The importance of Discord
for the FFXIV brand engagement

A case study of the FFXIV Discord server

Communication studies: Project report

Supervisor:
Jonas Agerbæk Jeppesen

Group:
Ieva Vedeikytė (66341)
Kamila Lechmanová (66284)

Number of characters:
97545

Abstract

The technological evolution of communication software has a direct impact on the ways in which communities form. One of the newest additions is Discord. Discord enabled the creation of millions of new online communities ranging from study clubs to gaming groups where people socialize and share their interests. In this paper, we will shed light on the gaming community of the popular MMORPG game FinalFantasy14 to see just how much a member-organized FFXIV Discord server contributes to members' overall FinalFantasy brand experience. In order to understand the subjective individual experience, we adopted phenomenology with an abductive approach as we consider results to be contemporary. Additionally, to comprehend how members use the Discord as a communication medium and whether it affects their brand engagement we utilized the classical Uses & Gratification theory in combination with the Customer Brand Engagement theory. The results showed that the FFXIV Discord server offers a wide array of options that satisfy its members to an extent of partially influencing their engagement with the FFXIV.

Keywords: online gaming community, phenomenology, uses & gratification, customer brand engagement, media study

Glossary

FFXIV

FFXIV is an abbreviation of a massively multiplayer online role-playing game developed and published by Square Enix (Kim, 2021).

Free Company (FC)

Free company, or an FC, is a player-run organization that shares items or in-game currency with its members (About Free Companies | FINAL FANTASY XIV, The Lodestone, n.d.). Additionally, as like-minded players assimilate, thanks to sharing resources they can accomplish activities that would be difficult or impossible for a single player. FCs have a leader who is able to invite new members to join (Ibid.). Moreover, FC can also purchase in-game estates which can act as in-game headquarters to organize events for its members (Ibid.). FCs also have socializing functions as the FC leaders tend to be selective about who they invite into their FCs.

MMORPG

MMORPG is an abbreviation derived from ''massively multiplayer online role-playing game'' (Definition of MMORPG, 2022). Games considered to be MMORPGs are usually story-driven online video games, where players take on a persona of an in-game character situated in a fantasy world while interacting with other players online (Ibid.).

Mentor

A FFXIV player can become a Mentor to help other FFXIV players in-game (How to become a mentor in Final Fantasy XIV, 2021).

Casual player

An individual who plays games in a non-competitive manner is called a casual gamer. These players focus on the social aspects of the game instead of perfecting their gameplay (Fire, 2014). Since they do not consider the game as their first priority, their playtime fluctuates as well (Ibid.).

Discord bot

A Discord bot is an AI-driven tool that can help automate tasks on the Discord server (Santora, 2021). For instance, moderation tasks such as censoring offensive words, as well as providing music, polls, mini-games, giveaways, etc. (Ibid.).

Meme

Based on a professor of linguistics Kirby Conrod (Benveniste, 2022), a meme is a self-replicating piece of information, usually an inside joke. The joke self-replicates as humans like to share and repeat information (Ibid.).

IP

IP stands for ''Intellectual Property'' (Romero, 2016). It is associated with the legal term ''Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs)'' that protect artistic works such as books, inventions, designs, symbols, and even games (Ibid.).

VC

VC or a ''voice chat'' is a Discord function where people can join a voice chat channel on a Discord server to talk, share their screen, or watch other people stream (Beginner's Guide to Discord, 2022).

Live letter

Is a live stream on FinalFantasyXIV's Youtube channel, where developers share upcoming content updates for the FFXIV game (FINAL FANTASY XIV Letter from the Producer LIVE Part LXIX, 2022).

Discord Partner

Discord partner is a partner program for various fan-made Discord servers that are not managed by companies (Partner with Discord, n.d.). These servers get unique branding options such as custom URL, server banner, or invite splash art (Ibid.). Additionally, the server Admins will receive Discord Nitros which can be distributed to their members (Ibid.).

Discord verified

Discord verified program is a badge system for Discord servers which indicates that these are official places for communities to gather (Verify Your Server | Server Verification |

Discord, n.d.). These Discords obtain analytics called Server Insights where companies can see where their users are coming from and what are the most popular channels (Ibid).

Nitro booster

Discord Nitro Booster is a person who has ''Discord Nitro'' (Nitro Benefits and Features | Discord, n.d.). Discord Nitro is a paid status through which users can obtain additional features such as custom emojis, bigger file uploads, animated avatars, etc. (Ibid.). Most importantly users who have this paid feature are called Nitro Boosters and they can ''boost'' a Discord server to broaden the number of emoji slots, audio quality, live stream quality, animated server icons, custom role icons, etc. (Server Boosting FAQ, 2022).

Table of content

Introduction

When the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 shook the world, the entertainment industry took a hit. While cinemas, shops, and other leisure venues closed in order to prevent the spreading of the disease, many people went back to home entertainment during periods of self-isolation. The video game industry experienced a significant boom during this period, which resulted in a record number of online game users on platforms such as Steam during the outbreak (Batchelor, 2020). According to the publisher Valve, Steam reached a new concurrent online user record of 20 million during the pandemic, with 6.2 million users currently in-game (Twitter, 2020). Later on, the numbers peaked at 29 million (Steam: Game and Player Statistics, 2022). Consequently, the video game industry exceeded the film revenue in 2020 with $145.7 billion and continued to experience its momentum after COVID lockdowns as well (Richter, 2020). Whether people chose to play solo or multiplayer games, they most likely found themselves lacking socialization which affected their well-being (Barr and Copeland-Stewart, 2021). That is where the gaming communities fill these needs and much more. These online communities can be found on various websites, social media such as Twitter, Instagram, Discord, or Facebook, forums like Reddit or IGN, or message boards where one can find and engage with fellow gamers online. What is more, online communities are meant to enrich the gamer's experience by becoming an information source for everything ranging from software troubleshooting, and hardware issues, to guidelines on how to improve and climb leaderboards. Therefore, unlike the other forms of online communities, the online gamer communities tend to be diverse and highly complex socio-technological structures (Fromme, Jörissen, and Unger, 2009). They are centered around an organization to exchange communication about game-related events and issues, or an exchange of virtual assets (Ibid.).

With that being said, it is often the case that players find themselves to be loyal to one game or multiple games from one developer. Consequently, specific online communities are formed to offer insights and all of the above to socialize and theory-craft about their favorite game. A handful of the most popular developers include Ubisoft, EA, Blizzard Entertainment, Square Enix, Kakao Games, Riot Games, and many more. While these gaming communities certainly bring a lot of enrichment to the table, not all of them offer a healthy culture. Each multiplayer game has its own kind of culture and some are described as "toxic". These toxic gaming communities can add to a fall of a game itself, or result in bullying of members as harassment exists in an online space as well (Nast, 2022). For instance, the notoriously known game League of Legends from the Riot Games developer is

widely known in the world to have the most toxic community (Brinks, 2020). Artificial intelligence software from IBM, IBM Toxic Comment Classifier, tried to identify toxic gamer communities through 100 Reddit sub-forums based on their comment sections. The process included over 1.3 million comments, and r/leagueoflegends appeared in the top 10, along with r/DotA2, r/playdaytheheist, or r/ModernWarfare (Murray, 2020). There are various factors affecting the gaming community culture, for instance, the competitiveness of the game. When looking at League of Legends, the game has 67 million players, therefore the variables affecting the cultural development vary (Maher, 2016). Consequently, the developers perceive hostile behaviors as an obstacle in order to attract new players or retain the current ones (Ibid.). Thus, companies try to take precautions and impose developing systems to combat antisocial behavior such as racism, homophobia, and misogyny in the in-game chat (Ibid.).

However, can companies truly control in what manner players communicate to help their game environment? In recent years various gaming communities started to assemble on their own, sharing their resources and passion with other gamers. One of the platforms that enabled it was Discord. Discord became a place where member-made communities interacted, connected with others, and had the ability to set their own policies concerning interaction to ensure non-toxic behavior if desired (Community Guidelines | Discord, 2022). The platform became an essential way for gamers to interact, essentially becoming a part of gaming itself (Park, 2022).

Problem area

With the evolution of communication software, new ways of community formations emerged. In general, media stand at the center of major developments in modern societies, and as such, we will focus on one of the newest additions, Discord (Flew, T., 2005, p.1). Discord as the new communication service provider started to be widely used by gaming communities and gamers of all sorts to socialize and share their interests. In this paper, we aim to look at one of the member-established Discord communities of Square Enix games, FinalFantasyXIV (FFXIV). The server provides a space for the community members to engage in social interactions, find others to spend time with, and share user-generated content such as drawings, music, or knowledge about the game. FFXIV is identified as an MMORPG, which means that people are encouraged to do the game content in groups in order to beat the game (MMORPG Guide, 2022). Therefore, one of the key aspects of the

game is socialization and a sense of community for players to attain when playing.

In this paper, we argue that players attain the feeling of a community through these member-established Discord servers, and consequently become more inclined to engage with the game. We want to unveil why and how FFXIV Discord members utilize the FFXIV Discord server, especially since the server offers a massive variety of experiences the players have on top of the in-game content. Additionally, the game functions on a monthly subscription model, therefore it is imperative to keep the players engaged for longer periods of time in order for the game to be successful. Subsequently, MMORPG games need to take into account that players can run out of content to play after finishing the game story. For instance, the base game story in FFXIV is said to be around 200 hours long, while each year new downloadable content for purchase is released which is approximately 50 hours long (MSQ length and hours spent, 2019). According to Statista, an average gamer plays for at least 8 hours a week (Clement, 2021). Thus, it would roughly take 6 months to finish the base story and around a month to play the new content each year. In conclusion, players are immersed in the gameplay for approximately a month until they start to look for a community to find additional activities to do with other people. If we take into consideration that a new story releases once a year, finding a community is an important component that keeps users engaged with the game for the next 11 months. In order to grasp the extent to which the gaming community adds value to the brand, we decided to observe the community of the FFXIV media Discord server called "Final Fantasy XIV". Not only do we aim to specify concrete values the community members perceive, but also how these values contribute to the brand power.

Problem formulation

To explore whether a member-established gaming community brings any value and supports the engagement of the FFXIV game we will conduct a case study of the FFXIV Discord community. With the results, we will fill in the knowledge gap of how this particular gaming community makes sense of the FFXIV Discord server.

Finally, a research question based on the above-mentioned case has been formed:

"To what extent does the FFXIV Discord server affect the brand engagement of the Square Enix game FFXIV?"

