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CONSOLE-GAMER: UNFOLDING RELATIONSHIPS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

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Introduction

Console gaming recalls the most varied images. Some people picture the eighties and iconic games such as Pac-Man, others may think to the latest technology, the younger ones even consider it a real job or a different way to spend time at home during lockdown. Although over the years consoles have enjoyed great success, the rise of smartphone gaming and the great return of computer (PC) in the digitalization era, have fueled the idea of an upcoming downfall. The objective of this thesis is to investigate whether this decline is actually emerging today especially with the eagerly awaited *PlayStation5* and *Xbox Series* launch. To pursue this objective, ten gamers have been interviewed to understand their motivations behind console gaming and purchase. The first section will develop an overview of the video games market and its main actors. Everything starts with the simple *video game* definition and then gets to the developments that have disrupted this sector, making it the fastest growing and most profitable segment of the entire entertainment market. After providing numerical data on the growth and current size of the market, a section is dedicated to the history of consoles from the early '70s, and its iconic *Atari 2600*, up to *PlayStation5*, the emblem of the ninth generation, proving how consoles are still strongly desired and highly sold today. The launch of Sony and Microsoft *next gen* consoles in fact, has proved to be an incredible success. However, in recent years the media have begun to speculate on the "death of consoles" given the rise of smartphones and new consumer needs in the realm of digitalization. As we will see, consoles are not dying; conversely they are going through a period of great success that does not seem to be declining. In the second section the ten interviews will be presented describing the informant's background. This study focuses mostly on the emotional attachment to the device, without deepening the technical aspects which can be further explored in a different context. The first six informants are males from 17 to 30 years old; some of them strongly passionate about gaming while others sporadic players. The remaining four are females between the age of 20 and 28 years. Finally the third and fourth paragraphs focus on data analysis summarizing the main results which are then used to build five console-gamer relationship models: *true love marriage, love betrayal, selfish relationship, childhood friendship* and *casual friendship*. This relationship types provide a frame to understand which motivations lie behind console's current success, which aspects must be exploited and better explored to guarantee its success over time. Finally, the last section aims at discussing some implications deriving gamer's categorization.

Based on data collection, investments may be channeled in specific areas to guarantee console's popularity in a long term perspective.

Overview

1.1 Introduction to Videogaming and its evolution over time

To fully understand the relationship and importance of consoles for consumers, it is necessary to take a step back, starting with a general description. There is no official definition, however a console is an electronic device that allows to play by interacting with images on a screen. In order to play, two different components are needed: the console (*hardware* component) and the videogame (*software* component), its complementary asset. The *videogamer* therefore, is the one who plays videogames, also with one or more input peripherals (such as a joystick, keyboard, gamepad, etc.) to fully enjoy the gaming experience. Born in 1952, in its most rudimentary form, the concept of video games has evolved extensively over time, not without setbacks and critical phases, until it reached its current conformation. It would be better to say the various present conformations, given the multitude of types of gaming experiences and consoles that have been developed to date. This evolution has required the setting up of complex infrastructures and organizations (the gaming companies and their commercial networks) to satisfy a continuously evolving consumer demand, which has led to a particularly fierce competitive climate. This climate is controlled by some major players, both console and software producers, and by a myriad of various size actors, typically active only on the software side. Both hardware and software components, as the rest of the entertainment sector products, are by definition hedonic. Like movies and music, they are meant to deliver a multisensory experience and are evaluated on an emotional level. In the course of this paper, we are going to assess some criteria for the buyer's decision process. Still, it all ends up trying to define if the video game platform delivers a desirable experience.[1]

According to their desired experiences, time availability, and personality, potential video games and console buyers may be categorized into three macro segments. These groups are defined as *casual gamers*, *core gamers*, and *hardcore gamers*. To investigate the relationship between consoles and consumers, it is essential to determine all three categories. The hardcore gamer is highly competitive and tends to play games requiring a high degree of skill, while the casual gamer, on the other hand, prefers low-involvement games that requiring lower time investment.[2] The core gamer is a third category that lies between those

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[1] Elizabeth C. Hirschman, Morris B. Holbrook "Hedonic consumption: Emerging concepts, methods and propositions," *Journal of Marketing* Vol. 46, (1982): 92-101.
[2] Jussi Kuittinen, Annakaisa Kultima, Johannes Niemelä, Janne Paavilainen "Casual games discussion", *Future Play* (2007): 105-112

extremes.[3] Generally speaking, consumer distinction in these three categories has always remained the same over the years, but the same cannot be said of industry. For about thirty years, the video game sector moved from being the ignored segment to the most mainstream and profitable of today's entertainment industry. As noted by Bobby Kotick, the CEO of one of the world's largest game publishers, Activision Blizzard: "Everyone is a gamer now."

Several reasons lie behind this great development. The two most significant aspects are the consumer broadband adoption and the rising popularity of smartphones. Fixed broadband connection has made it possible to remove physical, geographical, and distribution limits, making it easier for companies to create content and launch it to market. Second, the rapid rise of smartphones has somewhat redistributed power from the demand side. Nowadays, to buy a game, there is no need to reach a physical store (such as GameStop), instead it is possible to download an app on the smartphone to download digital content.[4] This has consequently changed the demand side, and more people have found themselves to be "gamers," even if only for a short time, having downloaded a gaming app. These two aspects combined have led to a drastic lowering of entry barriers and a considerable enlargement of the targetable audience.[5] Generally speaking, we can refer to the phenomenon of digitalization. The video game business model is product-based, and companies have always based their competition on the unique and original creation of a physical product. But since a few years now, this model has been replaced by a service-based one. The result has been a radical change; software companies ceased to create the entire value for the final consumer and started relying on the so-called "network effect". Competition changed form: investments were not solely targeted in production of the software, but in an actual chase to copy the most popular game of the moment. This becomes the best strategy to claim a slice of the market. Indeed, there is nothing unusual since it is a common practice in markets with low entry barriers and high differentiation costs. The "traditional game publishing" model, were the entire final value lies within the product itself, shifts to "networked game publishing" where the major worth is in the creation of a positive network effect. As we will see later, the network effect is not a new in the videogames industry. On the other hand, from the hardware point of view, a significant installed base (hence, more consoles sold to gamers) leads to a greater variety of software (more games available for
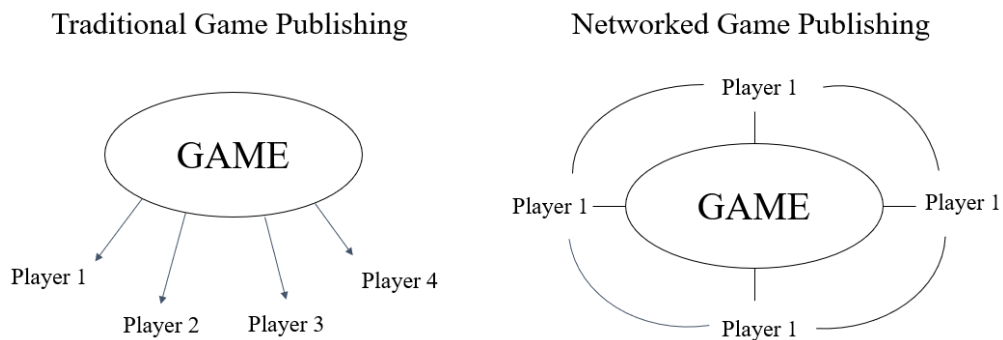
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[3] Michael Scharkow, Ruth Fest, Jens Vogelgesang, Thorsten Quandt "Beyond the "core-gamer": Genre preferences and gratifications in computer games," Computers in Human Behavior Vol.44, (2015): 293-298.
[4] Claudio Feijooa, José LuisGómez-Barroso, Juan-Miguel Aguado, Sergio Ramosa "Mobile gaming: Industry challenges and policy implications" *Telecommunications Policy* Vol. 36 (2012): 212-221
[5] Andy Bossom, Ben Dunning, "Videogames: An introduction to the Industry." *Bloomsbury Publishing* (2015)

said gamers).[6] A higher software quality means better games which increases the value of the gaming platform for the consumer.[7] Moreover, additional direct network effects are the foundation of the approach taken from the opposite direction (how to use the software to counter lifecycle decline). From now on, it is not only about the hardware side but also about the software one.[8] (Figure 1.1)

Figure 1.1

Traditional Game Publishing

Networked Game Publishing

GAME

Player 1

Player 2   Player 3

Player 4

Player 1

Player 1   GAME   Player 1

Player 1

This first major change is followed by an equally significant one. After ignoring a massive part of the addressable market for decades, the market finally stops targeting the usual small segment. As we will see later in the history of consoles, the launch of the Nintendo Wii in 2006 completely changed the way consumers view gaming. Nintendo launches a console easy to use for everyone, with incredibly accessible games, selling more than 100 million units (making it the second best-selling console after PlayStation2). At that point, *casual gamers* category explodes and grows exponentially to become the most significant consumer base component of the industry. Nintendo has been the first to address everyone and will develop its unique audience over time. Today its consoles do not compete with Sony and Microsoft, addressing a different target: adults and children in a casual game approach, far from the "professional" image communicated by its rivals PlayStation and Xbox.

1.2 Market Dynamics

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[6] Dmitri Williams "Structure and competition in the U.S. home video game industry" *International Journal on Media Management* Vol.4 (2009): 41-54

[7] Michael L. Katz, Carl Shapiro "Systems competition and network effects", *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol.8 (1994): 93–115.

