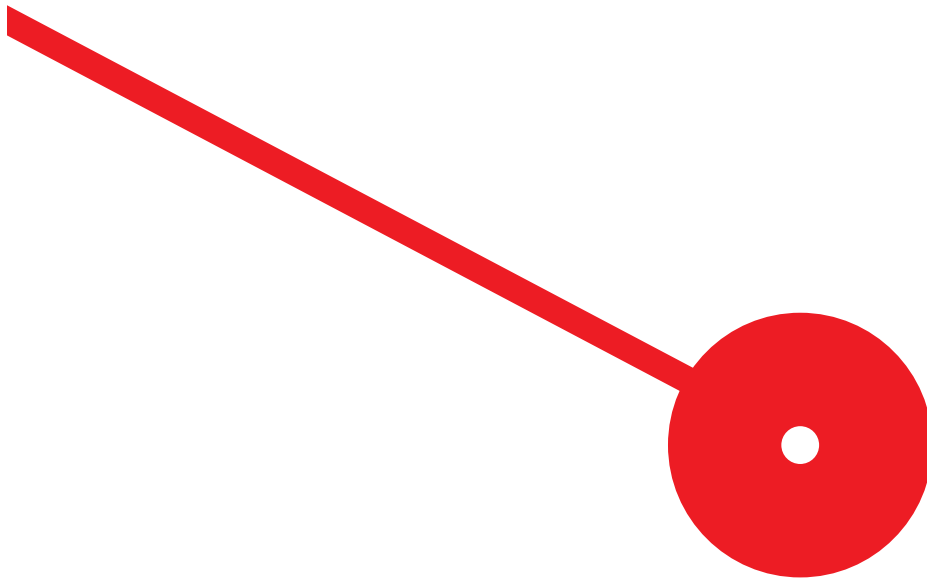




Fandom, culture, and videogames: analysing what makes a successful videogame franchise through Final Fantasy

Teresa Ferreira

10/2022

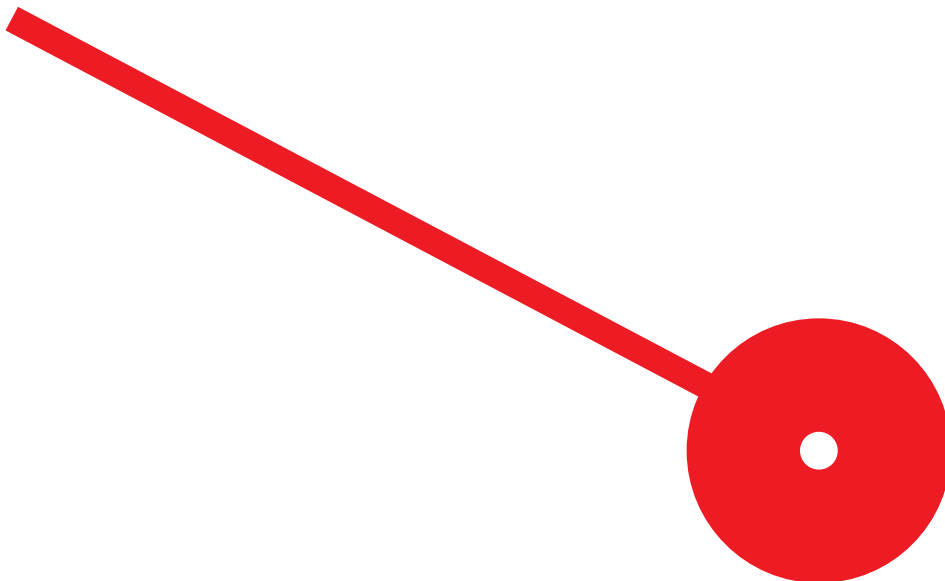




Fandom, culture, and videogames: analysing what makes a successful videogame franchise through Final Fantasy Teresa Ferreira

Dissertação de Mestrado

apresentado ao Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração
do Porto para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos
Interculturais Para Negócios, sob orientação de Sandra Ribeiro



To my late grandmother

To simply overlook the local meanings of game texts, particularly within the environment of their production, undermines their potential research value as artifacts. It neglects an important set of tools that area studies can bring to the formal theorization of games. Moreover, failure to address games as artifacts risks imposing Euro-American (“universal”) regimes of knowledge upon the medium in a manner that teaches us little about Japan itself.

Moore, 2017, p. 3

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family for supporting me throughout this journey and without whom I would have never reached this moment.

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Beatriz Ferreira, I have to dedicate a few words just for you. Growing up in a traditional Portuguese family means that any interest regarding media is seen as shallow and unproductive, and yet here we are, years later, still geeking out about the things we enjoyed since we were kids, in an age where it's more important than ever to develop media literacy. It's been quite a journey, and I can't wait for all of our future adventures together.

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Finally, a big shoutout to whoever is reading this. I hope you enjoy it and take some lessons from it.

Abstract

This study intends to validate the importance of discussing media in the modern world by exploring how the concepts of media, fandoms and culture are related, why fandoms exist and the power of media over culture. The object of study is videogames, and more specifically the videogame franchise 'Final Fantasy', There is also focus in understanding their appeal over other types of media, the history and evolution of videogames and the history and business model of Square Enix, the company behind 'Final Fantasy' products. Additionally, object of study includes how corporate practices and decisions affect the franchise, the evolution of the franchise throughout the years and what makes it a successful videogame franchise, taking into account all the previous information.

In order to achieve its purpose, the methodology used was based on qualitative methods of investigation. Document research about the topic at hand, from bibliography, ludography, and other pre-existing materials was gathered and triangulated with an online questionnaire. The information gathered from 85 participants was analysed and it was possible to conclude how the target audience for Final Fantasy experiences the games and the fandom, how it perceives cultural elements and how do they feel about corporate decisions as frequent customers, as well as their opinions on the importance of discussing media.