Moreover, to better comprehend the complexity of the case, the following sub-questions are presented:

1. ***What motivates the FFXIV gaming community to engage with the FFXIV Discord server?***
2. ***How did the FFXIV Discord server elevate the FFXIV gaming experience for the FFXIV gamers?***

Study background

Discord

Discord is a voice, video, and text communication social media platform used to talk with friends and communities (Discord | Your Place to Talk and Hang Out, n.d.). The software focuses on creating a space to belong to and making it easier to talk to people (Ibid.). Moreover, the service started as a communication solution for people who played video games online but evolved into an online space where different communities can create their own place and find a feeling of belonging.

Final Fantasy XIV

The game was produced by Naoki Yoshida and released worldwide for personal computers (PC), PlayStation4, PlayStation 5, and macOS (Kim, 2021). The game's initial release in 2010 referred to as ''A Realm Reborn'' (ARR) was an all-around failure due to its outdated graphics, glitches, and poor gameplay controls (LIN, 2015). The Square Enix president Yoichi Wada appointed a new team led by Naoki Yoshida who featured a new game engine, upgraded server infrastructure, and overhauled gameplay, interface, and the story itself (Ibid.). This revamped version launched in 2013 which raised the company's profitability with over 24 million registered players by 2021 (Kim, 2021). FinalFantasyXIV has become the most profitable FinalFantasy game to date. Additionally, the game has four expansion packs: Heavensward which released in 2015, Stormblood released in 2017, Shadowbringers in 2019, and the latest being Endwalker from 2021 (FINAL FANTASY XIV,

n.d.). In this paper, we consider the FinalFantasy14 as a brand, as the brand is considered a type of product created by Square Enix under the FinalFantasy trademark franchise name.

FinalFantasyXIV Discord server

The FinalFantasyXIV (FFXIV) Discord server is a Reddit member-initiated community, which was established by, and remains managed by these members who are not associated with the Square Enix company (Join the Final Fantasy XIV Discord Server!, n.d.). Its channels are dedicated to all aspects of the FFXIV game, with a focus on helping new and returning players (Ibid.). These channels range from FFXIV news, trivia, quizzes, every in-game role, endgame, and lore discussion, to even FC recruiting (Ibid.). Members can even share their own content in the form of art, music, pictures, or in-game screenshots on dedicated channels (Ibid.). Additionally, the FFXIV Discord members can engage in non-related FFXIV channels such as other games, technology, memes, animal pictures, or culinary (Ibid.). Additionally, the server has its own rules and policies the members need to follow such as being respectful, using dedicated channels appropriately, or do's and don'ts which are described in detail in the ''about-this-server'' channel (Ibid.). Moreover, as the Discord server has a massive number of users, it also has a big variety of Discord Moderation Staff members, whose responsibilities can be found in the same channel as above mentioned (Ibid.). Lastly, the server also gathers feedback from its members with suggestions or criticism (Ibid.).

Literature review

Defining fan studies

The field of fan study arose three decades ago although the definition varies within the scholarly community: the field is concretized over time, thus the newly occurred methodological approaches, fandoms, or new issues could be incorporated and tackled (Booth, 2018, p. 2). Duffet (2013, p. 13) proposes a definition of a fan as a person with a deep, emotional, and positive conviction about someone or something famous usually expressed through style or creativity. The mass media allow fans to create identities closely wrapped up within the aspect they are on about. (Ibid.). However, Jenkins (in Booth, 2018, p. 16) stresses that being a fan does not necessarily require one to form shared thinking with the

broader audience. By that, fans can exist as separate entities. On the other hand, when the formed fan identity is interchanged among others, claiming the same identity, and sharing traditions, and practices, it is understood as a fandom.

The exploitation and access to current media networks allow fandoms to engage in a participatory culture that provides low barriers for a strong artistic engagement within the society (Jenkins in Booth, 2018, p. 18). Notably, the digital networks altered the ways the culture operates by enhancing meaningful exchanges among individuals who would not encounter each other another way (Jenkins in Booth, 2018, p. 18). Being a part of such a community allows one to practice their passions, and knowledge, foster skills, and experiment.

Branding

The notion of branding was present ever since the Industrial Revolution began mass production: early branding practices would include burning out the sign, e.g. on a cattle to mark the brand's name and highlight its quality (Hansen, 2021, p. 2). Modern marketing seems to have maintained a similar notion as the American Marketing Association (2021) defines it: "A brand is a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers". The development of branding helped to decrease excessive focus from the retailer to increase the importance of the commodity itself or the manufacturer that produces it - the name of the brand became a significant tool for the companies to reach the end customer and expand the range of the production from local to national to, finally, international level (Hansen, 2021, p. 3).

USP and ESP

One of the branding characteristics is to send out signals to the customer base of the production emphasizing either its uniqueness and core features, or communicating the immaterial value of the commodity (Ibid.). A unique selling proposition (USP) is concerned with communicating a product's superior qualities and is related to innovative solutions regarding producing new and improved products that could outshine competitors. However, as technological supplies are increasing, they become easily accessible, thus the production becomes highly imitated making it difficult to stand out in the market (Ibid.). Hence, people tend to act rationally, meaning they will purchase the product with the best value at the best price (Ibid., p. 4). Although in reality, the concept of rationality can be questioned, the companies build the competitive advantage of emotional selling proposition (ESP). Hansen

(2021, p. 5) explains that once the product becomes a brand, it instantly holds multiple meanings emphasizing the symbolic value. Fundamentally, the notion of ESP refers to the immaterial brand's value, e.g. brand imagery, brand personality, or symbols, that make consumers feel in a certain, unique way when engaging with the brand and is not felt when using other brands.

Brand equity

Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as a set of assets and liabilities linked to the brand that differ from context to context, thus Aaker distinguishes them into five categories: brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets (patents, trademarks, etc.).

Brand equity provides information about the products and brand itself which helps the customers to interpret brand symbols better (Ibid). This affects their confidence and behavior towards the brand, ultimately leading to a better customer/user experience (Ibid.). When it comes to the value to the organizations, Aaker points out that brand equity can enhance the attraction of new customers, as well as retention of already existing ones. Another important aspect is brand equity in relation to brand loyalty. Essentially, the perceived quality and value of the brand enhances its equity leading to a higher brand loyalty also known as customers' tendency to maintain a positive, often long-term relationship with a brand (Ibid.). Finally, the brand equity asset can grant a competitive advantage that creates a tough market barrier for competitors since the consumers would engage more with the brand whose perceived value is higher compared with other brands (Ibid.).

Social influence and online communities

Historically, communities were considered as geographically bounded populations consisting of groups of people of different characteristics, such as age, race, sex, etc. (Anderson, 1983) The emergence of online communities helped detract the boundaries and the use of platforms like social media allowed to build 'imagined communities' of individuals following similar events and sharing common values (Ibid.). The essence of online communities is that even without physically knowing the members of the community, individuals connect due to shared beliefs, can feel a part of a common goal, and are enabled to conveniently share information and transfer social influence toward one another (Ozuem et al., 2021, p. 796).

When considering social influence, Kelman (1958) identified three levels of influence: compliance, identification, and integration. Individuals comply when adapting behaviors to gain rewards and avoid disapproval from the community. The identification stage refers to the individuals' acceptance of the source of influence to maintain desired relationships while integration happens once the individual accepts new behaviors and values within the community after recognizing its benefits. Moreover, scholars emphasize the correlation between the importance of a sense of belonging in the community and the brand value: it is recognized that communities that build a 'we' culture tend to have a stronger relationship within the consumer-members community than the consumer-firm relationship which as a result enhances brand equity and the perceived brand value (Ozeum, et al., 2021, p. 797).

Online game community

Hsu et al. (2007, p. 1644) in their study of consumer behavior, defined the online game community as a group of users who interact with each other via the use of the Internet, share common interests, develop relationships, and indulge in the need for entertainment of acting out different fantasy roles. Furthermore, scholars outlined two factors that play major roles in successful online game communities - sociability and usability. Sociability is concerned with interpersonal relationships and social interaction among players. While on the other hand, usability is related to the players' interaction with technologies and platforms allowing them to stream and participate in online games (Ibid.).

Preece (2001, p. 349) claimed that the two concepts are closely related as without the human-computer interface, human-human interrelation would not be possible, although she separates fundamental components for each. For instance, good sociability contains people who interact with each other, attain social roles, and exchange information; a purpose that provides community members with a reason of belonging; and policies - the language and protocols guiding user interaction. Subsequently, usability contains four components that address a software's role as a medium and as a space for social interaction. First, it eases dialogues and online interactions with other uses. Second, the information design grants access to easily readable and aesthetically pleasing information related to the gaming community. Third, it provides effortless navigation where users can move around and find what they need in the community and associated websites. And fourth, the download of the needed software allows access to the gaming community (Ibid.).

Brand communities

From the beginning of the 21st century, the brand communities have been researched and referred to as the ''Holy Grail of brand loyalty'' (Thompson & Sinha, 2008; McAlexander et al, 2002). The brand communities are taken as an instrument that can contribute to ''strengthening consumer - brand relationships''(Stokburger -Sauer, 2010), and its notion has been described by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) as ''specialized, non-geographically bound community'' with a set of social relationships among the brand fans. Kozinets (1999 in Constantin, Platon, and Orzan, 2014, p.124), emphasizes that brand communities are different from the general cultures of consumption which is based on why the members gather in the first place. While the members of the culture of consumption gather based on product, a brand community's essence is a particular brand attachment cause (Amine & Sitz 2004 in Constantin, Platon, and Orzan, 2014, p.124). Consequently, brand communities have the potential to increase the loyalty of their members and affect the adaptation of new products (Constantin, Platon, and Orzan, 2014, p.123). There are various scholars who identified different factors that motivate members to engage in these communities. For instance, Henning-Thurau (2004 in Ibid., p.125), described eight factors among which the social benefits are the most important. Other factors include venting negative feelings, caring for other members, self-enhancement, advice-seeking, economic benefits, platform assistance, and helping the company itself (Ibid.). On the other hand, Brodie (2011 in Ibid., p.125), identified five specific factors that reflect the reasons for member engagement applicable only in the online brand communities - learning, sharing, advocating for a brand, socializing, and co-developing where consumers contribute to the organizational growth. Based on the initial research, we have developed three hypotheses that will assist us to answer the main research question and will be reflected upon in the discussion section.