[8] Andre Marchand "The power of an installed base to combat lifecycle decline: The case of video games*", International Journal of Research in Marketing* Vol. 33 (2016):140–154

The video game industry is based on peculiar dynamics that make a videogame's success challenging and unpredictable. Despite this, for several years the business side of this sector has almost been mocked while the creative process was subject to an irrational idolization. This mindset fails to consider the strong "win or die" dynamics of this environment. Let us begin from the software production side. The development of a "blockbuster" game has considerable costs. It takes years to develop a title, not to mention the addition of marketing and distribution costs that double the total expenditure.[9] A title like Grand Theft Auto V (GTA V) has reached the market after six years of work. Take-Two Interactive, its publisher, has spent about 260 million dollars, nearly half in development and the other in marketing. GTA V is an explosive success case, but the truth is that most titles generally disappoint expectations and fail to return adequate profits. In fact, only a small number of titles overall dictates the total revenues on the software side. According to an analysis of the revenue distribution for several classic genres on consoles, the top-ten titles account for more than 90 percent of consumer spending.[10]

Another component to consider is seasonality. Historically, most sales are concentrated in the last two months of the year, making the marketing competition fierce.[11] Console and video game manufacturers are competing for the consumer's attention in the hope of meeting their high expectations in November and December. During the products release date, another central aspect takes place: demand uncertainty. Undoubtedly the videogames sector is not alone facing this obstacle. Still, publishers and retailers have to make considerable financial investments long before the release date. The probability of misunderstanding the competitive landscape or the consumers' preferences as the title finally hits the market is remarkable. Within these trends, it is also necessary to consider the business type. Videogames are a platform-based industry which follow a straightforward rule: hardware is sold at a loss. Only the sale of software allows recovery and, in general, to be profitable in the long term. Thus, it is of paramount importance that the game, once reached the market, obtains the desired success and also that the companies producing consoles get an installed base quickly. Increasing the console gamer base is the only way to attract content creators into develop software's and make the whole mechanism work. The example of Microsoft's entrance in console market in 2001 with Xbox perfectly explains this dynamic. The company found itself selling its consoles at a loss of

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[9] Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, Susana Pajares Tosca "Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction" *Routledge* (2019)

[10] Joost Van Dreunen, "One Up: Creativity, Competition, and the Global Business of Video Games", Columbia Business School (2020)

[11] Timothy Derdenger "Technological tying and the intensity of price competition: An empirical analysis of the video game industry" *Quantitative Marketing and Economics* (2014)

250$ each trying to persuade publishers as quickly as possible to develop games for them. Softwares are developed to be compatible with a specific hardware, hence for a consumer a new launched console has no value without a suitable game available.[12] Any aspiring competitor in the hardware landscape faces strong barriers to entry since the active players on the platform side are a handful.

This is why hardware and software are so closely linked: consumers do not want consoles per se (at least the majority), they want to play particular titles and therefore are forced to buy the respective consoles. Thankfully, the ecosystem can reset the installed base periodically, redistributing market share. This happens due to the natural life cycle of consoles which is called *generation*. Console manufacturers release new platforms at the end of each generation, every five to seven years. This mechanism allows companies to rebuild their market share and reset (though not wholly) the landscape of console manufacturers. The existence of consoles generation is another critical feature defining the market fueled by technological innovation.[13] Until today, nine console generations have entered the market taking part to the *console wars* in which they battle for market domain during their lifecycles.[14] In the following paragraph, all of them will be covered to understand the dynamics of a sector shaped by high investments, high risks, and high rewards.

1.3 Market size and platform adoption

Today, the Videogame Market has reached dimensions that were hardly foreseeable at its beginning. Globally it has been valued 151.06 billion dollars in 2019 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 12.9% from 2020 to 2027.[15] As mentioned above, an important distinction in the industry is between the hardware market, dominated by three main players, and software market, including multiple actors some of whom being quite new. Sony has been maintaining its leadership position in the consoles market for years with 46% market share, followed by Nintendo and Microsoft holding respectively 31% and 23% of the market. Nintendo has recently strengthened its position due to the 26 million Switch consoles sold.[16] (figure 1.3)

Figure 1.3

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[12] André Marchand "The power of an installed base to combat lifecycle decline: The case of video games" *International Journal of Research in Marketing* Vol.33 (2016): 140-154
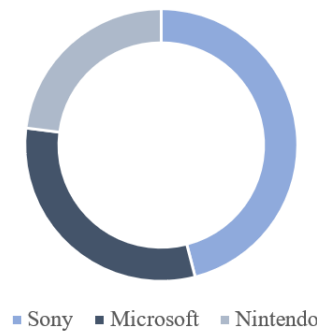
[13] Kyle Orland "Does the power of today's consoles keep up with historical trends?" *Ars Technica* (2013)

[14] Lars Bartschat "Success factors of video game consoles" *University of Munster* (2016)

[15] Grand View Research report "Video Game Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis 2020 – 2027"

[16] Ampere Analysis report (2020)

Global Console Market Share

■ Sony   ■ Microsoft   ■ Nintendo

On the software side, the biggest players (both incoming and already established) are Amazon, Facebook, Google, Apple, Microsoft, Sony, and Tencent. A ranking reflecting overall market leadership[17]. Apple, Microsoft, Sony e Tencent heavily rely on interactive entertainment for their success (figure 1.4). In particular, Tencent is a relatively newcomer compared to the other companies but is substantially achieving market value, making it the largest game publisher in the world today.

Table 1

Global game publishing share

Company	Total Revenues (US$ Billions)	Gaming Revenue	Gaming share %
Amazon	141,4	1,6	1,1%
Facebook	55,8	1	1,8%
Google	136,2	1,9	1,4%
Apple	260,2	11	4,2%
Microsoft	110,4	10	9,1%
Sony	78	21	26,9%
Tencent	45,4	18,6	41,0%
Total	**827,4**	**65,1**	**12,2%**

Source: Statista

However, consoles are not the only platforms for video gaming. Smartphones have been gaining momentum lately as the *causal gamers* segment grew substantially. This category invests limited time and engagement in gaming but has contributed dramatically to the market growth, partially due to Covid-19. According to Adjust and Unity's latest report, globally casual game downloads more than doubled from December 2019 to March 2020. But users did not just download more hyper casual games; they also played them more often. Sessions grew by 72% in March when lockdown went into force.[18] Another device whose adoption by gamers has

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[17] Joost Van Dreunen, *supra note*, 7
[18] Adjust and Unity report "Hyper casual gaming in 2020"

undergone an incredible increase is the computer. According to statista data, it is the most used gaming device today, becoming a strong selling mainstream product.[19] Traditionally, consumers have played on consoles, but now, the time spent gaming on mobile devices and PC has expanded the traditional gaming platforms scenario.[20]

1.4 History of gaming consoles

The gaming industry has an eventful history, and its beginnings have nothing to do with the concept of gaming that we know today. During the early days, companies dedicated minor investments in video game development just focusing on hardware creation. The console as an object was at the core, already having a "built in" videogame. The so-called *arcade* games. In the early '70s, content was a commodity, pretty much the same for every console, and definitely not a strategic differentiator. In this period Atari, the company bound to dominate the early years, was born and in Novembre 1972 launches the emblematic tennis game Pong.[21] As previously mentioned, it was a single-game console. Following the launch, all hardware manufacturers started imitating Atari, focusing on creating their own console regardless the game included. The market was flooded with devices, all roughly analogous, and the following shakeout was predictable.

Consumers quickly grew tired of playing the same games. This feeling pushed companies to start publishing *exclusive* games, only compatible with a specific console model, no longer built directly into the hardware. From that moment, the standalone development of video games becomes the real competitive advantage in the industry. The transition to title exclusivity changed the content creation process.[22] Game designers were finally considered artists, fully aware of their developed value. Until that moment, software development was carried out by a single individual, from graphics to storyboards to music, who got paid like an average employee. As soon as exclusive titles were released, some of them had a huge success and designers realized their potential. They were fully accountable for the multi-million dollar profits of the games while seeing their salaries unchanged.

Towards the end of the '70s, several departures of game designers from large hardware companies took place, the most famous being that of four Atari designers who founded

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[19] GFK "Gaming still on the rise" *Press Release* (2017)

[20] Kevin Westcott, Jeff Loucks, David Ciampa, Shashank Srivastava "Digital media trends survey: Video gaming goes mainstream" Deloitte Insights (2019)

[21] Atari.com. Downloaded on April 18th 2021 from https://www.atari.com/history/1972-1984-0

[22] Mark J. P. Wolf "The video game explosion: a history from PONG to Playstation and beyond" *ABC-CLIO* (2008)

Activision in 1979. By becoming independent, the creatives were finally able to perceive much more value for themselves. Activision, in just three years, earned 300 million and grew faster than Atari.[23] The business model had changed, and hardware production was finally detached from the production of games. Console producers were forced to turn to third-party software to encourage exclusive games for their platforms and make them more desirable. Despite this change in the business model and the development of iconic games such as Pac-Man and Space Invaders, in the early '80s the crisis was approaching. As mentioned before, home consoles production was increasing but games were essentially identical and low quality. Moreover, the negative associations linked to the video gamer as a "time-waster" are exploited by the aggressive marketing of the Commodore 64, PC that is proposed as an educational solution to video games.[24] As expected, in 1983, the videogames market collapses. On the one hand, consumers are confused by this consoles over-supply; on the other hand, companies are not able to bear such high production costs. Several hardware manufacturers were forced to exit the market.

It was just during the lowest industry's historical moment that Nintendo enters the market, disrupting it. In 1985, Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) was launched into the home console market, fuelling it back.[25] These years also consolidate the previously emerged trend: investing in creative software development. Nintendo's revolution simply lies in choosing quality over the quantity[26], thus avoiding another huge distribution of mediocre and undifferentiated content. The Japanese company encourages game makers to deliver only their best titles and revises its retail strategy. For the first time a manufacturer kept more than half of the inventory available inactive right when the popularity of its devices was skyrocketing, generating demand shortage.[27]

Years later, in the 1990s, major technical and content innovation hit the market: SEGA's Mega Drive and Nintendo's Super NES allowed the introduction of 3D graphics setting new standards for titles. 1994 marked PlayStation's launch by Sony, where communication finally has a turning point. The refined and mature advertising compares consoles not anymore to toys. Instead, proposes them as hi-tech furniture object. The beauty and complexity of the proposed

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[23] Joost Van Dreunen, *supra note*, 7

[24] Mark Finn "Console games in the age of convergence" *Tampere University Press* (2002): 45-57

[25] Jonathan Clemens "Defining Play: Producers, Mediators, and Users in the History of Video Arcade Games" *University of Minnesota* (2015)

[26] Blake J. Harris, "Console Wars: Sega, Nintendo and the Battle that Defined a Generation" *New York: Dey Street Books* (2015)

[27] Ali Farhoomand "Nintendo's disruptive strategy: implications for the video game industry" *Asia Case Research Centre* (2009)

games (e.g., Tomb Raider, Metal Gear Solid, Final Fantasy, etc.) and the million units sold worldwide establish it as a world-famous brand. From 1997, internet technologies lead to the second revolution in terms of playability: the ability to connect distant locations facilitates the multiplayer function, leading to the creation of a new genre, still very much in vogue: the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG). About ten years later, in 2008, the video game industry experiences its most successful year. In fact, despite the general crisis affecting all mass consumption sectors, global sales of consoles continued unstoppable and surpassed those of the following years, in terms of units sold.

