms is known as UGC (User Generated Content) and can look authentic and generate conversations based on the game shared.

5.1.2   The Effect of Costing

When each participant was asked the steps they take before making their final purchasing decision to buy a video game of their choice each participant stated that video games are costly and it is important to research before making the final decision. According to Morrison, D., (2022), the average price for a video game currently varies from around 40 – 100 US Dollars as the gaming companies that create the video games need funding for R&D, costing of running the company and employees, marketing a video game and so on. As video games are at a high premium price, gaming companies must create games that are a value for money for their customers with hours of enjoyment that may result in customers sharing their experiences on social media with one another.

Fahy, J. and Jobber, D. (2015) explain that setting prices is an important decision made by organizations and may involve several factors. A positioning strategy is one of the most important factors any organization may face before setting a price on a product or service to their target audience. "*Price can be used to convey a differential advantage and to appeal to a certain market segment*". Pricing can be known as a very powerful positioning tool as it can be associated with quality. Fahy, J. and Jobber, D. (2015) discuss Sony, PlayStation 3 console as the brand previously has a successful launch with the 2nd console in

the marketplace. The Sony brand priced the PlayStation 3 console at 600 US Dollars compared to their competitors Xbox pricing their console at the time at 600 US Dollars and the Nintendo Wii console at 249 US Dollars. As the Sony, PlayStation 3 console began as the highest-priced console compared to competitors in the marketplace, the following year the console dropped in price to 399 US Dollars as it fell to number three in the marketplace due to the price alone.

5.1.3 The Power of Word of Mouth in Consumer Purchasing Decisions

Word of mouth and electronic word of mouth plays an important role in influencing consumers to purchase a video game. Each participant interviewed stated they would look at previous customer reviews before making a final purchasing decision either by looking at the gameplay of the customer physically playing the game or reading an article posted on social media about the game itself. This is an important element in the success of a game in the industry as consumers would communicate through social media platforms and share their experiences based on a game they have played with their friends and followers. Social media gaming influencers can impact purchasing decisions especially the influencers with a large following such as Ninja. Ninja is known across the globe throughout the gaming industry as one of the most successful gamers with over 13 million followers on Instagram and over 18 million on the gaming platform Twitch. Gaming companies have the potential to collaborate with influencers to raise awareness of an upcoming game and create hype.

However, word of mouth may not always be based on a positive experience as customers may discuss the negative experience they may have had with a game and share it on their social media profiles and this may turn potential customers away from purchasing. Chiosa, Ana & Anastasiei, Bogdan. (2017) suggest that word of mouth can have a powerful influencer on consumer's behaviour. They continue to suggest that negative word of mouth through social media content has the potential to damage a brand's image and message. Negative word of mouth can be stronger than positive word of mouth and gaming companies must be aware of this as customers trust each other when it comes to spending time and money on a video game.

5.2   Recommendation

5.2.1   Recommendations For Future Research

This dissertation concluded a range of recommendations for future research. Qualitative research was used to conduct in-depth interviews with six participants to gain an understanding of the steps consumers take before purchasing a video game in Ireland between the ages of 20-35. As this research had a time constraint from May-August the researcher had limited time to interview a mass audience and gain insights from a wider demographic. A recommendation for future researchers is to broaden the demographic research by conducting qualitative research on a larger scale in terms of age groups and location. As the demographic interviewed for the data collection are between the ages of 20-35 years old they were mostly concerned about the cost of a video game compared to an older generation that may not be as concerned about the cost as they may be retired and may not use social media to research before purchasing. Interviewing an older generation may have a different data collection compared to a younger generation and this could be an interesting comparison for future research.

5.2.2   Recommendations For Professionals

There are quite a variety of recommendations the researcher can provide for future researchers however, to suggest any recommendations for professionals may be a challenge in the video gaming industry as there is a lack of academic literature in this industry. There are many areas in the video gaming industry to be investigated concerning the consumer decision-making process and how social media marketing can impact video gaming sales. The main objective of the purpose of this dissertation was to gain an understanding of how consumers are influenced to purchase video games and the steps they take after purchasing. This dissertation states that each participant interviewed was cautious of costing when purchasing as video games are expensive and they would use social media/the internet to research before deciding to purchase.

For future professionals to research in this industry they must look at all genders and age groups to gain a full understanding of the steps consumers take to purchase a video game. Video games can be known as a cliche male-dominated industry however this assumption is

inaccurate as Statista. (2022) suggest that in the year 2021 in the US alone there was a staggering 45% of female gamers actively playing video games.

5.3 Summary

In concluding this dissertation it is clear that there are gaps in video gaming academic literature concerning social media marketing and studying the journey a consumer takes before making a final purchasing decision and the steps they take after purchasing. As influencer marketing is on the rise through the use of electronic word of mouth, there is a lack of academic literature to co-exist with this which may be beneficial for future academics to research this gap in the literature.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Objective 1: To investigate how consumers recognise that they have a need to purchase upcoming videogames in the Irish video gaming market

Q1: Before you make your final purchase of a videogame of your choice what steps do you take to help guide you towards your purchasing decision?