Keywords

Culture, Entertainment Media, Fandom, Final Fantasy, Franchising, Japan, Square Enix, Storytelling, Videogames

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List of abbreviations

2D – Two dimensional (computer graphics)

3D – Three dimensional (computer graphics)

ATB – Active Time Battle (game mechanic)

CGI – Computer Generated Imagery (imagery creation)

FF – Final Fantasy (videogame franchise)

FMV – Full Motion Video (computer graphics)

IP – Intellectual Property (legal right)

JP – Japan (country)

JRPG – Japanese Role-Playing Game (game genre)

MMORPG – Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (game genre)

MOFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs (governing body)

NA – North America (region)

NES – Nintendo Entertainment System (videogame platform)

NPC – Non Player Character (videogame element)

PAL – Phase Alternating Line (television region)

PS1 – PlayStation 1 (videogame platform)

PS2 – PlayStation 2 (videogame platform)

PS3 – PlayStation 3 (videogame platform)

PS4 – PlayStation 4 (videogame platform)

PS5 – PlayStation 5 (videogame platform)

RPG – Role Playing Game (videogame genre)

SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System (videogame platform)

USA – United States of America (country)

INTRODUCTION

Globalization, the proliferation of internet access, and English as the *lingua franca* have shifted the way cultures operate. These factors have allowed the transmission and exchange of ideas, meanings, and values around the world. This process is accompanied by the common consumption of cultures that have been diffused by social and entertainment media and international travel. The circulation of cultures enables individuals to partake in extended social relations that cross national and regional borders.

As work becomes increasingly automated and life is facilitated by new technologies, it is easier to access any content we want. We have more free time available to devote to our families and friends, but also to cultural products and entertainment and since we are both consumers and creators of cultural products, and these products affect simultaneously ourselves and other people around us, they hold an important part of our everyday lives.

The videogame industry, while a fairly recent type of entertainment media due to its technological nature, is in expansion, with many jobs being created around it and expanding to other areas, such as cinema with movie adaptations or education with the gamification of knowledge and pedagogy. People are hired to create a videogame, to design concept arts, characters, to write stories, to compose music, to program, to motion capture, to voice act, to animate, to play test, to hire workers for all these jobs at the company, to manage company funds, to market it on social media, to translate and localize it, but there are also people making careers in gaming journalism, streaming, becoming ambassadors for companies, creating content, and many others. In fact, the growth of this industry has been so exponential that game studies are an area increasingly explored in academia. It is important to note, however, that videogames are

cultural artifacts, and they are not only entertainment media, but also a reflection of cultural and corporate values.

This thesis aims to explore the relationship between culture and videogames, and the object chosen was the videogame franchise 'Final Fantasy'. While studying videogames is nothing new to scholars, it yet remains a field of studies largely unexplored and full of potential.

I had previously presented an assignment on "Arab representation in media" for an Arabic Culture For Business class presentation, and before an assignment on how the Korean TV show *Squid Game* affected and was affected by social media, which prompted the idea of further exploring how culture affects media and how the media affect culture in return, and how the perception of realities outside of our own is shaped by the products we consume. This sequence of events further led me to this topic. It is a choice motivated not only by that, but also because videogames are a personal hobby and I think recognizing their academic value is essential.

I was also interested in exploring this topic as I came across the rising debates about the importance of media literacy on the internet. Experiencing art is a subjective phenomenon. People attribute different aesthetic judgements and values according to the personal feelings that art evokes, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't apply critical thinking to the analysis of art, especially as consumers. Looking into the context and subtext of what we consume can help us understand why it works, why we feel a connection, or why we don't and how others can still enjoy it even if it's poorly perceived by us.

This is where the debate of media literacy emerges, as in modern society the empathy in experiencing feelings about art and media, the critical thinking in digesting them and the argumentation with others while discussing art, media and feelings are skills that are

still lacking. These skills, while not exclusive to the areas of arts and humanities, play a central role in them but are neglected in other areas, and in a society that has evolved to place all value in practical and immediately applicable skills, it is of utmost importance to raise awareness to this disparity. Not only that, but critical thinking, empathy and argumentation don't just serve to experience art or media, these skills are vital to raise healthy societies where individuals can protect themselves against polarizing and radicalizing speeches and content and make conscious consumption choices. Consuming mindlessly and consuming arguably poor-quality content are not necessarily bad by default, but it is crucial to promote discussions about the value of the things we consume.

I also see that the topics of videogames and fandoms are only starting to be academically explored in Portugal, so I felt that laying out a basis for others is important, especially in Intercultural Studies for Business, an area that allows for so much exploration of different ideas.

Regarding the study subject, there are many main titles in the Final Fantasy franchise so exploring it as a whole was too broad, but if I had to pick one game over the others, I probably would, like many others, pick one of the most popular ones as they have the most content to explore. I believe presenting the franchise as a whole is more helpful in understanding its evolution and why people resonate with it, as well as what it takes to run a successful media business and why people become fans and faithful customers. Still, the focus is only the mainline of the franchise, with a few honourable mentions to spin-offs.

It is important to note that overidentification with the object of study, as it is my case with media discussion, videogames and more specifically with the Final Fantasy franchise, may affect impartiality and make an author confuse personal opinions and

feelings with the distant, neutral standpoint of someone with less emotional attachment and knowledge on the topic. However, as a fan, I also enjoy a position of privilege as I have easier access to the community of fans and news sources, and I have an easier understanding of certain nuances, which may enable me to assess information with a more critical posture than someone not so well versed. It is also essential to note that this work is done from a Western perspective and may not be representative of a more global experience. With this in mind, this work was reviewed several times and proofread in order to make it as objective as possible. I apologize if any information is presented like it is common knowledge, despite not being so obvious, as I tried to clarify as much as I could, and yet some information might need some explaining for someone outside the areas of intercultural studies, media studies and videogames.

In terms of the structure, Chapter I will explore the concepts of fandom, culture and videogames, how they relate to one another, what creates communities of fans around media entertainment, and how these reflect cultural values. I also present a brief summary on the history of videogames and fandoms to contextualize the areas of research; Chapter II will delve into the 'Final Fantasy' franchise, its history, marketing and cultural legacy, as well as the company history to analyse how to create a successful business out of a videogame franchise; Chapter III will present the conducted questionnaire and its results, while intersecting the data with the theory laid out beforehand. Finally, the conclusions drawn from the research are presented.