Figure 1.5

Consoles sold during generations

Company	Generations / Hardware	One 1972 - 1976	Two 1977 - 1983	Three 1984 - 1987	Four 1988 - 1993	Five 1994 - 1998	Six 1999 - 2005	Seven 2006 - 2012	Eight 2013 - 2020
Atari	Pong	0.08							
	Atari 2600		12.8	1.7					
	Atari 5200		0.9	0.1					
Sony	PlayStation					51	48.3	0.4	
	PlayStation 2						94.3	30	
	PlayStation 3								
	Playstation 4 (Pro,Slim)								
Microsoft	Xbox						22,1		
	Xbox 360							64	21.3
	Xbox One (S,X)								44.9
Nintendo	NES			11.6	50.6	1.3			
	Wii							85,9	15.7
	Wii U								13.56
	Switch								79.8

Source: Statista (million USD)

Today, in November 2020, the market entered its ninth generation of video game platforms with the Xbox Series and the PlayStation5 launch, both in standard and digital versions. The console business has proven to be remarkably resilient to digitalization. In the first half of 2020, the console install base reached more than 200 million units worldwide.[28] Speaking therefore of Xbox Series X and PS5 is also important to emphasize their digital versions. The new generation is all about speed and graphic effects: in this sense, there is not a big gap between the two consoles. Since the first months after launch (until now, May 2021), it has extremely difficult to purchase one of the consoles, both affected by supply shortages due to Covid-19. In this new generation, the two manufacturers wanted to differentiate themselves in designing the latest consoles and their approach to the next-gen. Microsoft focuses mainly on services such as Xbox Game Pass which explain a partial digital shift. On the other hand, Sony continues its

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[28] Joost Van Dreunen, *supra note*, 7

exclusive titles-based strategy, always heavily driving demand. Sony has also presented a new controller, the *DualSense*, with haptic feedback. This new feature replaces the basic vibration included in previous gamepads and translates on-screen elements (such as terrain resistance in racing games) to touch, offering a whole new gaming experience.

1.5 The end of the consoles market: truth or exaggeration?

It was back in 2012 when BOXER8 set a crowdfunding to fund its new proposal: the OUYA console, raising almost 9 million dollars.[29] This console promised to be accessible to everyone, both audience and content creators, like no hardware before. The announced price was also going to be much below the market level identifying it as an affordable alternative. Also, when the Chinese ecommerce giant Alibaba decided to invest in OUYA, everyone was finally convinced that it would disrupt the console market. Ouya was introduced as a low-cost "micro-console" offering reasonable quality on TV screens and most games free to play. The aim was to create e new market space between traditional high-end consoles and smartphones who had begun to penetrate the market aggressively. Despite its great promise, OUYA was a complete failure. Ouya did not have the rich catalog of quality games, great graphics, and processing speed that traditional gamers prized but the company had to sacrificed to drop the costs. Without those features, potential gamers had no reason to purchase this new console.[30]

A few years earlier OUYA's launch, the media started to rumor the "death of consoles" and this theory began to spread considerably in the industry. Wired magazine wrote "The Game Console is Dead. What will replace it?"[31], CNN discusses the Wii U console's lack of success explaining "why console gaming is dying."[32] This skepticism arose from the iPhone appearance and the rapid rise of Facebook, both suggesting that consoles would suffer the same fate as *arcade* games. The "invisible hand" that would change the market was the smartphone rise, with large organizations behind it and much less expensive technologies. The CEO of Square Enix, Yoichi Wade, simply stated: "in ten years, a lot of what we call "console games" won't

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[29] Jonathon Kissinger, Tony Morelli "Ouya: The Launch of a New Video Game Paradigm", *GSTF Journal on Computing (JoC)* Vol.3 (2014)

[30] W. Chan Kim, Renée Mauborgne "Red Ocean Traps The mental models that undermine market-creating strategies", *Harvard Business Review* (2015)

[31] Chris Kohler, "Consolation Prize: The Game Console is dead. What will replace it?" *Wired magazine* (2021)

[32] Blake Snow, "Why Console Gaming is Dying," *CNN Business*, 2012

exist."[33] The launch of the ninth generation for many experts was pointless and would have been probably the last.

But warnings were not just coming from outside the market. To begin with, the seventh generation raised suspicion lasting longer than usual. Historically the cycle of consoles spans about five years. At that time Microsoft decided to extend the Xbox 360 cycle with the launch of a new controller. Sony agreed in the same wake to launch an upgraded version of PlayStation3. The only company releasing a new hardware was Nintendo with the Wii U, but it turned out to be a failure compared to its previous version: the popular Wii. Everything seemed to confirm the "death of consoles" rumors, and yet it did not happen. Consoles adapted to digitalization, formulating their service-based strategy. Sony in 2006 launched PlayStation Network and focused on diversifying its content by including film and television programs. To further drive demand, Sony also expanded its hardware offering by developing the original PlayStation4, releasing the Slim version, Pro version, and standalone Playstation VR version. This happened to be the best matching strategy with smartphone manufacturers. The latter released a new generation of devices annually, while consoles had a longer life cycle. By releasing updating models, both Sony and Microsoft were able to better cater to different consumer cohorts. The introduction of digital content, new hardware versions, and the continuous success of top-selling titles, both companies maintained their leading position despite the entrants ready to disrupt the market. [34]

Consoles have been able to survive and, moreover, lead the market until today, even though media still support the aforementioned theory. Business strategy and technology are not the solely reasons for consoles success growing year over year. This thesis aims to explore the motivations behind the unexpected and ongoing success of consoles. In the following paragraphs, conclusions will be drawn based on ten interviews conducted with ten consoles enthusiasts.

Methodology

2.1 Design and Data Collection

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[33] Michael French, "Consoles set for Extinction Claims square Enix's Wasa," *The Market for Computer and Videogames (MCV)* (2009)

[34] André Marchand, Thorsten Hennig-Thurau "Value Creation in the Video Game Industry: Industry Economics, Consumer Benefits, and Research Opportunities" *Journal of Interactive Marketing* Vol.27 (2013):141-157

This thesis aims at defining a set of motivations to explain gaming console's success, which are still desired and highly sold today. Throughout the analysis, four types of hardware will be examined and compared. First two are the actual consoles: PlayStation and Xbox, regardless of generation, being the main focus of this research. To fully understand the relationship between gamers and these devices we also consider the smartphone and the personal computer (PC). Smartphones have been included to represent the *casual gamer* category and allow to understand if it can be considered a true alternative for gamers, given the proliferation of high-quality gaming apps. The PC represents a second alternative to classic consoles given its growing adoption and powerful hardware, which offers a superior gaming experience. It must be mentioned that we are not referring to a regular laptop but rather to gaming device, which is considerably more expensive than consoles (about three times more) and requires regular updates.

Technological features are excluded from this study, which will focus on emotional characteristics and therefore will investigate the relationship between player and console. The discovery-oriented purpose of this thesis leads to the choice of phenomenological interviews rather than more structured approaches to analysis.[35] This technique has been also better suited to establish the consumer validity of their relationship with the gaming console, allowing for a better understanding of their personal experience. Ten case studies were conducted for ten console players with different age and background. Informants were interviewed for about one hour each in a single series of online meetings over one month period. Informants has been selected to maximize the possibility of gathering different insights about the relationship player-console relationship. The variation in age and background allowed also to focus on some sociocultural factors driving the relationship behavior. Moreover, all interviews and analysis have been conducted to allow a more complete perspective sought through the method. The interview flow has been structured to provide five types of information:

(1) *Biographical data.* First questions collect information on age, gender, education level and job position. This section also quantifies how much time the interviewee spends on gaming and video games.

(2) *The beginning of the relationship with the console.* This section aims at understanding how informants approached console usage, at which age, and in which context.

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[35] Craig J. Thompson, William B. Locander, H. Pollio "Putting Consumer Experience Back into Consumer Research: The Philosophy and Method of Existential-Phenomenology" *Journal of Consumer Research* (1989)

Moreover, their relationship with console gaming today and the emotions associated with it are outlined.

(3) *The evolution of the relationship.* This passage depicts how the gaming moment has developed, since almost all the interviewees have been playing for years now. However, this evolution does not take place necessarily; sometimes the relationship does not experience any change despite time passing by.

(4) *Approaching different devices besides the console.* The fourth section is the most informative as it investigates the motivations behind purchasing a different device. Participants responded ranking among a number of motivations. This information is critical as it allows to grasp the possible effects of a device transition. Switching from a console to a different platform (or vice versa) may have strengthened the relationship with the console itself or weakened it. In addition, this section provides several reasons explaining the preference of one device over another.

(5) *The Ninth Generation.* The survey ends with a few questions about next generation consoles and the console-player relationship in the present.

2.2 Data Analysis

Two types of interpretation of the interviews were required. The first one is an idiographic analysis from the reading of transcripts and the identification of recurrent behaviors, common preferences, and tendencies.[36] The various relationships with console have been considered both individually and collectively in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of their main aspects and context. Later, the second level involved a cross-person analysis which had the goal to highlight recurring patterns across the episodes that could help better understanding the phenomenon.

Overall, interviewed people generated 10 stories for the analysis. This approach allowed to discover connections between categories and present findings in an easily readable way capturing more richness. The contextual description facilitates the presentation of findings and aims at engaging the reader. The major drawback is that of reducing the universe of data able to showcase; in this sense, it reflects the unavoidable trade-off between depth and breadth.[37]

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[36] Craig J. Thompson "Interpreting Consumers: A Hermeneutical Framework for Deriving Marketing Insights from the Texts of Consumers' Consumption Stories" *Journal of Marketing Research* Vol. 34 (1997):438-455
[37] Vern Glaser, Pedro Monteiro, Trish Reay, Asma Zafar "Presenting Findings from Qualitative Research: One Size Does Not Fit All!", *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, Vol. 59 (2019):201–216

Idiographic analysis

Case I: Alessandro

Alessandro is 30 years old and works in the videogames industry, managing to combine his job with his lifelong passion. After a master's degree in marketing he was hired in a large company and despite the 8 hours of work per day he does not give up console gaming. ("I like to carve out time every weekend and at the end of the day to play"). In addition to playing about two hours a day he likes to stay up to date and follows on youtube and various gaming magazines the latest news. In short, he's a real gamer, a definition in which he identifies ("I've always played videogames and I'm a real enthusiast). His first gaming device has been a *PlayStation1* (*Ps1*) when he was about 8 years old.