1. The brand's perceived value is higher when participants internalize the online brand community.

2. The brand's perceived value is lower when participants do not internalize the online brand community.

3. The brand's perceived value is not dependent on whether participants internalize the online brand community.

Theoretical framework

Consumer brand engagement

In recent times, the concept of consumer brand engagement (CBE) has been applied to multiple disciplines such as psychology, social sciences, politics, and business. Generally, the term 'engagement' has been present ever since the 17th century when explaining notions of legal obligations, employment duties, or betrothals (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). Over time, the notion of 'engagement' shifted from formal and forced to more discretionary interpretations emphasizing ideas of connection, attachment, and emotional involvement (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 254). Following recent presumptions, Brodie et al. (2011, p. 260) suggest that engagement could be understood as a context-dependent psychological state occurring out of consumer experience with a focal agent (e.g. brand) at a time of relational exchange. More explicitly the conceptualization of CBE is presented by Hollebeek et al., (2014, p. 154) as a positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity during/related to the consumer-brand interaction.

Indeed, Hollebeek et al., (2014) view CBE as a multidimensional concept corresponding to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral natures of engagement: 1) cognitive processing, 2) affection, and 3) activation.

The first dimension of cognitive processing is understood as a level of a consumer's brand-related thought processing and elaboration in consumer-brand interaction. Simply stating, it investigates the cognitive processes consumers incur when using or engaging with the brand. To imagine, Hollebeek et al., (2014) offer several assumptions from their research findings: using [brand] makes one think about it [brand]; using [brand] stimulates interest to learn more about it [brand], etc.

The second dimension of affection refers to the degree of a consumer's positive brand-related affect in a consumer-brand interaction. More particularly, the dimension is concerned with the emotional interaction consumers have when using/engaging with the brand. Hollebeek et al., (2014) offer assumptions such as: using [brand] makes one happy/proud/good/positive. Overall, within the second dimension, researchers aim to uncover positive emotions consumers have in association with a particular brand.

The third dimension of activation explains the level of a consumer's energy and time spent on a brand in a consumer-brand interaction. To be precise, within this dimension researchers try to uncover how consumers alter their behaviors/habits due to the brand they

are using/engaging with. For this, Hollebeek et al., (2014) propose the following assumptions: when engaging with [category], one relies on this [brand]; when engaging with [category], one spends much more time with this [brand] than others, etc.

Overall, the multidimensional concept of CBE will be utilized to gain insights of interview participants' relation with the FFXIV as a brand when uncovering the activities in relation to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activities. Our objective is to use the three dimensions within the concept to determine how engaged participants are with the brand based on thought processing, emotional attachment, and time commitment.

Uses and gratification theory

Simply stated the uses and gratification theory aims to explain how and based on what motives audiences engage with the media and what gratifications they derive out of the usage. Unlike other mass media-related communication theories (e.g. hypodermic needle theory), the uses and gratification theory does not rely on outlining the negative impact or manipulation of the audience. Contrary, the theory focuses on the motivation and positive outcomes recipients get from an active user of the media means (Griffin, 2012, p. 368). Initially, the theory was developed in the 1950s when its main research objectives were traditional media means such as television and radio broadcasts, their exposure, and their effect on individuals. In more recent Internet boom years the theory gained new significance.

Contemporary theorists propose five basic assumptions linked to the theory:

1. the audience is active, its media use is goal-oriented;

2. the audience members share a common link the gratification to a specific medium;

3. media outlets compete with other resources to satisfy needs;

4. people engaging with the media are aware of their interests and motives, therefore, can provide answers for inquiries;

5. only the audience can evaluate the value of media content (Kunczik and Zipfel, 2006, p. 190).

When explaining the gratification, Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch emphasize (1974, p. 21) that there can be as many of them as there are recipients as everyone can have very personal motives and goals they gratify for. However, on a broader scale, researchers have distinguished five groups of gratification audiences seek:

1. *Cognitive needs*: the active audience is seeking to acquire knowledge and new information, explore, be curious, and seek to understand the setting of the medium.

2. *Affective needs*: the audience is seeking the emotional and aesthetic experience as it kindles pleasure and satisfaction.

3. *Personal identity*: audience gratification for self-confidence, self-respect. They seek integrity, social status, or personal stability.

4. *Integration and social interaction*: the audience is seeking affiliation and connection within the medium.

5. *Escapism*: the audience engages with the media as a means to escape, release tension and shift from unpleasant to pleasant experiences (Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas, 1973).

The uses and gratification theory will be beneficial for the research since it will provide us with insights into media consumption and the interaction between the medium and its users. More particularly, with the use of the theory, we will be able to assort responses of what motives and gratifications participants of the FFXIV Discord server have when engaging with the media platform. However, we, as researchers, recognize and take into account the drawbacks the theory possesses. As Katz et al. (1974) hypothesized that even though media recipients are aware of their needs and motives, and can link them to the mediums that gratify their needs, it does not certainly mean that the awareness of needs is always accurate or recipients can articulate them properly. To comprehend this, researchers provide the example of how one could use the media due to the need for escapism but when researched, would provide the answer (consciously or not) as the need for information consumption. Nevertheless, the findings will be interpreted using phenomenology along with an abductive approach as methodological tools, granting us the opportunity to determine the relevancy of the respondents' answers.

Methodological framework

Research plan

To both comprehend and elaborate on our choices in this paper we use the ''Onion'' research strategy (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). This strategy helps us to clarify the steps we need to take and in which order. While presenting the methodological framework, we ''peel'' the onion starting from the outside, so the research philosophy and then continue further into the following specific steps taken in the research. In the following sections, we explore each ''layer'' of the onion and illustrate our choices.
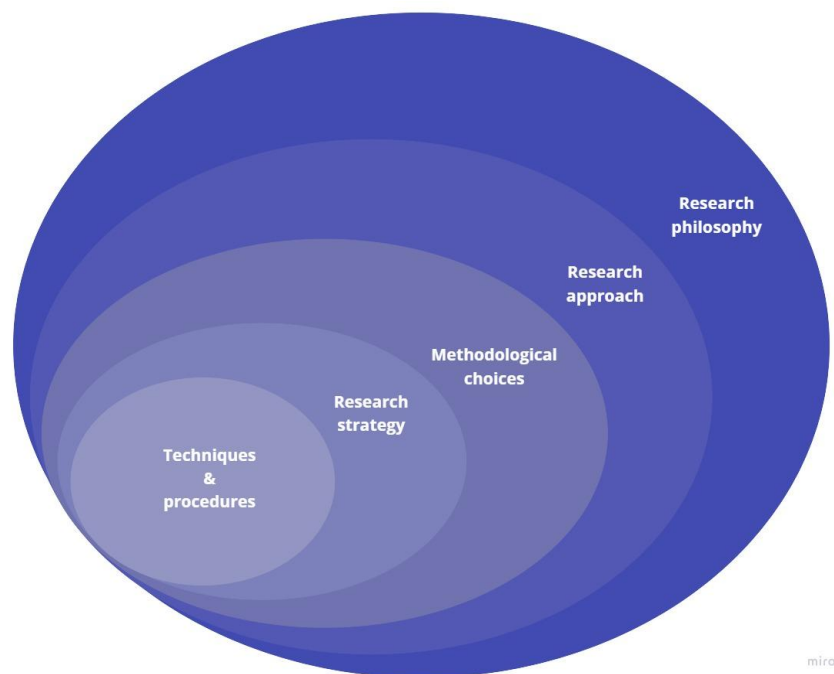

Figure 1. The 'Onion' (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019)

Philosophical view

Phenomenology became one of the most dominant philosophies of the 20th century (Egholm, 2014, p.102). Its importance was raised thanks to its ability to become an alternative to the structuralism approaches (Ibid.). With its similarities to Hermeneutics, Phenomenology's purpose is to comprehend human experiences and actions with an emphasis on describing and understanding phenomena and practices (Ibid.). Egholm (Ibid.),

describes the phenomenological perspective with a focus on how the events and phenomena manifest themselves to the individual. As its interest lies in the human consciousness and knowledge, the perspective suggests that the phenomena are deeply connected to a particular consciousness, therefore the phenomena cannot be studied independently (Ibid., p.103). As such, various phenomena manifest themselves to human beings in different contexts, and so they must be understood and interpreted based on individual perceptions (Ibid.). In short, the world manifests itself and it cannot be separated from the context in which the individual experiences it (Ibid.). For our study, the paper will benefit from this approach as it considers the contextual significance of the phenomenon. While with the other approaches we could focus solely on the phenomena, we could not describe it in greater detail if we did not begin with how it is perceived and experienced by the involved individuals as emphasized in phenomenology.

With this in mind, the ontology implies that the essence of the phenomenon is its existence (Ibid., p.109). The phenomenon comes into existence when it manifests itself in a human subject. Meaning, that the phenomena studied ought to be understood as they appear through an individual's experience. Subsequently, this perspective sees the individual as someone who acts intentionally and therefore takes the individual's intentions as the basis for understanding the nature of the phenomena (Ibid.). The way the FFXIV Discord members utilize the gaming community platform is therefore intentional. Considering how these intentions emerge and why they exist will help us to understand whether the FFXIV Discord server affects the engagement with the FFXIV brand. In order to determine the intentions, one must consider the individual's everyday life and their practices, purposes, dreams, and intentions in the world that create the way in which phenomena manifest (Ibid.). In our case, one of the ways the intentionality can be reflected is through the function role on the FFXIV Discord server. For instance, from a Uses & Gratification point of view on Social identity needs, a new community member or an FC leader will experience the FFXIV Discord server differently than a Moderator. We could say that the Moderator has a higher stake in the Discord server due to their functional role and responsibility to moderate the server, therefore they are more engaged with it. Consequently, by being in touch with the FFXIV community through Discord more often, talking about the FFXIV, or even moderating the chatrooms, one's brand engagement could be higher. Consequently, the way individuals experience Discord depends on their background which will ultimately reflect on their lives outside of the game, e.g. buying merchandise or paying for a game subscription. As a result, the world's capability of being is based on the subject's physical, social and cultural ways of being

(Ibid.). Consequently, even we as researchers or observers, cannot separate ourselves from the world and observe the world objectively, because our observation is historically, culturally, and experientially encapsulated (Ibid., p.104). Thus, based on phenomenology science can never be value-free (Ibid.).

Approach

Considering the steps taken in our research paper, we are moving forward with the abductive approach in mind. This type of approach leans toward shifting between the theoretical frameworks, data sources, and methodological concepts to maximize the potential of the best conclusion (Salmi, 2011). Our first steps resemble that of induction, where we observe the FFXIV Discord community to get a perspective of their activities. As Egholm (2014) emphasizes, this type of approach has a chance to discover an unknown phenomenon and the possibilities of its explanations. Hence, we are not interested in the absolute truth, but in revealing and comprehension of the phenomenon. Following the first steps, we drew several plausible hypotheses that could be the answers to our research question. Finally, similar to deduction we will test these hypotheses through our theories. On the whole, we will conclude the research with the gathered data in mind to finish with the most ''qualified guess' (Egholm, 2014, p.170).