In this train of thought, we begin by exploring the ecosystem of entertainment media, fandoms, and how culture plays a major role in it, as well as singling out the videogame industry in order to understand how they affect one another.

CHAPTER I – A CRITICAL APPROACH TO MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Culture is an important part of our lives. It influences how we speak, dress, behave, organize our days and lives, and how we connect with other people. Humans are cultural species, we consume culture daily, particularly in the form of entertainment media. Entertainment media is a cultural product as well, it is produced by and for a specific culture, which can then be spread to consumers of other cultures as well through word of mouth or the internet. If a certain type of media is entertaining, it leads to its popularization and it might create a fandom, that is to say, a community of followers and fans. These people feel a special affinity with the media in question and are willing to engage with more content or content similar to it, which leads to the growth of that type of media into a franchise business. This is also true for videogames, where franchises are particularly dominant. But why are people invested in entertainment media? What makes a person enjoy one piece of media but not the other? What are fandoms and why are they relevant to media businesses? Why are videogames a prevalent media sector?

This chapter aims to explore these questions, by first exploring the concepts at play, connecting them, and then providing some possible explanations for all these questions.

1.1. Defining the concepts

In order to understand the ecosystem of fandom, culture, and videogames, one must first understand what each concept means individually, and only then how they relate to each other.

1.1.1. Culture

Culture is a difficult term to define, as it is an umbrella term for all the social behaviour, beliefs and customs that operate when a person is inserted in a society, but it can also refer to individual habits and beliefs, as well as serve as an indicator of social status.

Culture determines how people perceive themselves and their place in society in relation to others, the way they relate to and what they expect from each other and how they're inserted within the world around them. Culture includes language, religion, work, etiquette, family and other social relationship dynamics, clothing, gastronomy, music, books, art, and media. In short, culture dictates who we are and how we interact with the social groups we're a part of and how we see the world.

Human societies share a set of customs and beliefs that define them into a specific culture. Although these cultural assets are inherently part of each social group, that does not mean that they cannot be dispersed and acquired by other cultures. In fact, the natural curiosity over other cultures leads to the consumption of things from different places, spreading cultural elements from one culture to another and diffusing the culture they originated from. The internet has allowed for this cultural diffusion to be done at an incredibly fast pace, creating a phenomenon called *cultural globalization*.

Cultural globalization, the phenomenon by which the experience of everyday life, as influenced by the diffusion of commodities and ideas, reflects a standardization of cultural expressions around the world. Propelled by the efficiency or appeal of wireless communications, electronic commerce, popular culture, and international travel, globalization has been seen as a trend toward homogeneity that will eventually make human experience everywhere essentially the same. [...] Although homogenizing influences do indeed exist, they are far from creating anything akin to a single world culture. (Watson, 2020, para. 1)

In other words, through the means of technology, people from any corner of the world can have the same experiences and consume the same content at the same time. This can also create homogenization of certain cultural aspects viewed in that content, and

although they are not enough to erase a person's own cultural identity, they can influence their consumption choices.

American culture was certainly the most disseminated in the early stages of globalization and the most influential to this day, due to its strong commercial power. As Fukuyama (2001, question 11) defended in the Merrill Lynch Forum, "America is the most advanced capitalist society in the world" and "if market forces are what drives globalization, it is inevitable that Americanization will accompany globalization". Non-Americans would consume what the USA had brought to them through the new technologies and media, eventually accommodating components representative of American culture and lifestyle into their own habits.

However, it was not the only culture being consumed at a transnational level. Japanese popular culture gradually built up overseas fanbases and markets over the decades as well. The anime¹ and gaming fandoms (1.1.3) have a history that sets them apart from other media-based fandoms as, unlike other fantasy and sci-fi fandoms such as *Star Trek* or *The Lord of the Rings*, anime and gaming fans sometimes struggled to acquire content of their media of choice in an understandable language as it often wasn't officially localized and thus, they had to access it through the translated works of other fans who could understand Japanese. This was particularly significant before the internet made it possible to communicate and distribute media in a timely manner as well as provide quick translation tools.

Philosopher Richard Velkley (2002) explains that the modern understanding of culture has its origins in the application of the expression *cultura animi*² by German author Samuel von Pufendorf. The philosopher clarifies that Pufendorf took the agricultural metaphor and applied it to refer "to all the ways in which human beings overcome their

¹ Japanese animation

² Latin expression first coined by Cicero, a Roman scholar, to refer to the cultivation of the soul by enriching it with the study of philosophy

original barbarism, and through artifice, become fully human” (p.15), thus normalizing the use of the term to include all factors of social life. He states:

such artifice reflects the myths and poetry, as well as the climate and geography, of unique peoples and epochs. In the early modern accounts of human nature, universality and necessity reside in basic inclinations such as self-preservation. Higher constructions of culture that employ reason, which has no end of its own and is only an instrument to satisfy the inclinations, will hence tend to be more particularized. (Velkley, 2002, p. 16)

Culture is, therefore, associated with civilization, although the two terms are not interchangeable. Civilization is, as the philosopher states, a term employed to convey “the idea of the entire progress of humanity culminating in the modern liberal state and its way of life, seen as inherently civil, polite, and pleasant” (Velkley, 2002, p. 13), thus, making civilization be associated with a morally superior state of being. However, this presupposition led to an attempt to catalogue civilization and culture, and a distinction between high culture and low culture came to existence.