> "I wasn't aware of what I was getting into. PS1 was a gift from my father and I didn't even asked for it. Back then, there was no idea that playing video games could have 'side effects'. My first console was an easy win, years later I would have a much harder times letting my dad having one."

Nowadays Alessandro mainly plays with a *PlayStation5 (PS5)*, Sony's next-generation console, and for all these years he has not left his favorite console brand. For him, gaming is a moment dedicated to relax and estrangement in which he gets comfortable on the couch and vents the tension of the day. His favorite game mode is offline, thus without connecting with other players. Although he has always preferred PlayStation over any other device, he has experimented with other platforms being a true console enthusiast. According to Alessandro, the main reason to purchase and try a different platform is the will to experiment ("I also played on the computer to try different gaming experiences, I bought the Switch out of pure curiosity"). A second motivation is title exclusivity ("I bought Xbox only to play to its esclusive games") and finally he strongly values the idea of simply owning a console. He doesn't define himself as a true collector but he believes it's a gamer "status" matter ("I personally bought the Xbox also for a gamer status"). In fact, he considers *PlayStation5* is a "must have", purchased out of interest in the ninth generation ("I was curious to see what a more powerful machine could do"). Compared to other devices for Alessandro, the game console use excludes that of the computer and smartphone.

"A PC is definitely too expensive and must be updated constantly, the purchase is not worth it. Instead, I can easily play with a console for 6 or 7 years, thus for the entire generation length, without taking any action. I briefly tried games on smartphones but there is no comparison, it's not challenging at all as a gaming experience."

Case II: Simone

Simone, a Business Administration student, is 25 years old and is currently finalizing his thesis. During the week he spends from 10 to 15 hours playing video games, being a passionate player for many years now. During his spare time, he enjoys computer science, sports and hanging out with his friends, but he also reads about videogames from youtube and reddit every day. The gaming approach took place when he was 5 years old with his first device: the Nintendo *Gameboy Advanced*.

"I remember asking my parents for the Gameboy. It wasn't popular and I hadn't seen it among my friends but I was very impressed by the commercial on television, it had this bright purple color and a beautiful game."

Shortly after the *Gameboy Advanced*, Simone switched to the *PlayStation1* which was actually owned by his uncle. Once he started to play it he never quit. According to him, the gaming moment is solitary on his gaming chair and with all the accessories. It is important not to be disturbed since it's not really about relaxation but rather a moment of concentration and seriousness ("I play when I want to challenge myself"). His favorite game mode is online since connecting with his friends is an essential component of the gaming experience. Simone has always played with all PlayStation versions and nowadays he mainly uses the new generation *PS5*, although not exclusively. To him, console gaming does not exclude PC gaming which provides him a more immersive and high quality gaming experience. Simone made the transition to the PC when he had the financial opportunity. In addition, for him the strongest reason to buy a different device lies in title exclusivity.

"Exclusive games to me are the most powerful reasons. For example, I bought myself a Nintendo 3DS XL just to play Pokemon Sun and Moon. I kept it for about a week and then sold it back. Maybe I won't keep it for 10 years like the Playstation, but I'll definitely purchase it."

Certainly, curiosity also plays a role in his purchase decision ("I bought *PlayStation Vita* five years later its release date because it was a technological masterpiece and I really wanted to try it"), which makes the console attractive even years after its release date. Simone also states that the simple

fact of owning a console is a valid reason to purchase it. Regarding the use of other devices, although he mainly uses the *PS5*, he considers the PC superior ("The computer is graphically more powerful. Keyboard and mouse are superior to joysticks providing a smoother experience"). While explaining this, he also adds that PlayStation still has some important advantages. Simone uses console to connect with his friends and play his favorite exclusive games (which cannot be done on PC), recognizing its ease of use:

> "Console game is very simple. Just press 3 buttons and you're literally inside the game while on PC you have so many settings to decide: download the software, get a separate monitor, speakers and many more accessories. Playing console basically requires a television. For this reason, PC is meant for slightly more experienced gamers."

Simone has been very pleased with the new consoles generation. According to him, exclusive PlayStation games are the best and he had no hesitation whatsoever ("For me the only choice is PlayStation"). Also the new *DualSense* controller has exceeded his expectations ("the gaming experience is totally different, you really feel the new technology. I must say that there is also a strong jump in graphics quality. You feel less of a difference with the PC").

Case III: Augusto

It's undeniable that growing up interests may change and what has been a true passion as a kid can become just a hobby in spare time. Augusto is a 17 years old high school student, and during primary school he played on console entire afternoons. Today he focuses on studying and during weekends, if he feels like it, plays video games. He is not constantly informed about the gaming world but occasionally reads news on Facebook groups and follows specific Instagram pages. His first console has been *PlayStation2* when he was about seven years old ("I didn't ask for it, my brother received it as a gift and I started playing") and today he mainly plays with *PlayStation4*. For him, gaming is not a major focus of the day:

> "I spend much more time playing only following specific releases. Basically, I only play if I'm bored or I'm really into an exclusive title. I used to spend a lot more time gaming when I was a kid and nowadays I still like to play on consoles because I'm really used to it."

In this case, the relationship with console has changed over time ("As a child I had more urge to play, I almost needed to get away from reality, but now it's not like that anymore."). The game mode

goes along with the platform choice. In fact, over time Augusto has tried different devices: from *PlayStation2* he moved to *Nintendo DSI*, then back to *PlayStation3, Xbox1* and finally *PlayStation4.* The reasons why he chose to change platforms over time are mainly exclusive titles ("I will definitely buy a console to play a specific game that otherwise I could not try"). A second reason is just the willingness to try a different device and desire to experiment, generally after having it seen from his friends.

For Augusto PC gaming is not a valid alternative to console gaming. He finds it too uncomfortable to use ("I love playing on the couch. PC gaming means sitting in front of a desk in a much stiffer position"). He does not even consider the idea of playing on smartphones since he cannot stand the idea of wasting time playing "games that do not make me feel anything".

Case IV: Prisco

Prisco is a third-year law student and his approach to the gaming world is a bit different from other informants. He is now 22 years old and time spent playing has been increasing until now. The pandemic and lockdown have had a major impact on his console relationship. He currently plays an average of 20 hours per week, mainly in the evenings and on weekends, checking in daily on twitch and youtube for any news about gaming and consoles. He approached console gaming when he was about 10 years old with *PlayStation2* after seeing his friends playing *Dragonball*, a PS exclusive title. Over the years, he switched from *Ps2* to *PlayStation3 (Ps3)* during high school ("I bought it but I didn't use it that much") and he stopped playing until the pandemic broke out:

> "In high school I played occasionally. When lockdown came into force, I had already moved out of town to study and decided to buy *Xbox1* since it was cheaper than the PlayStation. I was a student living out-of-town and did not feel like asking my parents for money. I currently play several hours a week. I must say that during lockdown an investment in *in-door* entertainment is more easily made."

Prisco considers gaming time as a chance to connect with friends and relax together at the end of the day:

> "I play in the living room. I bought a monitor and headphones to enhance the gaming experience. When I start playing I would call friends from my town and connect together. The gaming

session is very relaxed, on the couch, and of course I prefer to play online rather than offline. I also like to connect with different people, usually strangers. My idea of gaming is connecting with people and have a chat."

Switching to another device for Prisco has been dictated by financial motivations primarily. If it wasn't for this, he would have continued purchasing PlayStation without experiencing a transition to Xbox. According to him, a strong motivation to switch device are also exclusive titles and the possibility to enjoy different gaming experiences ("I also had the Nintendo DS but I eventually gave up on it since it didn't provide me a "wow" experience. To me the in-game involvement counts a lot"). Finally, a valid motivation is definitely the fact of owning it and feeling the differences with the previous generations.

According to him, PC gaming does not exclude console, but it is not an immediate adoption: "getting used to PC requires training. We are also speaking about a device way more subject to obsolescence". While regarding smartphone gaming, Prisco only approaches it in the idle moments of the day. He avoids wasting phone's battery playing low quality games. "The gaming console purpose is to play games while smartphone is used for everything else. It doesn't make any sense to drain the battery playing."

Prisco did not purchase a next-generation console for an economic reason but if he had a chance, he would definitely buy *PlayStation5* for continuity with previous hardwares. Moreover, he also claims to be a true fan of Ps5 design since he was a kid.

Case V: Andrea

Andrea has been working as a hearing aid specialist for a couple of years now, after completing a bachelor's degree in economics. He is 27 years old and nowadays he plays at videogames in his spare time. Lately, the pandemic has affected a lot the amount of time dedicated to gaming. In fact, he started using console again during lockdown period and for approximately 25 hours per week, while in high school and university time he almost never used it. Other hobbies include working out at the gym and hanging out with friends, without being that much into gaming news apart from checking casually Facebook groups. His first device has been *PlayStation1* when he was about 10 years old. He directly asked his parents for it after playing

it at a friend's home. According to him, the gaming moment does not take on specific connotations:

> "I play in any mood. For me it's not a unique time of the day. I settle down in my room in a comfortable way and connect to the television. I like to play online and connect with others but not for social purposes, just random people. Let's say that I play more relaxed having a strong gaming partner, able to save me in dangerous situations."

Over time he moved from *PS1* to *PS2* to the *PS4,* which is his mostly used device nowadays. Andrea believes that the strongest reason behind the purchase of a new console is obsolescence. According to him, the most meaningful reason is definitely to make a significant quality leap and improve overall gaming experience ("I haven't switched to other consoles lately because the one I currently use works fine, thus I don't feel the urge to change"). Andrea also explains why PC gaming is not a valid alternative to console:

> "For me console is irreplaceable since PC is definitely more cumbersome. I'm not into digital and computing thus I find it more challenging to manage all the different settings. Computer is better suited for 'nerdy' players and whoever takes gaming much more seriously, maybe professionals."

Regarding the ninth generation, Andrea did not follow the launch and didn't show any particular interest in new features. He also didn't take into consideration console purchase since his *Ps4* still works perfectly. Although, if he needed one, he would buy a *Ps5* being used to the overall interface and to keep playing with his PlayStation owner friends.