Research design

Bryman (2016, p.60) characterizes a case study as a comprehensive analysis of a single case. Our main focus is on a thorough breakdown of the FFXIV Discord server, and the value it creates by enabling brand discourse through a general survey and in-depth interviews. These data sources will bring about detailed quantitative knowledge along with qualitative data to enrich the quality of the paper.

For the most part, we consider the case of the FFXIV Discord server to be a representative case, as our goal is to objectively capture the context and conditions of an everyday situation (Ibid., p.62). We aim to reveal the unique features of Discord as a medium that can enrich the experiences of customers, consequently accelerating or increasing the success of a product. Hence, we take the FFXIV Discord server as a suitable exemplifying case, as it is not an unusual nor an extreme example of gaming users utilizing media to create online communities (Ibid., p.64). As FFXIV won the best community award it indicates the community is thriving, therefore, it provides a suitable context for our research question to be

answered (Cryer, 2021). Additionally, we will utilize triangulation due to its ability to improve the verification of this paper through a combination of a general survey and interviews to answer our research question.

Lastly, to dive into the case study design we consider Yin's model which presents the 5 main parts (Yin 2003, p.5).

Strategy	Form of Research Question	Requires Control of Behavioral Events?	Focuses on Contemporary Events?
Experiment	how, why?	Yes	Yes
Survey	who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes
Archival analysis	who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes/No
History	how, why?	No	No
Case study	how, why?	No	Yes

Figure 2. Yin's case study (Yin 2003, p.5)

Firstly, we begin by identifying the idea we are interested in, consequently drawing a suitable research question. Yin's model proposes a table that helps the query creation to capture the knowledge gap (Ibid.). Furthermore, for our units of analysis, we focused on the motivation of users to use this specific medium, the interviewee's backgrounds to understand the impact of the medium on their daily habits and experiences with it, and lastly whether using the FFXIV Discord server adds to the overall brand engagement happening.
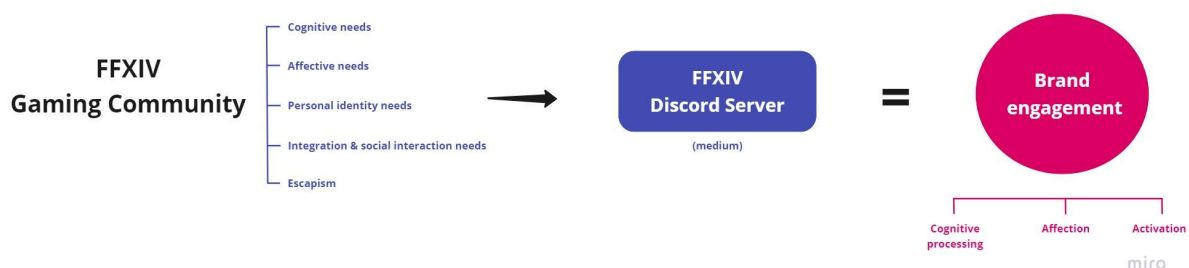

Figure 3. Research visualization

Following that, we created several hypotheses which will be verified in the analysis. Additionally, to discover the patterns in data and the objective of this research we relate the data with the theories and our research question. Above all, the criteria for the interpretations of the data are rather demanding to identify, thus we will characterize the validity, reliability, and discuss the data in the analysis and the discussion (Ibid., p.41).

Data collection

The ground of our research revolves mainly around in-depth qualitative data gathered from the FFXIV Discord community through interviews. Additionally, this data is complemented by a survey that has been also gathered from the FFXIV Discord server members, and qualitative data gathered from the FFXIV Discord server itself, for the sake of academic authenticity and value.

Triangulation

In this paper, we aim to utilize triangulation due to the fact that we are drawing our data from multiple sources. Our initial intention was to adopt data from only one data source, however, due to the benefit of enriching our paper with additional data that can help us reach a more ''complete knowledge'', we find triangulation immensely helpful (Flick, 2014, p.183). Our ambition is to increase the value of this paper by combining the data from our survey and interviews (Ibid.). In reflection to Denzin (1989), there are four types of triangulation: 1) data triangulation; 2) investigator triangulation; 3) theory triangulation; and 4) methodological or method triangulation. As we used multiple sources for our data collection, namely the survey and interviews, the methodological triangulation is how this research intensifies its validity. Additionally, multiple data collections tend to improve the confirmation of findings and enhance understanding of the phenomena (Bekhet and Zauszniewski, 2012). Whilst the benefits of this method sound lucrative, it brings about a handful of limitations as well. One of the said limitations can be the dilemma of combining qualitative and quantitative findings. As for this research, relying purely on qualitative data can be damaging because we need to be able to draw connections across various concepts we encounter in this paper, e.g. media and brand engagement. Hence, as researchers, we need to pay attention and detect patterns across our data and compare the data sets through triangulation in order to gain the best understanding of the problem.

Primary data

Semi-structured interviews

We consider the individual interviews as the main source of data in this paper. The format we have adapted is semi-structured due to its versatility. As such, the interviewer has an interview guide with questions to follow, however, there is no requirement that restricts the interviewer to ask additional questions. Consequently, this allows for a more natural flow of conversation since further topics can be discussed even if they are not included in the interview guide (Bryman 2016, p.201). This practice is vital, as the interviewee can mention something that was previously not included in the guide. Notably, in an individual interview, the interviewee has more space to express their opinion (Schrøder, 2003. p.151). This is visible throughout our interviews as we did quite a number of follow-up questions to dive deeper into the context of their actions.

Notably, individual interviews are also not flawless. One can lack the diversity in dialogue that is natural in the group interviews for instance (Ibid.). If our aim was to simulate an everyday dialogue, group interviews would have offered more accurate data. However, as we had an idea of what type of data and topics needed to be focused on, we needed to be the ones in control of the process, which is easier done in the individual interviews. Thus, the individual interviews yielded valuable data that helped us to answer our inquiry.

Our interviewees were chosen based on their affiliation with the FFXIV Discord server and their status in the FFXIV game. To elaborate, we chose a casual player, a Guild leader, and a Mentor (marked in green below). Our decision was based on the diversity in opinions and experiences that could have been obtained by choosing someone who spends a minimum (1-4 hours a day) time in-game, someone who leads a community and spends above minimum time a day in-game, and finally someone who is self-motivated to help the community in-game. Based on the model below, our decision-making process for the interviewees included these other options:
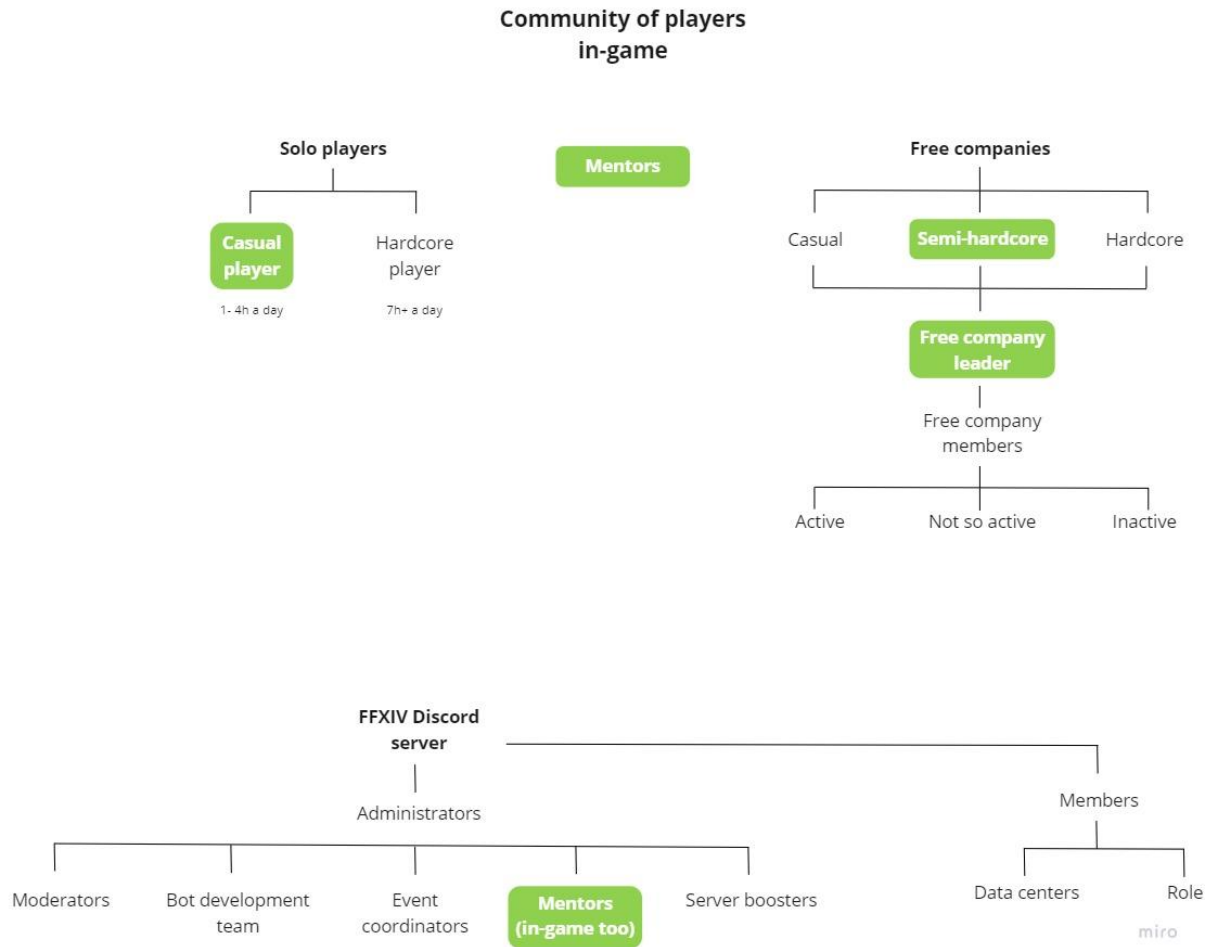
Figure 4. Potential interviewees

Furthermore, as our paper focuses on the experiences of the FFXIV Discord members, we needed to join the Discord server and reach out to potential interviewees that would be interested in participating in our study. This process was rather risky, as the server Admins do not wish for various organizations to reach out to their members as it can be abused for marketing or other purposes.