High culture refers to the set of cultural customs, beliefs and products held in the highest value by a culture. It is regarded as the culture of the elite and aristocracy, and cultural events considered as high culture are often expensive, such as going to a theatre play or watching a ballet show. High culture is generally associated with political power, high social status, prestige, wealth, and intellectualism. It can also lean into elitism. Elitism is the idea that a select group of people are morally, politically, and socially superior, and that those who don't agree with them are somehow inferior when they're just as valid. It's not so much about whether someone is right or wrong, but more about being part of an exclusive club above criticism because that social circle holds more power than everyone else. (Conerly, Holmes, and Tamang, 2021)

In contrast, low culture is a term usually applied in a demeaning fashion that is used to refer to popular culture (or mass culture), that is to say, cultural customs, beliefs and products that are more appealing to the masses, who might be less educated and

therefore prefer cultural content that doesn't require as much mental effort, like reality television, football and popular fiction and music. This content is also more available and easier to consume or participate in than the more refined, often inaccessible high culture content. (Conerly, Holmes, and Tamang, 2021)

All cultural products appeal to a certain demographic, so lower socio-economic classes prefer things that fulfil basic human needs, while wealthier classes have the income to consume more elaborated cultural products.

Although high culture may be viewed as superior to popular culture, the labels of high culture and popular culture vary over time and place. Shakespearean plays, for example, were considered pop culture when they were written, but are now among our society's high culture.

Aesthetic standards of low culture stress substance, form being totally subservient, and there is no explicit concern with abstract ideas or even with fictional forms of contemporary social problems and issues. [...] Low culture emphasizes morality but limits itself to familial and individual problems and [the] values, which apply to such problems. Low culture is content to depict traditional working-class values winning out over the temptation to give into conflicting impulses and behavior patterns. (Gans, 1999, p. 115-116)

In the heterogeneous societies in the West, the clash of different cultures creates power struggles that extend to all areas of life. These struggles have been called "culture wars", and one of the oldest debates has been about the collision between high culture and popular culture.

One of the longest lasting cultural struggles has pitted the educated practitioners of high culture against most of the rest of society, rich and poor, which prefers the popular cultures now supplied mainly by the mass media and other consumer goods industries. In this war, the advocates of high culture attack popular culture as a mass culture that has harmful effects on both individuals consuming it and on society as a whole. The users of popular culture fight back mostly by ignoring the critique and rejecting high culture. [...] The culture war is, however, not just about high and popular cultures. It is really a debate about the nature of the good life, particularly about which culture and whose culture should dominate in society. [...] The war is also about whether the cultural life of the country should be run by a cultured elite or whether it should be largely determined by "the

market"— in this case, a market in which the customers have more power than in others. (Gans, 1999, pp. xv-xvi)

Nowadays, this distinction faded, and the type of culture lived, consumed, and produced in each class is no longer strict. The widespread use of the internet has allowed people to have more access to new information, to have contact with a wider community that includes various cultures, and to learn about cultural things outside their own socio-economic conditions at a much quicker rate than what was possible with printing press, radio, and television, so there is more freedom to explore new tastes and cultures.

It is important to note, however, that both high culture and popular culture are complimentary parts of a culture. High culture is not superior to popular culture, nor is the opposite true, and we can learn from both. T. S. Eliot (1948) stated:

We have to try to keep in mind, that in a healthy society this maintenance of a particular level of culture is to the benefit, not merely of the class which maintains it, but of the society as a whole. Awareness of this fact will prevent us from supposing that the culture of a "higher" class is something superfluous to society as a whole, or to the majority, and from supposing that it is something which ought to be shared equally by all other classes. (T. S. Eliot, 1948, as cited in Jenks, 2003, p. 218)

Videogames fall into the category of popular culture. They are a type of entertainment media that has been getting more and more recognition thanks to the internet and are a regular hobby for a massive number of frequent customers and casual consumers alike. These consumers apply cultural values even in their hobby, such as which games are prestigious and which games are bad, deriving from the notions of what is considered high and popular culture. So, playing a more complex videogame such as the role-playing game *Final Fantasy* can be considered a more enriching and fruitful experience than playing a simpler game like the block piling game *Tetris*. In order to better understand this, let us proceed to the concept of videogames itself.

1.1.2. Videogames

A videogame is an electronic game that blends the audio-visual aspects of art and entertainment media with storytelling but require people to actively take part in them. It involves user interface or input to create visual and auditory feedback, so that the player can engage with the world, characters and/or other players in the game in order to make progress in the match, level, or story. That input is done by using devices such as joysticks, controllers, keyboard, motion sensing devices or virtual reality headsets.

[Video]Games can be best defined by a conjunction of two necessary conditions – the *digital/visual medium* condition and the *entertainment* condition – and a disjunction that summarizes how the former necessary condition instantiates the latter: *rule-bound gameplay* and *interactive fiction*. (Tavinor, 2008, section 6, para. 1)

In other words, a videogame is a combination of visual media and the appeal of videogames over other types of media is that they're dynamic. Traditional forms of media, such as books, movies, and music remain unchanged by their consumers, that is to say, even though they may provide different experiences to the audience consuming them, they remain the same. Videogames, however, due to their interactivity, may provide very different experiences according to each player's actions, even though they are the same for every player. This creates emergence, where player choices unfold the game at an individual pace.

Another definition provided by the philosopher Bernard Suits (2005) is the following:

To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]. I also offer the following simpler and, so to speak, more portable version of the above: playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles. (Suits, 2005, p. 54)

According to these statements, a game is distinguished by being an activity where arbitrary rules are imposed to deliberately inflate its duration and difficulty and make its

conclusion more rewarding for the joy of overcoming said challenges. It seems rather counterproductive and ineffective to duel on these challenges instead of reaching straight for the goal as fast as possible, but the value of this activity lies in the process rather than achieving the goal.

Videogames can be categorized by their platform, that is to say, they can be distinguished by the hardware necessary to run the games, so they can be arcade games, console games, computer games, and more recently, mobile games. Most gaming companies tend to put their games available on as many platforms as the game can be played in, in order to increase player base and profit, but some games are kept exclusive to a single platform if these companies estimate more profit in that condition. Videogames can also be categorized by whether they're online or offline, but the line is becoming gradually obsolete.

“[...] the very concept of online gaming will gradually disappear [...] Though the scale of integration may vary, there's hardly any video games without some sort of online component these days. [...] the distinction will be reduced to whether it is multiplayer or single-player.” [interview with Naoki Yoshida (director of *Final Fantasy XIV*)] (Madsen, 2022, para. 8)

Videogames can be categorized according to genre as well. For example, an RPG (Role Playing Game) places the player in the shoes of a character with its own personality, background, relationship dynamics and role in the story that unfolds. This requires the characters, worldbuilding and plot to be particularly appealing in order to create immersion, and most importantly, resonance, which will be addressed later on.