Case VI: Carola

Carola is the only gamer girl among her friends. Since she was given her first *PlayStation1* at 10 years old, she hasn't stopped playing. Nowadays, at 28 and with a full-time corporate job, things haven't changed much:

> "I've always identified in the 'gamer' personality. I always find out time to play, roughly 12 hours a week. Nowadays, more than ever I'm a gaming enthusiast as the industry started targeting also a female audience."

Initially, she began using her brother's console but soon took possession of it and never quit. The gaming moment is about complete dedication for her, being highly concentrated and using

the right accessories. She does not own a gaming chair as she has always played comfortably on her bed in front of the TV, but she bought a headset and the new DualSense joystick (in addition, of course, to the *PlayStation5*).

> "Playing games means challenging myself and having a lot of fun. I've always played PlayStation and I wouldn't dream of changing console, it represents my passion and, in some way, also my personality. It is a moment that I fully dedicate to myself in which no one should bother me".

Over time her relationship with the console has always been constant and solid. She has never felt a great urge to try new devices if not for curiosity, given her strong passion for the gaming world. According to her, the most powerful motivation behind the purchase of different hardwares is definitely the possibility to play most iconic games ("Super Mario is one of my favorite games, and of course I had to buy a Nintendo platform years ago"). She doesn't define herself as a proper collector, but she finds consoles aesthetically pleasing to have in the house ("I must confess that I really enjoy the idea of showing off my new Ps5 in the living room").

PC gaming for her is meant for "those who play professionally and not simply for passion". Moreover, she believes that the investment is not worth it since all her favorite games are PlayStation exclusive titles. Regarding smartphone gaming, every now and then she downloads some applications, but doesn't consider them a true gaming activity rather a way to kill time when she has got absolutely nothing to do. Instead, her curiosity and enthusiasm for the ninth-generation didn't fail to show:

> "I've been eagerly looking forward to the next generation and couldn't wait to try the *DualSense* controller. It's amazing to witness the technology evolution after all these years. I already think about the 10th generation and wonder what new features it might bring."

Case VII: Marianna

A passionate gymnast since childhood, Marianna has always played with consoles over the years. Despite not recognizing herself in the classic figure of the hardcore gamer, she has always shown a discrete interest in game play.

> "I practice rhythmic gymnastics competitively and has always been my passion. When I was a kid I used to devote few time to gaming but quite sporadic, lately during lockdown and closed gyms I've been playing much more consistently again."

Marianna is 22 years old and has a very practical personality. She doesn't like wasting time at all, which is why she has never showed interested in smartphone games. Console gaming has more or less been a part of her life and she has never moved to other platforms since her first Xbox360. Lately her gaming activity has changed, she has much more spare time which has been devoted to console play. She enjoys online gaming mode with other people, possibly as skilled as her, for a smoother game play.

> "I've been bored as much as anyone lately and got back playing Xbox after years. I bought myself an Xbox One just because my old console was now obsolete. I get comfortable on the couch and relax for a couple of hours, it clears my mind."

PC gaming for Marianna is not a valid option, she finds it too complex to use and "for the purpose (videogaming) it's not worth it considering how expensive it is". She doesn't play on her smartphone since she doesn't find gaming apps interesting enough, and when she gets bored console game is always her first choice. Switching to another device must be backed by compelling reasons:

> "I don't really follow the technical specifications; the important thing is to ensure support of my favorite games and having a well-functioning controller. I do not consider myself a video game enthusiast per se, in terms of technology."

Finally, Marianna has not purchased a next-generation console and is not planning to do so in the near future. Nevertheless, she admits that the pandemic allowed a reconnection with gaming and that she probably won't abandon it once returning to regular life.

Case VIII: Livia

Livia is 26 years old and has a degree in communication. She currently has a full-time job in a tech-startup and her approach to gaming world occurred through her brother, a true video game enthusiast.

> "I honestly never played Playstation growing up, but my brother has always been a fan. Recently we moved back in together during lockdown and he let me try out his Playstation4. I'm not great at playing but it's fun, ever since I tried the Nintendo Switch I haven't been able to part from it."

Nintendo Switch is a different kind of platform; much less game-intensive with a wider and more diverse target audience. Livia has become very involved and finds it a way to spend time with her family. Gaming time occurs in the evening all together even if she often finds herself

playing alone, for about 4 hours per week. Every now and then she uses the console with her brother and lately her interest is growing:

> "I don't understand much about the technical aspects of the *PS4* but I learned from my brother and we play together from time to time. I get bored playing by myself, rather I wait for him to come home so we can get on the couch and spend a couple of hours together. At first he didn't even want to play with me since I was really bad".

Livia alternates between *Nintendo Switch* and *Ps4,* she has never played with PC and has never been interested in trying since it is a "professional" single game mode in her opinion. She also adds that will never consider herself a gamer. It's just a hobby for her, although the gaming world fascinates her being "less *nerdy*" than she imagined. Every now and then she also plays with her smartphone but often downloads different games, getting bored easily. She particularly appreciates to play on her smartphone wherever she wants, especially in comfortable positions such as lying on the bed before going to sleep. Despite the gaming approach, Livia has no interest in learning about video games specificities, since her brother is already really into it. Thus, she has not followed the next-gen launch and has not even thought about buying a *Ps5*.

> "I would never spend that much on a Ps5 right now, however, it's a beautiful object that I would keep in the house. Maybe in the future... who knows, I might get more passionate about it. For now, I'm not giving up on *Nintendo Switch* for sure."

Case IX: Matteo

Matteo is 24 years old electronic engineer. Technology has always been his passion and his relationship with the console started as a kid, precisely with the iconic *PlayStation2*. Every day he dedicates a couple of hours to gaming, including weekends, and follows several youtube channels to keep updated on the latest news in the industry. He definitely likes to be considered a gamer and plays about 12 hours a week. If he had the chance, he would probably do it as a full-time job.

> "Gaming activity requires a lot of concentration. I have a number of accessories such as headphones, speakers and additional monitors. I avoid online gaming since I don't really trust other players, I prefer relying on myself […] Sometimes I think I'm a little too competitive."

Over time Matteo has tried various devices, being a true tech-fan and passionate about different platform features. The fact of owning a device is one of the main motivation to purchase a different hardware according to him, he likes having many different consoles and reviewing them. But it's also a matter of curiosity and, as in every case, of exclusive titles. Just as almost every other informant, the possibility of playing exclusive games is a strong motivational factor behind hardware purchase.

> "I switched to PC because it's the hardware most used by professional gamers and the difference is remarkable. It is such a powerful machine and the keyboard allows a fuller gaming responsiveness compared to the controller. Currently I have dropped PlayStation usage, after trying all versions, and mainly play on PC. […] I must admit that when I'm feeling nostalgic, I still dust off my *PS4*. Some PlayStation games are my favorites ever".

Matteo sometimes plays on his smartphone to spend some idle moments of the day and always downloads PlayStation apps. Over time his relationship with gaming has not changed much, having always been a great passion of his since he was a kid. On one hand, it has certainly grown stronger over the years ("growing up I became more aware of my passion, I like the idea of experimenting and learning more about videogames"). Although for him the PC is superior in graphics and performance, he continues playing on console every now and then ("I like to play sometimes on the couch, PC gaming takes place on my gaming chair and the setting is much more uncomfortable"). Lately he has also bought a next gen console, a *PlayStation5*, which he has enjoyed a lot.

> "This generation has been incredible, I've noticed a huge difference from the change between the seventh and eighth. The gaming experience, as different as it is, is almost close to the PC and that has been a pleasant surprise to me. In fact, I find myself using the *Ps5* much more than I would have thought."

Case X: Benedetta

Having moved to Rome to begin her first year of university, Benedetta is the only one among the informants who has never actually owned a console. She is 20 years old and has enrolled in Biotechnology, although in this first year she hasn't had the opportunity to attend many classes.

> "By September I had moved to Rome but didn't spend much time in the city, I went back to my hometown many times since in-person classes were very limited."

When Benedetta came home she often went to visit her aunt and uncle who live across the street from her house. They still have a *PlayStation3* previously bought for her cousin, who has now moved away. Benedetta approached *Ps3* out of boredom and slowly got the hang of it. She doesn't play it very often, in fact it only occurs when she visits her uncle for a couple of hours.

> "I don't spend a lot of time playing, and I'm not really interested in gaming that much. But I discovered PlayStation this past year and I really enjoy playing it. It used to be in the living room, but now I've taken it to my aunt and uncle's room so I can play it a bit more off to the side, since I connect with other people and talk out loud."

She started playing on her own, thus approached the online gaming mode to socialize. For her, gaming time is pure relaxation, connected with her friends or random people, in the comfort of her bedroom. In a few months she has made friends with some other players who have also explained her many things about this new world:

> "I didn't think I could ever make friends playing video games, but I really found a community of awesome people. I've bonded with two or three at most, but we have some whatsapp chats and follow each other on instagram. In my mind gamers have always been a bit weird, generally nerds or otherwise with little social life. Actually, it's not like that at all... or maybe I'm a bit weird too".

The gaming PC is not an option for her, as it is far too expensive ("Computer is useful for university, I already spend several hours a day using it and wouldn't spend more time to play"). As of today, Benedetta is not considering a *PlayStation5* purchase or any other next generation console. She will soon start attending classes and her daily life will change a lot. Until that moment, she will continue playing with her uncle's *PS3* during visits. In future she will probably buy one, just to continue connecting with her new friends and meet different people.

3.1 Main findings

Before summarizing the results from the ten interviews it is necessary to distinguish participants according to three categories: *casual gamer, core gamer* and *hardcore gamer* (see table 3.1). This division has been obtained from two aspects; time spent playing and interest in the gaming world (thus time dedicated to inform themselves).

Table 3.1
Gamer categorization

	Age (years)		
Player type	*< 22*	*22 - 26*	*> 26*
Casual gamer	Benedetta Augusto	Livia	
Core gamer		Prisco Marianna	Andrea
Hardcore gamer		Simone Matteo	Alessandro Carola

Hardcore gamers play from 10 hours a week and more, keeping updated on a regular basis about new releases and features. Casual gamers are not really passionate and do not keep updated about the news. Generally they do not own a console, or play Nintendo platforms sporadically. Core gamers lie in between the two categories, in this case they can play up to 10 hours a week, but they don't have a real passion for gaming or consoles. They simply spend more time playing having more spare time.

Below a summary of the main results divided into sections.

Relationship between player and console: some considerations.