Interview guide for FFXIV Discord server members

In this methodology section, we outline the interview questions that helped us understand how the interviewees experience the FFXIV Discord server, how they engage with the brand, and in what context their experiences form, based on their habits and their roles in-game and in the server.

Firstly, since our focus was aimed at the Discord server's visual and verbal content and how the individuals perceive it, we focused on the Discord functions and the daily routine of the interviewees.

Consequently, we made use of some of the techniques from Schrøder's interview model as it explores media experiences and clarifies the practices of the audience by communicating them (Schrøder, 2003, p.147). Schrøder (Ibid., p158) divides ways of interviewing into several types. Firstly, he mentions "indirect questioning" which is to be utilized when the interviewee has problems revealing the cause of negative feelings. Fortunately, this method of questioning was not necessary as the respondents appeared to be very keen on elaborating their answers when they showed disagreement. The next technique is the "projective technique". To make the best use of this technique we asked interviewees to compare the FFXIV game features with the FFXIV Discord server features to identify what the Discord server brought to the table that the FFXIV game did not. Finally, the last technique focuses on the "non-verbal expressions". We did not utilize this technique, as it was developed for children who are not yet fully developed to verbalize their experience of the media, instead, they are meant to draw the typical situation in which they utilize the media. We were able to acquire this information when asking the interviewees about their daily routine and how & when they use Discord in general. Afterward, we followed with a question with a focus on the FFXIV Discord server specifically and drew conclusions on how they experienced the medium. These questions were based on the Uses & Gratification theory, however with our philosophical approach in mind to capture the full experience despite the theory's criticism. They are located in Appendix 1.

In the end, to reflect on the brand engagement we formulated questions based on the Customer Brand Engagement theory. Our questions reflected on the interviewee's associations with the brand's products and overall engagement with the brand's activities and products.

Coding

Bryman (2016, p.581), emphasizes that there are multiple ways how we can perform the coding. Choosing the right or suitable coding method highly depends on the data comprehension of researchers (Ibid.). Our focus was on understanding the individuals, how they feel and why they act the way they do. Ergo, the Process coding was the most suitable method to choose, due to its ability to capture one's actions along with their conceptual actions (Saldaña, 2009). Consequently, they may express how they feel which is something

we need to understand if we want to interpret the data correctly (Ibid.). Despite that, subjective interpretation may occur during coding. Nevertheless, we try to minimize it by reflecting on the interviews through listening to the recordings and re-reading the transcriptions to interpret them as accurately as possible. Moreover, as the technique takes into account concepts like prejudice, identity, trust, and memory it fits well with our theories and the research (Ibid.). The coding for the interviews can be seen in Appendix 2.

Interviewee	Statement	Topic	Interpretation
Casual player	I think it's, first of all, it's just that the franchise of that kind of is very powerful.	Buying merchandise	The product itself sparked the interest to engage in buying merchandise. The casual player does not mention the FFXIV Discord nor he does not feel that Discord nudged him into buying it.

Figure 5. Coding table

Survey

At the beginning of our research, after narrowing down our scope, we decided to make a web survey to obtain general data from the FFXIV Discord server members. We utilized the web survey as it is highly customizable and the possibility to reach people outside of our time zone is beneficial. Moreover, the web survey tends to have a fast response rate, and since the FFXIV Discord members utilize an online space for their community it was a suitable way to obtain the first scoop of data. Moreover, as mentioned in the Triangulation section, our aim is to enrich our data set and lift the level of validity by using a different data collection method.

The survey introduced the participants to the goal of the study through an introduction description, as well as how their responses will be handled and by whom. After the survey questions were drafted (elaborated in the section ''Survey questionnaire''), we contacted the Moderators of the FFXIV Discord server and waited for their confirmation and rules on the distribution of the survey. In the next two days, we obtained a response that stated we could advertise our survey once on one of the FFXIV Discord server channels. Additionally, after posting the survey, it was pinned by the Moderator for the next three days, as we could only advertise it in the ffxiv-discussion channel which has a lot of traffic every day, and so the survey would not be visible after more than 5 messages. After 3 days we gathered a sample of 17 answers from the FFXIV Discord server with a population of more than 220 000 members.

Survey questionnaire

Our target group were the members of the FFXIV Discord server as the focus lies on the FFXIV players that are part of the FFXIV Discord server community as well. The primary objective of the survey was first to identify the demographics of the participants. We included questions focused on gender, age, location, and their current employment status. Moreover, a question with a focus on whether they are a part of an FC was mentioned as well, to see whether they socialize in-game or on Discord.

Furthermore, we utilized a general outline of the Uses & Gratification theory to acquire data that would reflect the motivation factors of why the FFXIV Discord server members utilize the platform. This question had an option of multiple answers, thus the participants could tick more than one box with the answer. Moreover, the next two questions focused on the potential effect that the FFXIV Discord server has on the members' motivation to play the game (for which they have to pay a monthly subscription). Lastly, the final question focused on the participant's impression of the FFXIV Discord server and its contribution to the overall gaming experience. With this question, we were interested in whether the members think about the FFXIV Discord server as part of the game as a package. The full list of questions & answers can be seen in Appendix 3.

Secondary data

According to Bryman (2016, p. 313), analyzing secondary data grants researchers high-quality sets of information and is relatively cost and time effective. In our case, the collection of the secondary data began in the early project development stages. When presenting the project, we had to rely on less formal forms of data sources, such as game forums and game-related articles so we could obtain the data needed to comprehend the chosen brand and the gaming concept. We acknowledge the chances of such data credibility issues, therefore we aimed to combine it with academic journal articles and researchers' writings to balance out reliability. Subsequently, we have investigated numerous studies, scientific books, and journals from authors such as Booth, Hansen, and Aaker to grasp fundamental concepts used throughout the paper - branding and brand-related concepts like brand love, loyalty, and equity, communities within virtual spaces, etc. The variety of sources gave us a deeper understanding of each concept and assured the reliability of the data. The following section of methodology was built mainly upon secondary data referring to well-established authors such as Bryman, Yin, Egholm, Schrøder, and more. By doing so, we

created an insightful framework helping us to use proper methodological means in order to reflect on research objectives. Furthermore, the same basis was implemented when developing the theoretical framework - we have utilized various sources to gain a proper understanding of chosen concepts, hence it could supplement primary data findings when analyzing data sets.

Reliability

Wilson (2013, p. 145) defines reliability as a degree of consistency and stability when measuring a phenomenon. A characteristic of reliability is to show research operations simply meaning that if the study was re-performed following the same procedures, the research outcomes would remain the same (Yin, 2003, p. 37). Therefore, in order to enhance the reliability of the paper and avoid errors or biases, we used a variety of data sources to analyze the case. Even with potential weaknesses in data robustness, such a method has a tendency to result in more insightful, multivariate findings. Lastly, analyzing already existing data related to the research objectives are considered to be time and cost-efficient (Wilson, 2013, p. 215).

Validity

As Wilson (2013, p. 148) states, validity can be characterized as a mechanism helping researchers to measure what is intended to be measured. In fact, there are two types of validity: internal and external.
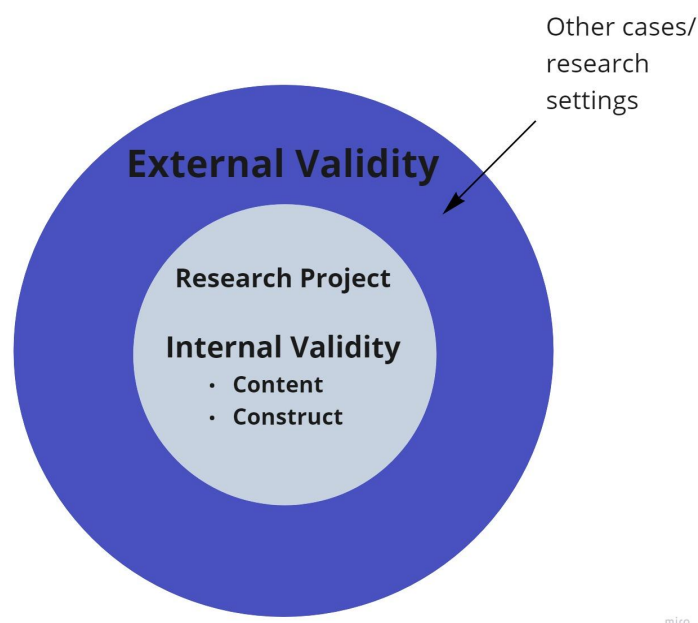

Figure 6. Validity (Wilson, 2013, p. 148)

The internal validity is further divided into the content and construct. The content validity can be identified with face and sampling factors. The face is understood as an instrument carrying out needed measurements. In this case, the instrument was the common language interviewees and interviewers are proficient in - English (Ibid.). We assured that interviewees can easily understand the questions and were allowed for clarification if needed. The sampling factor requires broadening the view on the research subject, namely including all the measures within the nature of the study (Ibid.), therefore when analyzing community engagement with the FFXIV brand we aimed to utilize various measurements, such as time and effort spent on the brand, emotional bond, and cognitive interests.

Furthermore, the construct validity, as Yin (2003, p. 34) defines it, shows established operational measurements of the studied concepts. To put it in simple terms, construct validity is achieved when interview questions are created upon the appropriate literature (Wilson, 2013, p. 149). Thus, when generating the interview questions for the participants, we have used the concepts within the theoretical framework as the base to assure construct validity.

The objective of the external validity is to comprehend to what extent the findings of the research can be generalized (Ibid.). However, unlike the positivism approach, the use of phenomenology puts more emphasis on the understanding and exploration of the case, rather than generalization. On the other hand, research can serve as a template for the starting point for future researchers looking to conduct more generalized research.

Limitations & Delimitations

Limitations

When carrying out the initial survey, the major limitation was the way to reach people. The server contains over 200 thousand members, however, due to the low exposure of the survey, we conducted answers from 17 respondents. For the survey to be uploaded on the Discord, we had to get the server Moderators' approval. However, the moderators pinned the survey to a less-visited section simultaneously granting us the opportunity to promote it once on the discussion channel. Since there was a lot of communication among members, our survey got lost and not a lot of responses came in. We were also unable to ask for real-time

adjustments because the Moderators were spread out all over the world, making instant communication difficult.

Secondly, we found numerous Discord servers based on the FFXIV game, including the ones managed by the interviewees, e.g. the Guild leader. Our reasoning for choosing a particular FFXIV Discord server was its correlation to the community with shared values, attainable social roles, and influence among members. Perhaps if we would have approached different/smaller servers, we would have gotten more or quicker responses with differing insights altering results.