Like any type of media, videogames are produced by and for people. The videogame industry, much like books, movies, comic books and other types of media, is affected by cultural values, draws inspiration from different cultures and has the power to affect culture too, and that is reflected in the content produced, the games feature narratives, characters, settings, music, and other aspects affected by cultural elements.

The history of videogames starts in the United States of America, with the first simple prototypes being made in the 1950s. These were initially created as technology demonstrations, used to simulate board games and research programming and artificial intelligence. It is assumed that the first video game purely for entertainment, titled *Tennis For Two*, was created in 1958.



Figure 1 – Tennis For Two on a DuMont Lab Oscilloscope Type 304-A

Computing technology continued to develop, and as computers became more powerful and accessible, researchers began experimenting on them and creating games for non-academic purposes, leading to the release of *Spacewar!* in 1962, one of the earliest digital computer games available outside the academic field. (Donovan, 2010, chapter 1)

Following the success of *Spacewar!*, more videogames started being developed and sold to the increasing audience, leading to the beginning of the commercialization of videogames as an industry in the 1970s. This period was marked by coin-operated arcade games, such as the hit arcade game *Pong*, and the launching of the first

generation of videogame home consoles with the Magnavox Odyssey. (Donovan, 2010, chapter 2)

The industry flourished from the 1970s to the early 1980s. This was considered the golden age of arcade videogames, due to their technological development and cultural impact. During this period, games transitioned from black and white to color, several interface options were developed, such as joysticks, steering wheels, pedals and light guns, and modern genres of videogames began being established. There were space-themed shooter games like *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids*, maze chase games like *Pac-Man*, driving games pushing for 3D perspectives like *Turbo*, and the beginning of platform games with *Donkey Kong*.

Games also began starring named characters and mascot characters, like Pac-Man from *Pac-Man*, which crossed over into other media including cartoons, songs, and movies, cementing their way into pop culture.

In 1983, the videogame industry suffered a crash, which had a particularly heavy impact in the North American market. This large-scale recession in the videogame industry affected primarily the United States due to market saturation in the number of consoles and available games, games of questionable quality, growing preference for personal computers over arcades, and loss of publishing control by Atari, the until then producer of most of the products consumed in the market.

This framework led to a change in the market and the dominance over the industry shifted from the USA to Japan. For the Japanese, this event became known as the “Atari shock”. (Ernkvist, 2008)

During this period, Nintendo created the Nintendo Family Computer (also known as Famicom), later redesigning the system and rebranding it as Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). The NES was the bestselling console of its time, and it helped in

breathing new life into the videogame industry after the crash. (Sheff, 1994) Nintendo introduced a new business model³ in the industry in this period that is still in vigour to this day.

Following the crash, with the new Nintendo model, the industry developed in a more sustainable way, and Japanese companies such as Nintendo, Sega and Sony were the leading companies in the market. Since then, the industry has prospered, and gaming has now become a common hobby. Newzoo⁴, a videogame financial data analysis website, reports that there were 2.69 billion gamers in the world by the end of 2020.

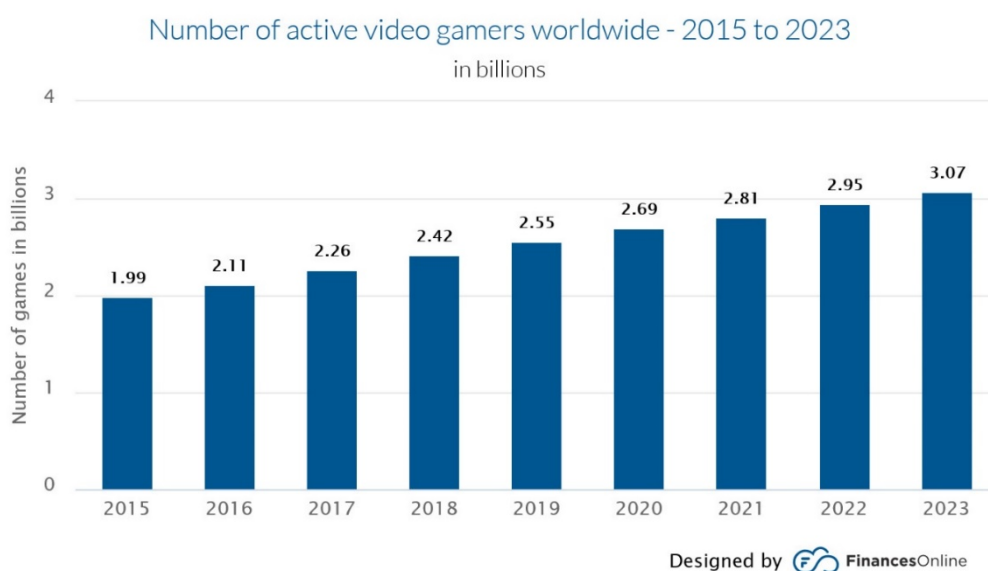


Figure 2 - Number of active videogamers worldwide - 2015 to 2023 (Source: Newzoo)

It is also important to note that the internet is now integrated into the gaming hobby, as many games encourage players to play online with friends and use social media to get news about upcoming new games and updates. This aspect further boosts the number of people who get into the hobby.

During the 2020 pandemic countries had to institute quarantine and lockdowns, and people were instructed to stay at home, which led to an increase of indoor activities and

³ The Nintendo model consisted of licensing third-party developers to produce and distribute games on Nintendo consoles. This model is in effect to this day, keeping a balance in the number of hardware developers.

⁴ <https://newzoo.com>

consuming of home entertainment. This furthered the expansion of the videogame industry, with the global videogame market having estimated annual revenues of 159 billion USA dollars (~159.23 billion euros) in 2020, three times the size of the 2019 global music industry and four times the size of the 2019 film industry (Hall, 2020).