The first noteworthy aspect is related to the age of the informants. Elderly gamers who have been playing for a long time will probably allow an easier approach to console to their children compared to the one they experienced. This could have positive impacts in terms of future adoption of the medium. It is also very likely that players will transmit their brand attachment. In fact, it was observed among the responses that nine out of ten participants have never changed console brand since their first approach (be it PlayStation or Xbox).

Considering instead some strengthening factors about the console-gamer relationship, Covid-19 has certainly played a role. Casual gamers (Livia, Benedetta and Augusto) claimed to have "rediscovered" their connection just during lockdown. All three cases had already experienced a previous bond with console, interrupted for various reasons. Nevertheless, today they are all happy with time spent playing and have no intention to go back. A third aspect to consider is the evolution in the gamer stereotype, often quoted as a reason for reconsidering gaming. Casual gamers claimed to be "surprised" by other players met online. In their minds they pictured them differently; "nerdier" according to Livia and "a bit weird" according to Benedetta. Following this reasoning, a more "modern" gamer image could possibly contribute to engage a broader

audience. It's important to mention that "console gamers" must not to be confused with "PC gamers". The latter are associated with a professional and still very hardcore target.

Moving on, player also brought the attention over their favorite gaming mode. The interviewees all expressed a preference between playing "online" (30%) and "offline" (70%). The former allows to connect with other players, whether friends or strangers. Several players enjoy this mode: hardcore gamers use it to find a strong gaming partner, while core and casual gamers favor group play, chatting with friends. The offline mode is single game one, without relying on any other player. The interesting aspect of this distinction lies in its correlation with the console-gamer relationship. Offline gaming is generally linked to an exclusive and deep bond, typical of players who have always stuck to the console (hardcore gamers). The online mode is divided into two subgroups. The first includes players who search for a winning partner (core or hardcore gamers) while the second considers players who connect to have a chat and socialize (casual gamers). Both motivations are valid and strong for console usage, especially the second one in pandemic times. Some informants claimed to have found great relief in being able to connect with friends during lockdown and spend time gaming together.

Console relationship and other devices.

Respondents recounted more than just their relationship with the console. Of the total number of informants, 70% have an exclusive relationship, the following 20% alternates the console use with PC and the remaining 10% plays both on console and "other devices". This last section include Nintendo Switch players or gamers that have changed brand over time (es: moving from PlayStation to Xbox).

Table 3.2

Player's device preferences

Gamer share/tot.	Main device	Gamer category
70%	Console only	Hardcore, core, casual
20%	Console + PC	Hardcore
10%	Console + other device	Casual

The 70% of "console only" players has a varied composition: casual, core and hardcore gamers. This shows how console can embrace a wide target, from the bored gamer playing during free time, to the true enthusiast who has been involved for years. These gamers, if core or hardcore,

approached videogames starting from console and have never left it. While, if casual gamers, they started playing on console almost by chance and given the easy playing mode they never felt the urge to try other consoles type or spend money over a PC. The "Console and PC" segment includes a specific type of gamer, namely the hardcore. These are generally technology enthusiasts or aspiring professionals. Their first contact still has been console but leaving the place later to PC gaming for an enhanced experience. Finally, the last 10% only includes casual gamers. These players play on console occasionally and often prefer less intense gaming sessions such as smartphones ones or Nintendo games.

Regardless of the most currently used device, whether it is just the console or a platform combination, many interviewees over time have tried other devices. Each of them has drawn up a series of reasons explaining their desire to purchase another platform. Among the motivations expressed, the three most mentioned were selected and ranked in this order: *title exclusivity, curiosity* and *status*. Casual gamers were excluded from this ranking, as they generally do not experiment with different devices and do not feel the need to do so.

Table 3.3

First reasons mentioned for purchasing a new device

Mentions as first	Motivation	Description
42%	Title exclusivity	Purchase a platform to play its related exclusive title.
33%	Curiosity	Exploring gaming experiences and try new technologies. Not tied to new releases.
25%	Status	The concept of possessing a console, in some cases for collection purposes.

Generally, title exclusivity motivation is very strong, since the platform purchase is necessary to play its exclusive games. Curiosity is a particular motivation since it is unrelated to the concept of new release and novelty. In many cases gamers are interested in buying a platform even years after its release date. This reflects a true interest in trying a different gaming experience and different technology. Finally, *status* is the third most recurring reason that drives gamers in the purchase decision. In this case, the identity of the gamer comes into play being validated by the possession of different consoles.

Opinions about other devices.

Speaking about smartphones and PC gaming, the interviewees were called to express their opinion. Regarding the former, in 90% of the cases it is not considered a real alternative to gaming. Reasons mentioned are low quality titles and limited hardware power. Moreover, the 70% considers it just a waste of time compared to console or PC gaming. Smartphones are still appreciated for the possibility to play at any time, in comfortable settings and during idle moments. PC on the other hand is more widely appreciated but still prevents its adoption due to high pricing. Moreover, it requires continuous updates and integration with several accessories such as monitors, headphones and keyboards. Computer gaming also has a different target audience and associated identity; 50% of respondents match PC to a professional sphere, unrelated to the concept of "passionate" gaming.

The exclusive console-gamer relationship.

As mentioned above, 70% of respondents mainly use console to play, thus establishing an exclusive relationship with the device. Within this component, the most three cited reasons to explain console preference are the following. In the first place (with 50% of responses) there is the emotional attachment towards the device. Among the answers, some speak of a real bond with the console ("it represents my passion and, in some way, also my personality " says Carola) and a long-lasting relationship, being the first gaming device. In second place there is title exclusivity. A very strong motivation that binds players to the console is definitely the possibility to play their favorite games, being mentioned by 25% of informants. Finally, two more reasons are the ease of use compared to other devices and comfort (15% and 10% of responses respectively). The possibility to play comfortably on the sofa is widely appreciated console feature, compared to the desk position on a gaming chair, generally more rigid.

Graph 3.1

Motivation behind console exclusivity/preference
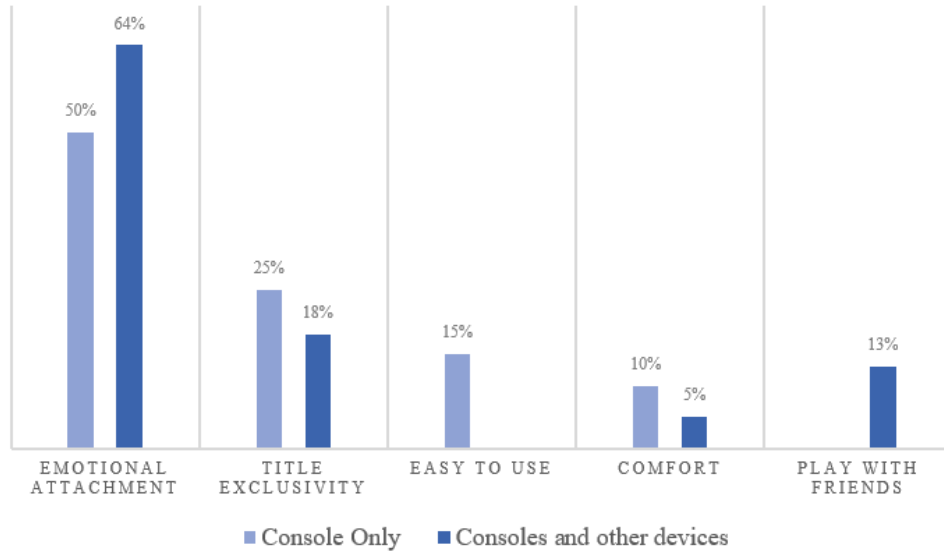
The remaining 30% of gamers who, beside console usage, also integrate other devices were asked a very explicit question. Having equal graphics and hardware performance, which gaming platform would have chosen. The purpose of this request was investigating which console aspects were still missed by those who have currently abandoned it as their primary device, if any. 80% of the respondents stated that they would use the console under those conditions. In this case, emotional attachment is definitely the most popular motivation (67%). In addition, players who currently use PC or other hardware, still miss the exclusive titles and friend connection on console. This on the one hand confirms the popularity that console exclusive titles enjoy, on the other hand it could demonstrate a lack of group gaming experience on other hardwares. Finally, the ease of use of the console for this type of gamer is not a point in favor, as they are generally very familiar with technology, plus comfort doesn't matter much either. Being these hardcore gamers, the explanation could be the following. Hardcore players generally do not associate gaming activity to relax and comfort, instead to a high tension and competition moment.

To conclude, the interviewees also expressed their opinion over the next-gen consoles launch: PlayStation5 and Xbox Serie S|X. Among those who followed the release and purchased a console, general satisfaction has been observed. A special mention goes to the DualSense haptic feedback, particularly praised. PC gaming players have also reported how the ninth generation has reduced the wide technical gap between consoles and computer hardware, which results in a dramatic improvement in the gaming experience.

Cross-person analysis

Having the results of the gamer-console relationship concept established at the experience level, we now move to the across person analysis for a theoretical specification. The relationship description coming from the ten cases constitute the data for this second step. Five main relationship has been defined from the analysis of text data. The dimensions over which the relationships have been built are three: *intense* versus *superficial* (referred to the general interest in videogaming), *exclusive* versus *non-exclusive* (referring to the console relationship), *offline* versus *online* (game mode).

Table 2

TYPOLOGY OF PLAYER-CONSOLE RELATIONSHIP FORMS

Relationship Form	Definition	Case Example
True love marriage	Deep and loyal console relationship typical of hardcore gamers, durable and stable over the years. Characterized by the passion for gaming world, brand loyalty and deep identification with the gamer's image.	Alessandro and Carola
Selfish relationship	Characterized by an intense console use (core and hardcore gamers) without strong emotional attachment. The lack of passion in gaming reduces console value to a simple playing tool, whose key aspect is mainly functionality.	Andrea and Marianna
Love betrayal	These gamers have moved to different devices over time but still remain emotionally attached to the console. The goals is a full gaming experience, prioritizing hardware power and high technical specifications. Characterized by a more professional approach.	Simone and Matteo
Childhood friendship	Typical of players who have diverged from gaming world over time. Nowadays the main device is still the console but over time its use has gone to decline. Even though gaming is sporadic the emotional bond is quite strong.	Augusto
Casual friendship	The case of recently born player-console relationships. Gamers have approached consoles for varied reasons, generally in a casual, disengaged mode. Pandemic played a key role and some cases exhibit potential relationship development. Emotional attachment is missing.	Livia and Benedetta

True love marriage

This type of relationship involves an exclusive connection with the console, lived in an intense and faithful way. Gaming is a key moment of the day, with its own ritual. Players have been using consoles since they were children and have grown up with the device. Hardcore gamers generally experience this kind of bond, also identifying in the gamer concept. Despite their curiosity and willingess to experiment, they have never quit console gaming and have always got back to it. It has been observed an open affection and bond to the device also never betraying their favorite console brand. The relationship over time has not evolved consistently, being always strong to change. Another noteworthy aspect about the *true love marriage* relationship is the satisfaction coming from console possession. Often players are motivated to buy a device for the sheer pleasure of owning it and adding it to their collection. Smartphones and PCs are not considered an alternative as they clash with the concept of gaming "for passion". Moreover, according to them, console gaming is not compatible with any another device. A category example is Alessandro which defines the *PlayStation5* a "must have", following all the other *PS* versions. Carola also belongs to this cluster, claiming that PlayStation almost defines her personality.