Thirdly, when gathering interviews using phenomenology, we were required to ask questions to get more personalized answers and deeper insights, which could have been better obtained in person. However, due to the participants' location, we were able to conduct only one in-person interview with the casual player, since the Guild leader and the Moderator were located outside Denmark. Consequently, we gathered their interviews through online voice chat, which resulted in less explicit answers in comparison with an in-person interview due to a lack of facial expressions.

Delimitations

In terms of personal limitations, when conducting the interviews, we could have divided participants based on demographic elements, such as gender, age, and location in combination with the employment that in conclusion, we could have made a pattern between the characteristics and responses. The main reason for the different approach was the time limit as patterning, sampling, and our philosophical approach would have been time-consuming.

Moreover, to enrich the data and obtain more varied outcomes, we could have selected different or added more interview participants such as server Moderators or Nitro Boosters who invest in the server to enhance its quality and attract more users. However, due to their role Moderators are significantly busier than other members on the server, thus it was difficult to get in touch with them. Furthermore, the FFXIV Discord server is part of the Discord Partner Program, hence it can be tricky to determine which of the Nitro Boosters did invest in the server, and who just received a free badge for being a part of the community.

Analysis

Cognitive needs

Following the theory of uses and gratification, one of the most desired needs that media audiences seek is cognitive fulfillment. The pursuit of cognition can be expressed in multiple ways, such as exploration of the medium and its channels, willingness to search for game-related information within the general chat of the medium, or initiating conversations with community members. The participants revealed differing standpoints in regards to seeking knowledge and cognitive needs fulfillment when using the FFXIV Discord server.

For starters, the first interview participant, namely the Casual Player (CP), outlined that thanks to the Discord server he began engaging with FFXIV (Appendix 1). More particularly, the participant noted that his own curiosity played an essential role here as he wanted to explore the server and get familiar with its functionality (Ibid.). However, exploring the server thoroughly may be more difficult than expected - as the CP noted, the server has too many channels, making it difficult to engage with all of them or search for information from each one. Also, the CP added, that the main criterion for choosing which channels to explore is purely interest-based - what seems to contain information that the CP considers relevant at a given time (e.g., the general channel, the announcements, or the fan art channel) gets his attention. Additionally, the player seemed to rely on the FFXIV Discord as the fundamental source to gain knowledge and updates about the game. When asked whether he seeks information on another similar platform, i.e., the game's launcher forum, or rather Discord, the player undoubtedly opted for the latter. The reason for this is the convenience Discord offers - unlike slow-paced forums, the CP can receive almost instant responses to needed queries due to the constant flow of communication between server members (Ibid.). On the other hand, the vast amount of communication within a server can also make it difficult for participants to keep track of information since messages can get lost among thousands. Nevertheless, the FFXIV Discord also serves as a supplement for the CP to other means of information, such as Youtube (Ibid.). The CP stated that if the information in the video was not comprehensive or poorly explained, the Discord helps fill the 'knowledge gap' as the interviewee can directly ask other members for explanation or elaboration (Ibid.). According to the data results, the CP seemed to be relatively invested in a brand - when asked which games come to mind first when he thinks of MMORPGs, the participant named the Final Fantasy brand as his second suggestion, signaling comparatively strong engagement

(Ibid.). The participant noted that playing the game stimulates his desire to expand his game-related knowledge, but due to his busy life and desire to contribute to personal projects in real life, he does not acquire all the information but explores it occasionally (Ibid.).

The second interviewee, the FC leader (FCL), held a relatively opposite mindset concerning cognitive gratification when using the FFXIV Discord. In fact, the FCL did not seem interested in learning about or exploring the server (Ibid.). When asked about the sources he relies on when searching for information about the FFXIV, the interviewee named Reddit as he finds most news about the game there, and other Discord servers. Although he pointed out different media platforms/spaces for searching game-related information, the interviewee noted that the FFXIV Discord is yet a third source of information used from time to time, as he has access to translations of the live letters (Ibid.). When looking at the cognitive processes of the FCL through the lens of CBE, we see that game-related information and its collection are important to the growth of his FC - the more he can present, the greater the chances of building a larger community. Despite running an FC and an FC Discord server, he seems to have a high level of commitment to the game. The interviewee mentioned numerous Final Fantasy branch games and when it came to MMORPGs, FFXIV was his first choice, indicating his connection with the game (Ibid.).

Following the responses of the third interviewee - the mentor (M) - we recognized yet another perspective regarding information search within the server. In contrast to the previous two respondents, she seemed to have explored the server and its functions more thoroughly, suggesting that specific information seeking was one of the primary focuses when joining the online community. More specifically, the respondent explored features such as role selection, healer and recruiter channels, etc. Since the respondent primarily mentors and assists people in-game, she does not engage with all channels as often (Ibid.). The interviewee remarked that she uses multiple bots that retrieve information about announcements, maintenance, etc. from various community APIs and websites, which ease information access and controls the flow, ultimately, enhancing the user experience (Ibid). As well as that, M relies on other virtual platforms that display game guides and relevant information that can be shared with other members. With regard to the CBE, the M meets the criteria for a cognitive connection to the game due to her time dedicated to helping others (Ibid.).

Affective needs

People seeking affective needs gratify for entertainment, pleasure, and connectedness in social spaces (Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas, 1973). A social platform like Discord offers many ways of satisfying affective needs, for example exploring or producing fan art for aesthetic enjoyment, browsing memes, or seeking valuable advice from the server's members to enhance the experience and strengthen the bond with the community. In fact, the affective satisfaction appears to be relatively important for the FFXIV Discord server participants - as the generated survey suggested, nearly 53% of respondents marked that as the fundamental reason why they engage with the server (Appendix 3).

A closer look, however, revealed that the interview respondents are of contrasting opinions about satisfaction and affective needs gratification on Discord. The M noted she sometimes came across shared memes that she found entertaining and would redirect them to her Discord channel (Ibid.). In spite of that, the interviewee did not explicitly indicate that using the FFXIV Discord contributes to her affective needs gratification

On the other hand, the CP has taken a distinctive position. For him, the Discord server not only means the storage of a massive flow of information but also the space to have aesthetic experiences and receive inspiration (Ibid.). For example, the CP stated that the need for affective satisfaction occurs when the player feels strongly connected to the game story during/and after the playthrough. Consequently, he tries to satisfy his curiosity and extend the game experience by exploring fan art, especially for characters that came to his mind during gameplay (Ibid.). This indicates a strong cognitive and emotional connection - the thoughts triggered by the game create a desire for affective pleasure than can be achieved when engaging with the server. Moreover, the load of information becomes handy when a CP seeks to enhance his gaming experience. He can also find inspiration for the in-game characters' design in certain channels, such as the transmogrification channel, as people share their creations that might serve as examples or can simply be casually browsed through (Ibid.).

Reflecting on CBE, while not all respondents feel emotionally connected to the FFXIV Discord, all feel some degree of affection for the game itself. For instance, the FCL claimed that playing FFXIV now feels like a natural habit (Ibid.). He does not claim to have a strong emotional attachment to the game or that it makes him happy, but he emphasizes the satisfaction he receives from playing and progressing through the story and in-game content (Ibid.). As for the M, playing FFXIV induces various emotions - she can feel genuinely happy, relaxed, and even emotional (Ibid.). The fact that the interviewee associates the brand

with positive feelings reveals a relatively strong bond with the game. Next, the CP was more explicit about the feelings he gets when playing the game. To be exact, he outlined that emotions depend on the activity at a time, such as adrenaline, excitement, and sometimes even rage are evoked when playing against other players (Ibid.). Whereas feelings of camaraderie and trust are primary when completing game tasks together with friends, etc. (Ibid.). According to him, FFXIV provides a player with a unique sense of emotion. As a result, the online multiplayer aspect of the game gives the CP a higher level of game value than other Square Enix games.

Personal identity needs

How one understands their ''self'' changes in the social networking space (Hongladarom, 2011). Nevertheless, for our purposes, we will focus on what group one identifies with, and what role they embody (Rajakishore and Vineet, 2020).

Notably, 29% of respondents in our survey associated their use of the FFXIV Discord with building status or showing integrity (Appendix 3). Integrity has been classified as a rather complex concept in relation to the traditional standards of morality (McFall, 1987, p.5). These range from telling the truth, to being honest and fair (Ibid.). Furthermore, Taylor illustrates it is not only that but how true a person is to themselves (Taylor and Gaita, 1981, p.143). The M mentioned that the Mentor title requires some effort in-game, however, it is even more difficult to obtain it on the FFXIV Discord (Appendix 1). The reason behind it appears to be the lack of integrity of previous Mentors who obtained the title only to show they advanced in the FFXIV Discord's hierarchy (Ibid.). To clarify, the FFXIV Discord possesses its own functional hierarchy with Admins being on the top, following the Moderators, Mentors, Even coordinators, etc., who are distinguished by different colors and server permissions (see Figure 7). For instance, the Moderators can kick or mute members, Event coordinators cannot.
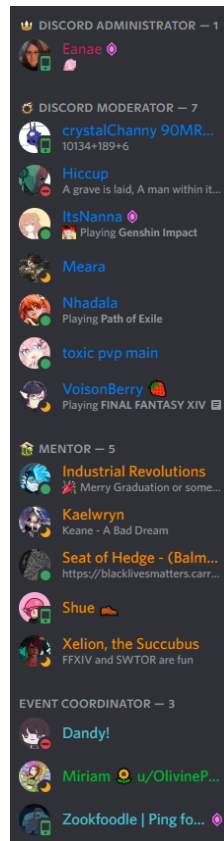
Figure 7. A part of the FFXIV Discord hierarchy

Hence, a person possessing integrity is true to his commitments (Taylor and Gaita, 1981, p.145). If one pretends in front of others to be committed to a certain way of life but they are not, they do not possess the integrity, and can, therefore, as illustrated in the example above, be stripped of their title. The M displays attributes of this concept, as she connects her motivations with the way she spends her day (Appendix 1). Hence, she pays attention to her FC Discord server instead of the FFXIV one (Ibid.).

Usually, the integrity of social networks like Discord servers is outlined by the specific community policies which characterize what is not allowed on the server (Halevy et al., 2022, p.94). The CP instinctively noticed it, even if he did not familiarize himself with the FFXIV Discord's rules (Appendix 1). He stated that he would not utilize the FFXIV Discord for a casual talk with his friends as the server feels way too ''official'' (Ibid.). His reasoning behind this impression was the authoritativeness that came from the Discord server's name and its Discord Partner badge (Ibid.).