The latest developments that could permanently alter how the industry functions happened this 2022, with many videogame companies buying and being bought by other videogame companies or selling their IPs (intellectual properties) or stocks (Barbour, 2022). This could lead to a consolidation of the industry, with only a few developing and publishing companies ruling in an oligopoly, hindering competition and creativity.

Videogame creation requires the commitment and passion of a team of professionals and the monetary investment to launch the final product to the market. However, no company can thrive without its customers, and in the videogame industry this is a vital point. Content creation in films, videos, animation, books, or games is about storytelling, about creating stories that captivate the audiences. Fans and fandoms are the backbone of franchises and media businesses. Whoever understands its fandom, can take advantage of that knowledge to market their product for a long period of time.

1.1.3. Fandom

Fandom is a term used to describe the shared values, practices, and collective interests of a community of people who share an interest in a particular subject, activity or person. It can be any subject, from sports to celebrities, cinema to animation, comic books to literature novels, boardgames to videogames.

The term “fan”, abbreviated from “fanatic”, was originally used as a derogatory term for devoted sports fans and women who went to the theatre to admire the actors instead of watching the plays. This term stems from conceptions of what is considered acceptable and inappropriate in a culture, what is high and popular culture, and projections of insecurity as fans pour their attention and energy on things that are not normally considered worthy of time.

The stereotypical conception of the fan, while not without a limited factual basis, amounts to a projection of anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies. The fans’ transgression of bourgeois taste and disruption of dominant cultural hierarchies insures that their preferences are seen as abnormal and threatening by those who have a vested interest in the maintenance of these standards (even by those who may share similar tastes but express them in fundamentally different ways) [...] Fan culture muddies those boundaries, treating popular texts as if they merited the same degree of attention and appreciation as canonical texts. (Jenkins, 1992, p. 17)

The study of fan cultures started off to justify the reservations of scholars as entertainment media, and therefore popular culture, slowly evolved and cemented itself as a significant part of society, but it has been slowly destigmatized since then, and became an increasingly popular field of studies due to its ability to shed light on how people relate – both positively and negatively – with popular media franchises, their social organization and their transformative power through fan works⁵.

In his renowned work “Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture”, Henry Jenkins defines fan culture as-

⁵ A fan work is a creative work produced by one or more fans about their favourite intellectual property and generally intended for other fans to enjoy

an amorphous but still identifiable grouping of enthusiasts of film and television which calls itself “media fandom.” This group embraces not a single text or even a single genre but many texts – American and British dramatic series, Hollywood genre films, comic books, Japanese animation, popular fiction (particularly science fiction, fantasy, and mystery) – and at the same time, it constructs boundaries that generally exclude other types of texts (notably soap opera and for the most part, commercial romance). (Jenkins, 1992, p. 1)

These fans who share the same interest for a piece of media make up the fanbase of said media. They create their own customs and traditions, use specific linguistic terms (for example, fans of videogames incorporate specific technical words, abbreviations and quotes into their vocabulary when interacting with the rest of the community, assuming their peers are also acknowledged with what they mean), engage in certain social activities and behaviours such as conventions⁶ and cosplay⁷, creating a sense of belonging, a shared identity, a community with its own culture, which is denominated the fandom.

This fandom culture, however, is not defined in the same terms as what we usually associate with culture. According to Jenkins, fan communities exist “in the “borderlands between mass culture and everyday life” (p. 3) and their shared passion for one piece of media transcends restrictions to geographic areas, ethnicities, language, religion, age, gender, and sexual orientation.

Fandom originates in response to specific historical conditions (not only specific configurations of television programming, but also the development of feminism, the development of new technologies, the atomization and alienation of contemporary American culture, etc.) and remains constantly in flux. Such a culture also defies attempts to quantify it, because of its fluid boundaries, its geographic dispersment, and its underground status. (Jenkins, 1992, p. 3)

Fandoms develop, consequently, into fluid intercultural communities which evolve as society and technology evolve as well.

⁶ Conventions are gatherings of fans and businesses held in large pavilions with many booths, showcases and all sorts of activities happening simultaneously

⁷ Cosplay is the process of assembling and sewing costumes that replicate characters, sometimes even including more sophisticated mechanics to give life to the outfit, such as hydraulics to open and close wings or the smithing of swords and armour, dressing those costumes and talking and acting like said characters

Modern fan culture is considered to have originated with the 1960's television series *Star Trek* (Jenkins, 1992, p. 36). In that time period, media was published in a one-way process, that is to say, media was published by its creators without taking any feedback and suggestions from audiences. Audiences were therefore considered as passive receivers of information and since there were no means to communicate with media producers, media discourse was also decided by said producers. Due to this, fans started to challenge the media authority as well as express their own feelings and ideas.

At the time, fans generally shared their creations via *fanzines*⁸ or conventions, but nowadays the internet and social media have facilitated fan culture to become more widespread and more accessible. Rather than submitting a fan work to a *fanzine* where, if accepted, it would be photocopied along with other works and sent out to a mailing list or distributed at conventions, modern fans can post their works and opinions online and access other people's creations instantly. This makes media producers more receptive to the voices of fans, as it not only increases engagement and boosts reputation, but it can also help to maximize the audience by delivering content that considers the audience's opinion.

These fan creations make fandoms an example of participatory culture, as fans act not only as consumers but also as producers and creators of some form of creative media and media discussion, both of which essential to keep a fandom active. Fan communities usually encourage creative expression and artistic production, thus participants generally create content based on their favorite media, such as *fanart*⁹, *fanfiction*¹⁰, *fanzines*, *fanvideos*¹¹, translation and cosplay.

⁸ Fanzines are fan magazines

⁹ Fanarts are drawings and pieces of art, also known as artworks

¹⁰ Fanfiction, fanfics or fics are written works and pieces of text

¹¹ Fanvideos are a type of video format created for fandoms. Their denomination can be different depending on the fandom, as they can be known as AMV (Anime Music Video), for example, for videos mixing anime footage with popular music

A significant portion of the content produced by a fandom is related to *ships*¹². Fanfiction writers take the material given in media and repurpose it to discover character growth, through family dynamics, mental health problems, alternate universe situations, but mostly through *slash*¹³ fiction, where they explore “issues of intimacy, power, commitment, partnership, competition and attraction” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 215). This serves not only to fill any gaps that the original media work may have left or to explore the possibilities of scenarios not presented, but it is also an exercise of self-exploration for fans, both writers and readers, as *slash* fiction serves as a playground of ideas that tackle gender norms, social conventions, sexuality and intimacy.