Selfish relationship

This relationship category is grounded on specific requirements. Gamers do not have a solid emotional bond with the object, but rather "exploit" it. Even though the gaming activity takes place in boredom moments, it is still taken very seriously (in fact players fall into the hardcore/core category) and the console is seen as the most convenient and simple device available. There is no deviation from console use during time. PC gaming is not an option because of the complexity and high costs, while console offers a friendly user experience without requiring maintenance or updates. Even the online component is not perceived as a chance to socialize, but rather as a mean to find winning playmates. The gamer also is often uninterested in technology or industry-specific news. Respondents belonging to this category have not followed the next-gen launch and do not have their own opinion about it. Moreover, console relationship over time has not undergone the evolution characterizing the previous category, always being shaped by emotional detachment. Andrea is a case example, claiming that the main reason to buy a different hardware is the obsolescence of the current one. The only feeling he had for the console was concern that it would work properly, nothing more. Regarding the launch of the next generation products he didn't even think about buying the new *PS5*, since his *PS4* "still works fine".

Love betrayal relationship

The case in which the transition from console to another device strengthens the console relationship has been defined as *Love betrayal relationship*. This category includes strongly passionate players about videogames (generally hardcore gamers) who have experimented and played for a long time with different hardware over the years. The reason is generally due to try exclusive titles and experiment with different technologies. These gamers in fact, are generally big fans of the technological and digital world. Their first device has been the console but over time they have gone further, in some cases abandoning it and in others not. Generally speaking, they have never experienced the console relationship in a unilateral and faithful way. Players belonging to this category recognize the professional aspect of gaming also considering the departure from the console a necessary step to undertake a qualitative leap. The noteworthy aspect of this category is the strong emotional bond that still remains. The interviewees claimed that console gaming reminds them of their childhood and is still considered irreplaceable. During the years, players have moved away from console gaming yet missing some of its aspects, such as exclusive titles and the chance to connect with friends. A case belonging to this category is Simone who has switched to PC gaming. He states that despite loving the computer power and its accessories, he still plays on console to connect with friends and enjoy some old PS games. He also stated that currently has been using the newly purchased *PlayStation5* again. According to him, the technology of the new console greatly diminishes the technical difference with the gaming PC.

Childhood friendship

Time passing does not necessarily reinforce and matures console relationship, as in the *childhood friendship* category. This group is characterized by a bond established as children, in an embryonic and unconscious way, weakly carried out until today. Players are usually casual, using console in their spare time without a major focus on it. They have developed different hobbies during time, drifting away from the gaming world and thus losing interest. *Childhood relationships* does not consider the case of players who have switched to PC, but rather of those who has been consistent with console play and now have just a sporadic gaming activity. Even though play time has been reduced, it still brings with it a childhood reminiscence openly declared by informants. An example is Augusto, who does not consider himself a true gamer

even though he played on console a lot as a kid. To this day he still is "used to it" but but no longer has much desire to play games. He hasn't considered a new generation console purchase because it wouldn't be worth the expense, but if he had to choose he would have definitely bought *PlayStation5*, because "Sony has never let me down".

Casual friendship

The last category is the *casual friendship*, meaning a console relationship without an excessive commitment typical of casual players. Game play generally starts due to external influence: for example approaching other friend's devices. The bond is initially experienced from afar, often with distrust, but in some cases has a true development potential. In this case we are not only considering standard consoles (namely Xbox and PlayStation), but also Nintendo which is widely adopted given its casual target audience. Console gaming is not perceived as a serious and challenging moment, rather as a carefree time of aggregation with friends and family, in some cases even to socialize with new people. Lockdown period had a major effect on these players, who would never have played on a console otherwise. Also, the recent evolution experienced by the gaming world has facilitated this approach. The first big change has been turning to a female audience and another major point has been the gamer image evolution, which has proved to be more appealing and interesting. Two examples of this kind of relationship are Livia and Benedetta. Both were not "born" as video game enthusiasts but have later approached the gaming world. As they become more familiar with the console, they both claimed to expect "weird" and "nerdy" gamers online while they ended up meeting very similar people to them. Livia is moving from Nintendo Switch to PlayStation, showing core gamer potential. Benedetta on the other hand has also socialized with people playing online with PlayStation and her approach could lead to a possible hardcore gaming mode.

Further developments

Following the analysis it is possible to draw some conclusions about the console gaming world. Collecting and analyzing the data of the ten interviews it has been possible to highlight console strengths and the reasons behind its huge success still today, more than forty years after its birth. First of all, the future of console gaming is certainly based on the diversification of content. It

is clear how brands have decided to propose complementary offers in recent years. If during the previous PlayStation and Xbox era the average gamer tended to buy exclusively one of the two consoles and possibly a Nintendo portable, now things look completely different. Consumers might choose to buy a *Playstation5* to play Sony exclusive titles, subscribe to *GamePass* to play Microsoft's catalog on their smartphone or tablet, and have a *Nintendo Switch* as a portable console to carry around. The offer has changed a lot reflecting the target audience evolution. In terms of future developments it is possible to focus on specific aspects, starting from the next generation.

The first key point is working on brand image and loyalty. The gaming world, and in particular the console gamer image, is undergoing profound changes. From the introverted, lazy university boy locked in his room in the eighties, today the gamer is a tech-enthusiast with an active social life and not only a boy anymore. This aspect is inevitably linked to the image of the console brands which reflect a more appealing and attractive style. It is important at this time to continue to press this change by retaining the existing user base and embracing new ones. The aforementioned category of *love marriage relationship* gamers feel strong attachment to the brand itself and to the gamer status concept. Console brands will continue to leverage this aspect to enhance the community and belongingness feeling. At the same time, console adoption today is not as cumbersome as it was fifteen years ago. Consoles are no longer subject to media terrorism and broadband has extended the purchase possibility to a wider public. Generations that grew up loving video games will recognize their importance even in adulthood and their children will not grow up despising them. Probably in the future, parents and kids will play together in a completely different video game setting. In this sense, a communication targeting hardcore gamer's families (and not casual ones currently addressed by Nintendo) will be able to ride this change. A suitable channel for this communication may be though influencer marketing. Informants in fact, claimed to keep updated mainly on youtube and social media. The pandemic can also prove to be a historic moment to highlight an important console aspect, namely its ability of fueling connection and sharing through gaming activity. This aspect has allowed many people to rediscover their bond with this device. The right narrative focused on its positive role during lockdown is essential to embrace this target, which is reflected in the *childhood friendship* category. Finally, it is important to pay attention to the right target audience. As could be noticed from the responses and variety of informants, the gaming user base has undergone a profound evolution over the years. Console brands today target females, children and males of all ages, catering to every need. One strategy to pursue is certainly

investing in casual gamers, who have exponentially grown recently. Some of them claimed to have approached console during lockdown and through a casual gaming mode. Among them, PlayStation gamers admitted to have increased their gaming sessions by getting more and more passionate. Following this reasoning, casual gamers are not necessarily antagonistic to console ones. Instead, this type of player can prove to be the starting point of a new user base of potential core/hardcore gamers. Brands must address them for example investing in shorter gaming sessions titles, better suited for a casual gaming mode. This category brings enormous potential that should not be missed.

Speaking about exclusive titles, respondents all agreed on their key role. Investments in quality titles development still proves to be a winning strategy following its introduction by Nintendo in the eighties. Despite the aggressive competition from smartphone gaming providing free (or semi-free) games, in almost all cases players do not consider smartphone gaming a viable alternative. Software production remains always at the center while the revenue model undergoes a change: the transition to the subscription model, in fact, is taking place successfully and will become more and more popular. A second aspect that emerges from this study is the focus on accessories. If console fans, *true love marriage* category, have praised new generation for hardware power and their long-lasting relationship with the brand, PC gamers have focused on the new DualSense controller. Those who have abandoned over time the console for PC gaming, have found themselves buying various accessories to be integrated. For this reason, the most appreciated aspect of the ninth generation has been the new controller's haptic feedback, which has also reduced the gap between PC and console according to some informants. One way to draw attention and include this target, included in the *love betrayal category*, is surely to develop more and more performing accessories in the next generations. Future investments could be aimed at headphones, controllers and other items. A focus on accessories could partly fill the current gap with the PC world, while maintaining its ease of use and comfort. Finally, for all those who don't have an emotional attachment to consoles and wouldn't spend large sums of money to buy new models, investing in better software backward compatibility could be the best option. In this way, *selfish relationship* category would still have a quality gaming experience without undertaking additional new hardware or softwares investments, perhaps downloading specific free programs to upgrade their consoles. Such a way could be a suitable strategy to attract back this segment of players that would otherwise abandon gaming.

One last aspect to be considered is a general tendency among informants to consider the console an "object to keep at home". As generic as this expression is, it is worth analyzing its possible implications. First of all, console design has been mentioned several times, proving the importance of the aesthetic aspect and how it influences purchase decisions. However, it is crucial to understand how a console may be a "must have" object in the house, even for casual gamers. A possible solution to further increase console's popularity, especially for potential casual gamers, is building a dedicated ecosystem around it. An integration with targeted tv series or gaming content would only bring benefits. A way could be providing special offers combined with console subscription services. Sony can currently count on millions of PlayStation Plus subscribers, which is a great starting point to expand its audience by integrating other services. The most credible possibilities are discounts or simply trial periods that go beyond 14 days. Selective access to specific content for free could also be an idea to attract the casual viewer and convince them to sign up to see the rest of the catalog.