When it comes to the FCL he has certain expectations of how an FCL should behave, which is not engaging on the FFXIV Discord server more than on his own FC Discord, as he is aware that people ask him for advice and expects him to clarify FC's actions, therefore he

needs to prioritize where he is active. This way, he shows his integrity to his own community and engages on the FFXIV Discord server only to promote that community.

On the other hand, the CP sees himself as someone who is not bound by individuals to behave in a certain way, except his own (Ibid.). That is, to do content in-game at his own pace, or to not use the FFXIV Discord server in a way that would clash with the server's policies (Ibid.). Whilst he shows elements of integrity, he does not need to exercise it on the FFXIV Discord as does he want to obtain any status (Ibid.). His reasoning implies the importance of a smaller community where he would want social recognition instead.

Briefly, to reflect on the CBE, we can see that the M has a sense of accomplishment and responsibility stemming from her interaction with the brand through the game. Therefore, the cognitive processing & affection that happens is primarily positive. However, the FFXIV Discord itself does not evoke any type of commitment as she does not possess nor want the Mentor title (Ibid.). Moreover, when it comes to the activation part, M spends around 3 to 4 hours in-game per day, including the time when she works she spends on the Discord. On the other end, we have the CP who has no commitment to the FFXIV Discord nor the FFXIV game itself. Lastly, the FCL is committed to his own FC and therefore does not have any need to seek an additional role, which results in a neutral feeling.

Integration & social interaction needs

In our case, we adopt integration into the online space, as a process in which the new Discord member learns about the server's culture, attains rights, gets access to various positions, and begins to build personal relations (Shoma, 2020, p.2). The online communities, such as the FFXIV, consist of free-willed individuals, with shared interests who interact through the computer networks socially for a long period of time (Ibid.). Members of the online communities exchange social support or resources through which ties and even additional social organizations develop (Ibid.). Our survey supports the need for social interaction among the FFXIV Discord members with over 58% in the report (Appendix 3).

All of our interview participants confirmed they have the Discord application running even during work time (Appendix 1). Despite that, all three also confirmed they do not use the FFXIV Discord server to socialize (Ibid.). They preferably utilize their smaller networks to fill their need for interaction with others (Ibid). For instance, the casual player stated that the reason why he does not interact with the FFXIV Discord community is mainly that it is, in a way, a community with people who do have only one thing in common, however, for

him, it is not enough to start interacting (Ibid). Another concern that may be obscuring his social activity on the server are ''heavy regulations'' (Ibid). However, policies for the forbidden content and behavior need to be established, whilst finding a balance for free speech (Halevy et al., 2022, p.93). Interestingly, however, before committing to the game, the CP joined the FFXIV Discord server first to get the feeling of the community which consequently made him join the game (Appendix 1). Additionally, he noted how the activity on the FFXIV Discord affected his decision to stay subscribed to the game (Ibid). Discord became a part of his FFXIV gaming experience as he saw it as a space where the community can thrive (Ibid).

On the other hand, when it comes to the other two interviewees both of them disregarded the FFXIV Discord server's activity as something that would influence their involvement with the FFXIV game (Ibid). Both the M and the FCL prefer to socialize with their FFXIV FC communities instead (Ibid). However, most of the social connections FCL has made were formed when individuals joined his FC also through the FFXIV Discord server. (Ibid.)

Last but not least, the cognitive processing appears to have all respondents thinking about the brand one way or the other. For all three respondents, it is the utilization of their Discord servers, including their own. The FFXIV Discord server left quite a positive impression on all the respondents as well since the community itself is considered friendly and non-toxic (Ibid.). However, in general, when it comes to the social aspect, the three interviewees prefer the FFXIV game where they spend three to six hours a day (Ibid).

Escapism

For the most part, escapism is seen as a negative experience (Calleja, 2010, p.335). We could understand escapism simply as a sort of a movement from an undesirable situation where one hopes for the betterment of it (Ibid.,p.347). We do not have to understand ''undesirable'' as necessarily negative, due to escapism playing an important role in fleeing away from stagnation or boredom (Ibid.).

It is also not an unusual type of need that is dealt with in the gaming community. In our survey, 58% of respondents identified it as something they utilize the FFXIV Discord for (Appendix 3). When looking at our interviewees, all three utilize Discord during their day (Appendix 1). Yet, none of them spends that time on the FFXIV Discord server specifically. Firstly, the CP uses Discord to communicate with the friends he knows (Ibid). When it came

to escapism, however, both the CP and the M implied that they rather shift to their established networks or the FFXIV game (Ibid). For the CP, the FFXIV's Discord community does not appear to be close enough to offer the connection he needs with individuals in order to unwind or take his attention away (Ibid.). In the same light, he acknowledges that the FFXIV Discord is a way to find that ''tight'' community in the form of an FC (Ibid). Hence, from the implications of the CP and the M, players use their FCs, once they find them possibly through the FFXIV Discord, to fulfill their need for escapism. This could be further supported by the answers of the FCL. As he wakes up he turns on the FFXIV game and continues in his work at the same time (Ibid). As he works as a Strategic Resource Planner for a healthcare company we could assume his job can become stressful at times and one of the reasons he engages with the FFXIV game is to ''escape'' when that time comes. Nevertheless, he denied he ever used the FFXIV Discord server specifically for this need, hence, we could suspect that he engages with his FC through the FFXIV game or his FC's Discord server for that matter instead.

Looking at the escapism from the CBE perspective, we cannot say that cognitive processing is necessarily influenced by the FFXIV Discord itself from the interviewee's points of view, however, they do confirm that they engage with the brand in other ways such as playing the FFXIV game. As for the affection, even though escapism is generally a negative experience, they do utilize the brand to ''escape'' the situation which implies that the brand offers a more satisfying option than the one they are escaping. Lastly, when it comes to activation, as they spend more time in-game, or talking to their FCs they keep engaging with the brand either directly, through the game, or indirectly, through their FCs.

Discussion

When carrying out the research, one of the main conceptions we bore in mind was understanding a brand. As data findings showed, FFXIV was among several other similar-concept games that interview participants would name. However, Final Fantasy differentiates by the emotional uniqueness and positive associations players get when engaging with the brand.

If a company is able to build a worthwhile brand among consumers, it has a better chance of maintaining a high level of retention. When we weigh this with the data, we can see that participants tend to build long-term relationships with the FFXIV brand. In particular, the FCL has been part of the FFXIV community for over two years, so the game has become a natural part of his everyday life. The value the brand has for the M is different. The role she partakes in her FC Discord as a Mentor assisting new/less experienced players can be her cornerstone of maintaining 8 years lasting connectivity to the FFXIV.

Yet another key element we analyzed throughout the research was the concept of community. Further investigation led us to the realization of online communities as well as brand communities. How intertwined the online game, brand, and fan communities are. In this case, we understand the FFXIV Discord community as a community that socially interacts online, because of their common interest in the FFXIV brand. Consequently, their FFXIV brand interest develops the community into a fandom.

Moreover, as Ozuem et al. (2021) pointed out, belonging to the community also means directing and receiving social influence from member to member. Since compliance concerns appropriate behavior within the community to avoid disapproval, according to the results, all three interview participants seemed to follow the step, for instance, following unspoken ethical rules, and server policies in order to maintain the space within the community. Overall, it appears that all three participants agree that Discord is important both as a means of communication and social network, but they do not attribute any behavior changes to the FFXIV Discord community.

The last part of integration refers to the acceptance of the behavior change due to the social influence within the community. Accordingly, interviewees' values towards the FFXIV brand have not changed as a result of the influence of the FFXIV Discord community. To answer the hypothetical statements, all three participants have a certain degree of attachment to the Final Fantasy brand and could be classified as loyal consumers, however, in this case, it

cannot be said that the brand value has been influenced by integration in the Discord community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we will present the results of this research by answering each sub-question and finalize this chapter with an answer to our research question.

To begin with, FCL did not use the FFXIV Discord to gather new information, and by the same token neither has M. Both of the respondents have an FC and engage with the FFXIV game for years, therefore their need for knowledge is fulfilled else how. On the other hand, the CP uses the FFXIV Discord directly for the FFXIV updates as he does not prefer other means of receiving new information.

Furthermore, CP uses the FFXIV Discord for affective needs, mainly user-generated content. Whereas the M nor the FCL do not attribute their affective needs to the server, rather they use their own FC servers.

Moreover, the M and FCL showed high levels of integrity and social identity needs, however, they are fulfilling them in their own FC servers. Alternatively, the CP showed integrity by respecting the unspoken rules of communication on the FFXIV Discord server, however, as he does not have any commitment to the FFXIV game nor its community his interest in the FFXIV Discord role is low.

Subsequently, the social interaction is not something that FCL and M sought at the FFXIV Discord, as they engage in their own FCs. However, they are integrated into the FFXIV gaming community as they actively engage with it through their roles. In contrast, the CP did not engage with the FFXIV Discord members as he felt a lack of connection to the members. Consequently, he is integrated into the FFXIV gaming community, but not so much in the Discord one.

Lastly, when it comes to escapism all of the respondents use the FFXIV game rather than the FFXIV Discord. Even though the M and FCL use their FC Discords they do not utilize the FFXIV Discord in the same way. With the results from our survey, we notice that players who are a part of an FC have relatively low interest in the FFXIV Discord server altogether (Appendix 3).

For our second research question, the FCL nor the M felt that the FFXIV Discord has any impact on their FFXIV gaming experience. On the other hand, the CP along with 82% of our survey respondents agreed that the FFXIV Discord contributes to their gaming experience. Of these respondents, 82% were not a part of an FC. The CP clarified that Discord is becoming a standard ''companion'' to any game. When looking at the M or the FCL, they can utilize their smaller communities (FCs) for this kind of information so it is understandable why the FFXIV Discord server brings little to no additional experience to them.

From the cognitive process point of view, all respondents recognize the FF franchise and engage on Discord servers connected to the FFXIV game, which keeps them engaged with the brand.

Furthermore, the degree of emotional interaction with the brand itself through their FFXIV game can be labeled as positive. The in-game content brings about emotions ranging from thrilling to exciting which we label as positive. However, as the FCL and M do not utilize FFXIV Discord for their affective needs no emotional experience stems from it, unlike the CP who enriches his in-game experience through the FFXIV Discord.

Lastly, the FCL and M spend significant time in-game and on their FC Discords, however, same as the CP they do not spend equal time on the FFXIV Discord. Therefore, we can see that the FF brand became a part of their lives, except for the CP as he is not active for the time being.