Fans are passionate and vocal about their fandom, but they are not always unified in their beliefs or opinions, as they actively challenge the media on account of their personal experiences with what is being portrayed, sometimes even contrasting with the authorial intent.

The fan’s claims for a favored text stand as the most direct and vocal affront to the legitimacy of traditional cultural hierarchies. [...] Unimpressed by institutional authority and expertise, the fans assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons. Undaunted by traditional conceptions of literary and intellectual property, fans raid mass culture, claiming its materials for their own use, reworking them as the basis for their own cultural creations and social interactions. (Jenkins, 1992, p. 18)

This is not, of course, to say that authors of intellectual properties ought to create their works around what fans want, but rather that fans can feel a particular affinity for a work and still criticize it. In other words, they resonate with the stories that are depicted, but can also repurpose them to reflect other ideas of their own.

This can also lead to conflict within the fandom and even fandom wars. Fans might get so passionate about something (a *ship*, for instance) that they will create conflict with

¹² A ship is a term used in fandom spaces to refer to a couple. Fans will ship two characters together when they think that they would make a good couple, regardless of whether or not those two characters are intended by the authors to be viewed as a couple

¹³ Slash is an old fandom term used to refer to non-heterosexual relationships

other fans who are passionate about something slightly different (a different *ship* or a *ship* including one of the characters from the other *ship*). They can also create conflict with fans of other intellectual properties over awards, for example. This is because they want their opinions about their favourite media to prevail, and they also want other people to recognize the value in said media and in said opinions. In other words, fandom can encourage the development of gatekeeping ownership of the truth, or encourage solidarity, community and the collective search for meaning in media products.

1.2. Resonance and Media Analysis

Entertainment media consists of films, animation, television, music, radio shows, podcasts, news, newspapers, magazines, books, videogames, and other formats facilitated by internet platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, and serves as a tool for artistic expression and for having a good time.

Entertainment media plays a fundamental role in modern society, since human beings have a need for entertainment and media includes a wide range of audio-visual pieces of art and storytelling. Storytelling alone is one of the oldest human social activities, as hunter-gatherer societies developed visual and oral storytelling traditions to share the glory or dangers of their hunting adventures, dictate social behaviour rules and protect the youngest with cautionary stories to keep them away from danger. These stories provided individuals with social information about the norms, rules, and expectations, which facilitated survival as well as cooperation. For some, even religious stories, myths, and legends can be interpreted as a form of storytelling. So, humans are and always have been producers and consumers of stories, and media is just the most modern and accessible type of content that provides both real and fictional stories at a large scale.

But why are stories so appealing to people? To better understand it, one must look at a term from the fields of physics and musical theory that is applied in the context of human emotions.

In technical terms, resonance is a “sound or vibration produced in one object that is caused by the sound or vibration produced in another” (Britannica Dictionary, 2022, resonance). This means that one object is projecting a sound, vibration, or wave while another different object is reflecting it. However, resonance is also a term used to refer to a “quality that makes something personally meaningful or important to someone”

(Britannica Dictionary, 2022, resonance). In other words, when we like something, we resonate with it.

In fact, the sociologist Hartmut Rosa takes this idea and defines resonance as following:

Resonance [...] is based on the experience that we can reach out and answer the call, that we can establish connection through our own inner or outer reaction... We experience this kind of resonance, for example, in relationships of love or friendship, but also in genuine dialogue, when we play a musical instrument, in sports, but also very often at the workplace. The receptive as well as active connection brings about a process of progressive self- and world transformation. (Rosa, 2018, para. 3)

This concept appears in opposition to alienation, which Rosa describes as being a state of detachment from reality, where there is a lack of responsivity, and interaction is done in a casual, instrumental, indifferent way. This makes creating connection with others and the world harder, and contrasts with the social human nature. Alienation creates feelings of inadequacy and rejection, which can bring about anti-social and anti-cultural sentiments. So, if a painting is destroyed, alienated people, even if they recognize the value, don't have any particular feeling towards the destruction of that piece of art.

It is important, therefore, to create connection, to create resonance. Rosa (2018), however, also states that resonance cannot be artificially forced, it's not created at will and its occurrence can't be planned, it is something that happens beyond our control and comprehension, which explains why like or dislike things and can't understand the reason why.

But resonance can also be used as a concept with a slightly different meaning.

Through resonance a particular statement in a particular context acquires a universal significance. Thus, the tremendous vision of a blood-soaked deity treading the winepress alone in Isaiah 63 is one that has haunted us ever since with its terrible beauty; through "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" it entered the American consciousness, and a title such as "The Grapes of Wrath" testifies to its continuing power. Yet in its original context it is little more than a ferocious celebration of a prospective massacre of Edomites, who were bitterly hated because in the later Old Testament period they had begun to push into the territory of Judah. (Frye, 1981, p. 239)

While Frye's excerpt is from a literary study on the Bible, this idea of resonance implies that a particular image, word, story, or concept expands beyond its original meaning and resonates with people from different places of the world across different time periods and is, in turn, invested with meaning from those people according to their own experiences.

Stories are created by and for the people, they are a product of their time and place and they can either be aligned with the dominant social values, or the social values of the target market, or oppose them. As an example, one can consider how film casts are more diverse now, a directing choice made to appeal to audiences with higher cultural sensibility. These are made aware of social discriminations through the internet, and therefore engage more with media that promotes equality. This is why stories from the past have seen countless adaptations and reiterations in order to better suit the values and taste of modern audiences, and while old stories can still be loved by many in their authenticity, it is also important to recognize both their noble values and systemic issues as society evolves and becomes more aware of the impact stories can have in the long run (Janicke, 2016). However, creative works like *Star Trek* were challenging the values of their period by having a diverse cast of characters in important roles that were breaking stereotypes. This means that media can reflect or reject the social norms of its period and serve as a tool for change.