Conclusions

Throughout this thesis, the relationship between console and video gamer has been explored, specifically considering the two rival brands PlayStation and Xbox. Console gaming has a ten-year history that is part of a technological and social development context. Though ten interviews, gamers provided their motivations behind their console use compared to other devices such as PC, smartphone or Nintendo. The interviews described very different situations which have been later clustered in five main relationship forms. Both men and women interviewed have been grouped into the three categories: *casual*, *core* and *hardcore* gamers. The first developed relationship form is the *true love marriage*. It describes console enthusiasts, hardcore gamers who have never abandoned their brand and who will probably transmit this passion to their children. The second one, *love betrayal*, consider gamers who currently play mainly on PC but still keep an emotional bond with console, being their first gaming device. The third group differs from the others by excluding real console fans. Instead, the *selfish relationship* refers to core/hardcore gamers who have no emotional bond with the device. Finally, the last two categories concern casual gamers; the *childhood friendship* includes players who have moved away from the gaming world, although initially very passionate, and finally the *casual friendship* category considers players who have approached console in recent times. These relationships generally started during lockdown due to boredom, but some of those players have become really passionate and may potentially turn to core or hardcore gamers. Across categories, the console-gamer relationship starts and evolves in different ways but some common threads are identified. Almost all players claim that playing on console reminds them of their childhood, some also appreciate the user friendliness compared to other devices, others the ability to play comfortably. The most appreciated feature is certainly the exclusive tile selection associated, which in many cases strongly binds the player to the console. The most common reasons for switching to other devices are a greater hardware power and the desire to try different gaming experiences. Playing on PC is a more professional game type requiring complementary accessories for a complete gaming experience, while Nintendo platforms have a more casual target highly differing from the two main console brands. Several conclusions have been drawn from this study. First of all, it is crucial to address a much broader target than a few years ago. Players no longer reflects the initial male and nerd stereotype, instead embrace many different personalities, both men and women. In this sense it is important to address communication to the wide target of casual gamers that, in spite of what has been supposed, turned out to be the starting point for a new generation of potential core and hardcore gamers.

Then, it is extremely relevant to focus on powerful and attractive accessories development, meeting console gamers and pc gamers requests of a complete high-quality gaming experience. Finally, the integration of services such as entertainment content could prove to be a key engagement element for casual audience who have not yet discovered console world.

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Summary

The eagerly awaited *PlayStation5* and *Xbox Series* have finally hit the market in November 2020. These consoles represent the ninth generation of hardware in the ever-changing Video Game environment, which has proven to be incredibly resilient to digitalization. Today, this segment has reached dimensions that were hardly foreseeable at its beginning. The *hardware* side (consoles) is dominated by Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo, while the *software* one (actual videogames) by some new players such as Amazon, Facebook and Google. Although over the years consoles have enjoyed great success, the rise of smartphone gaming and the great return of computer (PC) have fueled the idea of their upcoming downfall. The objective of this thesis is to investigate whether this decline is actually emerging or not.

First sections provide an overview of video game market dynamics and main actors, starting from console players. According to the existing literature, gamers may be categorized into three segments: *casual gamers*, *core gamers*, and *hardcore gamers*. Hardcore gamers are highly competitive and skilled, while casual gamers, on the other hand, prefers low-involvement sessions with lower time investment. The third group, core gamer, lies between those extremes. Video game industry is based on peculiar dynamics that make a videogame's success challenging and unpredictable. Despite this, for several years the business side of this sector has almost been mocked while having the creative one subject to an irrational idolization. This mindset fails to consider the strong "win or die" dynamics of this environment. First of all, the development of a *blockbuster* game has considerable costs. It takes years to develop a title, not to mention the addition of marketing and distribution costs that double the total expenditure. Then, a second aspect to consider is seasonality. Historically most sales are concentrated in the last two months of the year, making the marketing competition fierce. Within these trends, it is also necessary to consider the business type. Videogames are a platform-based industry which follow a straightforward rule: hardware is sold at a loss. Only the sale of software allows recovery and, in general, to be profitable in the long term. Thus, it is of paramount importance that the game, once reached the market, obtains the desired success and also that console producers get an installed base quickly. Increasing console gamer base is the only way to attract designers into develop software's and make the whole mechanism work. This explains the strong interconnection between consoles and games: consumers do not want consoles per se but want to play their exclusive games. Therefore, it is mainly the software choice which pushes consumers to purchase the compatible hardware. Thankfully, the ecosystem can reset the installed base periodically, redistributing market share. This happens due to the natural life

cycle of consoles which is called *generation*. Console manufacturers release new platforms at the end of each generation, every five to seven years. This mechanism allows companies to rebuild their market share and reset producer's landscape (although not fully).

The gaming industry also has an eventful history, and its beginnings have nothing to do with the gaming concept that we perceive today. During the early days, companies dedicated minor investments in video game development just focusing on hardware creation. The console was at the core, already having a "built in" videogame (the so-called *arcade*). In the early seventies, software was a commodity, pretty much the same for every console, and definitely not a strategic differentiator. In this period Atari was born and in November 1972 launches the emblematic tennis game *Pong*. As some games started gaining success and providing high revenues, game designers started to be aware of their value as creators. Until that moment each videogame was entirely developed by an individual, from graphics to storyboards to music. It began to happen that game designers who developed alone a million-dollar revenue software still got paid like average employees. For this reason, several departures of designers from large hardware companies took place and, by becoming independent, creatives were finally able to perceive much more value for themselves. The business model had changed, and hardware production finally detached from games one. Despite this change and the birth of iconic games such as *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*, videogame selection was poor. In the early eighties the market collapsed and it was just during its lowest historical moment that Nintendo entered, disrupting it. Nintendo's revolution simply lies in choosing quality over the quantity, thus avoiding another huge distribution of mediocre and undifferentiated content. Years later, in the 1990s, major technical and content innovation hit the market: the introduction of 3D graphics set new standards for titles. The 1994 marked *PlayStation*'s launch by Sony, where communication finally has a turning point. The refined and mature advertising compares consoles not anymore to toys. Instead, proposes them as hi-tech furniture object. The beauty and complexity of the proposed games and the million units sold worldwide establish it as a world-famous brand. About ten years later, in 2008, the video game industry experiences its most successful year. Despite the general crisis affecting all mass consumption sectors, global sales of consoles continued unstoppable and surpassed those of the following years, in terms of units sold. Today, in November 2020, the market entered its ninth generation of video game platforms with the Xbox Series and the PlayStation5 launch, both in standard and digital versions. The console business has proven to be remarkably resilient to digitalization. Traditionally, consumers have played on consoles, but now, the time spent gaming on mobile

devices and PC has expanded the traditional gaming platforms scenario. For this reason, around 2012, the media started to rumor the "death of consoles" spreading this theory considerably in the industry. This skepticism arose from the iPhone appearance and the rapid rise of Facebook, both suggesting that consoles would suffer the same fate as *arcade* games. The "invisible hand" that would change the market was the smartphone rise, with large organizations behind and much less expensive technologies.

Is the ninth console generation really going to be the last one? Could the "console death" be considered a true prediction or just exaggeration? This thesis aims to collect qualitative results to understand whether console gaming is actually going to experience a decline or not. To pursue this objective, ten gamers have been interviewed to outline their relationship with console. Along with the different relationship types, a set of motivations to explain console's success is obtained.

The interview flow has been structured to provide five types of information:

(1) *Biographical data.* First questions collect information on age, gender, education level and job position to group informants into the three gamer categories.

(2) *The beginning of the relationship with the console.* This section aims at understanding how informants approached console usage, at which age, and in which context.

(3) *The evolution of the relationship.* This passage depicts how the gaming moment has developed, since almost all the interviewees have been playing for years now.

(4) *Approaching different devices besides the console*. The fourth section investigates the motivations behind purchasing or trying a different device. Participants were asked to rank a set of motivations to justify their transition.

(5) *The Ninth Generation*. The survey ends with a few questions about next generation consoles and the console-player relationship in the present.

Four types of hardware have been examined and compared. First two are the actual consoles: PlayStation and Xbox, regardless of generation, being the main focus of this research. To fully understand the relationship between gamers and these devices we also consider the smartphone and the personal computer (PC) as viable alternative. Technological features are excluded from this study, which will focus on emotional characteristics. Two types of interviews interpretation were required. The first one is an idiographic analysis from the reading of transcripts and the identification of recurrent behaviors, common preferences, and tendencies. The second level

involves a cross-person analysis which has the goal to highlight recurring patterns across episodes that could help better understanding the phenomenon. Overall, the six males and four females interviewed generated ten stories and five relationship types have been defined from the text data analysis. The dimensions over which the relationships have been built are three: *intense* versus *superficial* (referred to the general interest in video gaming), *exclusive* versus *non-exclusive* (referring to the console relationship), *offline* versus *online* (game mode).

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Relationship Form	Definition
True love marriage	Deep and loyal console relationship typical of hardcore gamers, durable and stable over the years. Characterized by the passion for gaming world, brand loyalty and deep identification with the gamer's image.
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Love betrayal	These gamers have moved to different devices over time but still remain emotionally attached to the console. The goals is a full gaming experience, prioritizing hardware power and high technical specifications. Characterized by a more professional approach.
Childhood friendship	Typical of players who have diverged from gaming world over time. Nowadays the main device is still the console but over time its use has gone to decline. Even though gaming is sporadic the emotional bond is quite strong.
Casual friendship	The case of recently born player-console relationships. Gamers have approached consoles for varied reasons, generally in a casual, disengaged mode. Pandemic played a key role and some cases exhibit potential relationship development. Emotional attachment is missing.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First of all, it is crucial to address a much broader target than a few years ago. Players no longer reflect the initial male and nerd stereotype, instead embrace many different personalities, both men and women. In this sense it is important to address communication to the wide target of casual gamers. This gamer category is generally considered a threat to console gaming, reflecting smartphone popularity. Instead, in the course of the analysis, turns out to be the starting point for a new generation of potential core and hardcore gamers. It is also extremely relevant to focus on powerful and attractive accessories development, meeting console gamers and pc gamers requests of a complete high-quality gaming experience. Finally, the integration of services such as entertainment content

could prove to be a key engagement element for casual audience who have not yet discovered console world. The key aspect still lies in casual gamer inclusion, a fast growing segment whose huge potential cannot be ignored.