Overall, the FFXIV Discord offers an array of options to engage everyone depending on their needs. Based on our sample the FFXIV Discord server offers mainly its informative function, as well as means for connecting with other communities, and exploring user-generated content.

Bibliography

Aaker, D., 1991. *Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name*. New York: The Free Press.

American Marketing Association. 2021. Branding | American Marketing Association. [online] Available at: <https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/>

Anderson, B. (1983). Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and

Barr, M. and Copeland-Stewart, A., 2021. Playing Video Games During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Effects on Players' Well-Being. *Games and Culture*, 17(1), pp.122-139.

Batchelor, J., 2020. *Record number of Steam users online during coronavirus outbreak*. [online] GamesIndustry.biz. Available at: <https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2020-03-16-record-number-of-steam-users-online-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

Bekhet, A. and Zauszniewski, J., 2012. Methodological triangulation: an approach to understanding data. *Nurse Researcher*, 20(2), pp.40-43

Benveniste, A., 2022. The Meaning and History of Memes. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/26/crosswords/what-is-a-meme.html>

Blizzard.com. n.d. *About - Blizzard Entertainment*. [online] Available at: <https://www.blizzard.com/en-us/company/about/>

Booth, P. ed., 2018. *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., pp.2-71.

Bryman, A. (2016). Social research methods., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brinks, M., 2020. *12 Games That Can't Escape Their Own Aggressively Toxic Communities*. [online] Ranker. Available at: <https://www.ranker.com/list/video-games-with-toxic-communities/melissa-brinks>

Brodie, R., Hollebeek, L., Juric, B. and Ilic, A., 2011. Customer Engagement: Conceptual Domain, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications for Research. *Journal of Service Research*, 14(3), pp.252-271.

Calleja, G., 2010. Digital Games and Escapism. *Games and Culture*, 5(4), p.335.

Clement, J., 2021. *Average time spent playing video games worldwide 2021 | Statista*. [online] Statista. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273829/average-game-hours-per-day-of-video-gamers-in -selected-countries/>

Constantin, V., Platon, O. and Orzan, G., 2014. "Brand Community Formation: A Critical Review ." *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Oeconomica*, 2(16), pp.123-131.

Cryer, H., 2021. *Final Fantasy 14 wins Best Community at the Golden Joystick Awards 2021*. [online] gamesradar. Available at: <https://www.gamesradar.com/final-fantasy-14-wins-best-community-at-the-golden-joystick-awards-2021/> Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC/Melbourne: SAGE.

Denzin NK (1989) The Research Act. Third Edition. New York, McGraw-Hill.

Discord. 2022. *Community Guidelines | Discord*. [online] Available at: <https://discord.com/guidelines>

Discord. 2022. Beginner's Guide to Discord. [online] Available at: <https://support.discord.com/hc/en-us/articles/360045138571-Beginner-s-Guide-to-Discord>

Discord. 2022. *Server Boosting FAQ 🐛*. [online] Available at: <https://support.discord.com/hc/en-us/articles/360028038352-Server-Boosting-FAQ-#h_419c 3bd5-addd-4989-b7cf-c7957ef92583>

Discord. n.d. *Discord | Your Place to Talk and Hang Out*. [online] Available at: <https://discord.com/>

Discord. n.d. *Join the Final Fantasy XIV Discord Server!*. [online] Available at: <https://discord.com/invite/ffxiv>

Discord. n.d. *Nitro Benefits and Features | Discord*. [online] Available at: <https://discord.com/nitro>

Discord. n.d. Partner with Discord. [online] Available at: <https://discord.com/partners>

Discord. n.d. Verify Your Server | Server Verification | Discord. [online] Available at: <https://discord.com/verification>

Duffett, M., 2013. *Understanding Fandom– An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture*. Bloomsbury, pp.1-20.

Egholm, L., 2014. *Philosophy of science*. Gyldendal.

FINAL FANTASY XIV, The Lodestone. n.d. About Free Companies | FINAL FANTASY XIV, The Lodestone. [online] Available at: <https://na.finalfantasyxiv.com/lodestone/special/grandcompany/about_freecompany/>

Finalfantasyxiv.com. n.d. *FINAL FANTASY XIV*. [online] Available at: <https://www.finalfantasyxiv.com/>

Fire, B., 2014. Urban Dictionary: Casual Gamer. [online] Urban Dictionary. Available at: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Casual%20Gamer>

Flew, T., 2005. *Understanding Global Media*.

Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research*. 6th ed. Los Angeles/London/New

Fromme, J., Jörissen, B. and Unger, A., 2009. (Self-) Educational Effects of Computer Gaming Cultures. *Handbook of Research on Effective Electronic Gaming in Education*,

Griffin, E., 2012. A First Look at Communication Theory. McGraw-Hill.

Halevy, A., Canton-Ferrer, C., Ma, H., Ozertem, U., Pantel, P., Saeidi, M., Silvestri, F. and Stoyanov, V., 2022. Preserving integrity in online social networks. *Communications of the ACM*, 65(2), p.94.

Hansen, H., 2021. *Brand Management in a Co-Creation Perspective - Communication as Constitutive of Brands*. Routledge, pp.1-55.

Hollebeek, L., Glynn, M. and Brodie, R., 2014. Consumer Brand Engagement in Social Media: Conceptualization, Scale Development and Validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28, pp.149-165.

Hongladarom, S., 2011. Personal Identity and the Self in the Online and Offline World. *Minds and Machines*, 21(4).

Hsu, C. and Lu, H., 2007. Consumer behavior in online game communities: A motivational factor perspective. Computers in Human Behavior, 23(3), pp.1642-1659.

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., Gurevitch, M., 1974. Utilization of mass communication by the individual, the uses mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research. Sage.

Katz, E., Gurevitch, M. and Haas, H., 1973. On the Use of the Mass Media for Important Things. *American Sociological Review*, 38(2), pp.164-181.

Kelman, H. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization three processes of attitude change. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 2(1), 51–60

Kim, M., 2021. *Final Fantasy 14 Surpasses 24 Million Players, Becomes Most Profitable Final Fantasy Game In the Series - IGN*. [online] IGN. Available at: <https://www.ign.com/articles/final-fantasy-14-24-million-players-most-profitable>

Kunczik, M., Zipfel, A., 2006. Introduction to journalism science and communication science. Zaklada Friedrich Ebert, pp. 189-192.

LIN, J., 2015. *This Man Resurrected One of the Most Beloved Games Ever*. [online] Time. Available at: <https://time.com/3817373/final-fantasy-14-naoki-yoshida/>

Maher, B., 2016. *Can a video game company tame toxic behaviour?*. [online] Nature. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/531568a>

McAlexander, J., Schouten, J., Koenig, H., 2002. Building Brand Community. Journal of Marketing, Vol. 66, 38–54. McFall, L., 1987. Integrity. *Ethics*, 98(1), p.5.

Muniz, A., O'Guinn, T., 2001. Brand Community. Journal of Consumer Research, Vol. 27,No. 4, 412-432.

Murray, S., 2020. *AI Tries To Identify Toxic Gamers Via Language*. [online] Static1.thegamerimages.com. Available at: <https://www.thegamer.com/ai-identifies-toxic-gamers-language/>

Nast, C., 2022. *Toxicity in Gaming Is Dangerous. Here's How to Stand Up to It*. [online] Wired. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/story/toxicity-in-gaming-is-dangerous-heres-how-to-stand-up-to-it/>

Oxford Dictionary (2009), ''Oxford Dictionary,'' Oxford University Press: UK.

Ozuem, W., Willis, M. and Howell, K., 2021. Determinants of online brand communities' and millennials' characteristics: A social influence perspective. 38(5), pp.794-818.

Park, M., 2022. *The state of Discord in 2022: Gaming takes a backseat to forums*. [online] pcgamer. Available at: <https://www.pcgamer.com/the-state-of-discord-in-2022-gaming-takes-a-backseat-to-forums/>

Preece, J., 2001. Sociability and usability in online communities: determining and measuring success. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 20(5), pp.347-356.

Reddit.com. 2019. *MSQ length and hours spent*. [online] Available at: <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffxiv/comments/aojm6s/msq_length_and_hours_spent/>

Richter, F., 2020. *Gaming: The Most Lucrative Entertainment Industry By Far*. [online] Statista Infographics. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/chart/22392/global-revenue-of-selected-entertainment-industry-sectors/>

Romero, I., 2016. Video Games: What Does IP Mean?. [online] Twinfinite. Available at: <https://twinfinite.net/2016/06/video-games-what-does-ip-mean/>

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications Ltd.

Salmi, A. (2011). Internation research teams and collective case studies: an abductive approach. Northhampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.

Santora, J., 2021. 22 Discord Bots That Will Keep Your Server Hopping. [online] Influencer Marketing Hub. Available at: <https://influencermarketinghub.com/discord-bots/>

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2019. *Research methods for business students*.

Schrøder, Kim et al. (2003). "Reception Research Toolbox: the Qualitative Interview", p. 143-170, in Schrøder et al., Researching Audiences. London: Arnold.

Stokburger-Sauer, N., 2010. Brand Community: Drivers and Outcomes. Psychology &Marketing, Vol. 27, No. 4, 347–368, DOI: 10.1002/mar.20335.

Store.steampowered.com. 2022. *Steam: Game and Player Statistics*. [online] Available at: <https://store.steampowered.com/stats/>

Taylor, G. and Gaita, R., 1981. Integrity. *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 55(1), pp.143-145.

The Game Statistics Authority. n.d. *World of Warcraft*. [online] Available at: <https://activeplayer.io/world-of-warcraft/>

Thompson, S.A., Sinha, R.K., 2008. Brand Communities and New Product Adoption: The Influence and Limits of Oppositional Loyalty. Journal of Marketing, Vol. 72, 65 – 80.

Twitter. 2020. *Twitter*. [online] Available at: <https://twitter.com/SteamDB/status/1239180882826715136> .

Wilson, J., 2013. Essentials of Business Research: A guide to doing your research project. Sage Publications

World of Warcraft Forums. 2018. *Does blizzard actually care*. [online] Available at: <https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/wow/t/does-blizzard-actually-care/38333>

World of Warcraft Forums. 2019. *Blizzard...the only company that happily tells their customers NO*. [online] Available at: <https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/wow/t/blizzard-the-only-company-that-happily-tells-their-customers-no/111658>

World of Warcraft Forums. 2020. *How many players did quit since classic release?*. [online] Available at:

<https://eu.forums.blizzard.com/en/wow/t/how-many-players-did-quit-since-classic-release/136326/11>

www.dictionary.com. 2022. Definition of MMORPG. [online] Available at: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/mmorpg>