Q2: How do you become aware of the latest videogames and consoles in the marketplace?

Q3: Do you follow any video gaming influencers on social media? If so, who and what do they post to attract you to follow them?

Objective 2: To assess how consumers search for information on the latest videogames and consoles in the Irish video gaming market

Q4: Where do you find information on current and upcoming video games?

Q5: How easy is this information to access?

Q6: Do you feel searching for information before purchasing an upcoming game/console is a good or bad thing? Can you elaborate?

Objective 3: To explore how consumers evaluate alternative video gaming consoles through the use of social media

Q7: What video gaming companies do you follow on social media? And why?

Q8: How do gaming companies use social media to impact your decision to purchase a video game? Can you give an example?

Q9: What social media platforms do you used the most in terms of evaluating any alternative videogames? Are they effective?

Objective 4: To understand how consumers make their purchasing decisions in the video gaming industry in Ireland

Q10: Would reviews on the latest video games on social media influence your purchasing decision?

Q11: Would a negative review on social media impact your decision on purchasing a video game?

Q12: Do gaming companies you follow on social media and play on a regular basis have any additional perks that make you want to purchase again

Objective 5: To examine how consumers use social media to conduct post-purchasing evaluations in the Irish video gaming market

Q13: Have you recently purchased a video game online? Can you explain any post-purchasing messages you have received from the brand?

Q14: What have video gaming brands done in the past to entice you to pre-purchase again from them?

Q15: Would you use social media to post a review on a videogame you recently purchased?

Participant Information Sheet

"The impact of social media on the consumer decision making process in the gaming industry. An analysis on male and female gamers in Ireland between the ages of 20-35."

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT

My name is Jennifer O'Brien I am an MSc in Marketing student at National College of Ireland and this study is based on how social media is used to persuade consumers to purchase videogames in Ireland. The aim from this research is to gain an understanding on how gamers use and engage with videogaming brands across social media platforms.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

This interview will include topics around social media and gaming based on 5 objectives. The interview itself will include 16 questions and I will use Microsoft Team recording and transcripts to record each interview for further use.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?

You have been selected for this research as you are a gamer and currently live in Ireland and you are in the age demographic I am researching.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?

This research is voluntary and you have the right to refuse any participation or you can refuse to answer any of the following questions at any time.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

The benefits for partaking in this interview are to gain a deeper understanding on the potential benefits of using social media to promote videogames to an audience for the purpose of my dissertation research & findings section. If any possible physical or psychological harm may commence throughout this process I will try my best to help if a situation should arise.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

This interview will be completely confidential and all participants personal information will remain completely anonymous throughout the dissertation. Each participant must complete a form of signed consent prior to commencing with the interview as I will store and use recorded information.

HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?

Each interview will be recorded through Microsoft teams and stored on a folder in Dropbox. Each recording and signed consent form will be retained in a confidential folder on Dropbox where only I can access and when my Masters is completed this information will be removed. Under freedom of information legalisation you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

This study is only for the purpose of my dissertation and nothing more.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

If you wish to receive any further information on the details of my dissertation please contact the researcher Jennifer O'Brien.

[THANK YOU]

Below are the **five objectives** based around my research that contain the 16 questions I am going to ask you throughout the process of this interview:

Objective 1: *To investigate how consumers recognise that they have a need to purchase upcoming videogames in the Irish videogaming market*

Before you make your final purchase of a videogame of your choice what steps do you take to help guide you towards your purchasing decision?

How do you become aware of the latest videogames and consoles in the marketplace?

Do you follow any videogaming influencers on social media? If so, who and what do they post to attract you to follow them?

Objective 2: *To assess how consumers search for information on the latest videogames and consoles in the Irish videogaming market*

Where do you find information on current and upcoming video games?

How easy is this information to access?

Do you feel searching information before purchasing a upcoming game/console is a good or bad thing? Can you elaborate?

Objective 3: *To explore how consumers evaluate alternative videogaming consoles through the use of social media*

What videogaming companies do you follow on social media? And why?

How do gaming companies use social media to impact your decision to purchase a videogame? Can you give an example?

What social media platforms do you used the most in terms of evaluating any alternative videogames? Are they effective?

Objective 4: *To understand how consumers make their purchasing decisions in the videogaming industry in Ireland*

Would reviews on the latest videogames on social media influence your purchasing decision?

Would a negative review on social media impact your decision on purchasing a videogame?

Do gaming companies you follow on social media and play on a regular basis have any additional perks that make you want to purchase again

Objective 5: *To examine how consumers use social media to conduct post purchasing evaluations in the Irish videogaming market*

Have you recently purchased a videogame online? Can you explain any post purchasing messages you have received from the brand?

What have videogaming brand done in the past to entice you to pre purchase again from them?

Would you use social media to post a review on a videogame you recently purchased?

Would you follow a video gaming brand on social media and re-purchase from them in the future based on a successful experience in the past