As of today, media is the most powerful tool to shape human behaviour and culture. It has become an intermediary between the individual and culture, as one can easily consume products from a different place by simply doing a few clicks, and the usage of social media networks makes content go viral, that is to say, it makes a lot of people talk about it and encourages consumption. This also creates a "fear of missing out", an anxiety caused by the possibility of exclusion for not being informed about any topic.

This causes people to consume things not so much because it appeals to them, but by imitation, because that is what everyone else is doing and they don't want to feel left out (Bury, 2017).

According to Farmer, Ciaunica & Hamilton (2018), imitation is closely linked to mirror neurons. They state that mirror neurons “fire both when an individual performs a specific action and when that individual observes that action being performed by another” (section 3, para. 1). In other words, imitation is something that we learn both by doing and seeing others do things, and it is how we first interact with the world and how we learn to be a part of society. So, when a large number of examples of human behaviour are available through media, it is only natural that it becomes a means to learn about the world.

Media has a profound effect on how people think, feel and act, it leads people into accepting what's trendy or not, what to watch, what to wear, what to drink and eat, where to travel, how to behave in each situation, what to believe about oneself and others. Media creates images that help us understand who we are by portraying us as unique individuals with unique interests, habits, qualities, and faults. It also helps us to understand who other people are by showing their own similar or different interests, habits, qualities, and faults, and provides examples of how we should or shouldn't interact with them. Because of this, media also encourages people into liking or disliking people and things, creating a set of values and opinions that are deemed acceptable or not.

The entertainment industry can, therefore, be pointed as one of the greatest disseminators of culture in history. It is responsible for creating trends, shaping culture, and also profoundly influencing our identities and behaviour. It is because of this very

influence, that media industries must be mindful of the power they hold over the everyday lives of people and society.

However, media can also be used to market things as more attractive than they would normally be seen, and this is also true for a place or a country. After the Second World War, the world had a negative perception of Japan in general as a result of their support to the Nazi party in Germany during the war. Due to this, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) began efforts to improve Japan's image to the outside world by exporting television shows that put Japanese culture under a more positive light (Iwabuchi, 2015). Seeing their positive reception, more cultural products such as animation, manga¹⁴, videogames, popular music and films began being exported, and Japan acquired a "cool" image internationally. In 2006, the Ministry officially implemented "pop culture diplomacy" as one of the most important strategies to promote the nation's branding.

Japan's pop-culture diplomacy was firmly institutionalized with the 'Cool Japan' policy discourse, which sought to capitalize on the popularity of Japanese media culture in global markets (notably Euro-American markets) [...] This had been accompanied by active policy discussion and increased export promotion of Japanese media culture in a more institutionally organized manner than before, leading to the adoption of pop-culture diplomacy by MOFA. (Iwabuchi, 2015, section Soft power, para. 1)

This diplomacy model falls under soft power, an approach to international relations that aims not to coerce or use force to be at advantage, but rather shape perception and preferences, making individuals, populations, and governing bodies receptive to the country exerting influence and more eager to consume products and ideas from or make commerce with it.

The marketing of "Cool Japan" has attracted the attention of other Southeast Asian governments, who have also been trying to sell a selected image of their nations to the

¹⁴ Japanese comic books

international community. South Korea, in particular, has had a rapid cultural diffusion and cultural impact through *K-Pop* music and *K-drama* soap operas. (Lux, 2021)

The effectiveness of this type of diplomacy has been questioned. While this initiative contributes to recognition and valorisation of arts and entertainment by governments, increases the investments in these areas, and it promotes cultural diffusion, said diffusion may not reflect a better understanding of the culture it stems from.

This line of critique is concerned with the ambiguity of the objective of pop culture diplomacy to enhance the nation's brand images as well as its lack of effectiveness. Even more significant is the question of whether it can achieve a crucial objective of cultural diplomacy, that is, the promotion of genuine international cultural exchange... Exposure to the media culture of Japan can enhance the understanding of culture and society in Japan, even if in a one-way manner. However, there is no guarantee that this understanding will evolve beyond the individualized pleasure of media consumption. (Iwabuchi, 2015, section Cross-border dialogue, para. 2)

These cultural products are curated to make their country of origin a subject of wonder and fascination by other cultures. As a result, consuming said products brings only a very superficial, fabricated comprehension of a culture that may not be aligned with the true reality of the country.

For these reasons, it is important to discuss media, why we enjoy it and what cultural messages we are absorbing through it.

CHAPTER II – SQUARE ENIX AND FINAL FANTASY

Now that we explored the ecosystem of videogames, culture, and fandom, and how they interconnect and impact one another, as well as why people enjoy media and the importance of knowing what we consume, we can study how that is applied to a practical example. For this purpose, we take a significant the Final Fantasy franchise, a relevant reference in the videogame sphere, as the case study.

In order to have a better understanding into entertainment media as both a consumer and an investigator, one must also look deeper into the company that produces said media. This is especially true for videogame companies, as players associate them with their gaming experiences and that influences their next purchase decision when it comes it acquiring a new product from the same company or not.

2.1. Square Enix

To spread happiness across the globe by providing unforgettable experiences This philosophy represents our company's mission and the beliefs for which we stand. Each of our customers has his or her own definition of happiness. The Square Enix Group provides high-quality content, services, and products to help those customers create their own wonderful, unforgettable experiences, thereby allowing them to discover a happiness all their own. (Square Enix, 2021)

Square Enix is a Japanese entertainment corporation best known for its videogame franchises, such as *Final Fantasy*, *Dragon Quest* and *Kingdom Hearts*¹⁵, among several others. They hold headquarters in the USA, Canada, Europe (in France, Germany and the United Kingdom), India and China, and own several smaller subsidiary publishing studios, some of which located in the West.

Outside of digital entertainment, it also takes part in the business of manga and anime publishing, CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) film making, merchandising, as well as holding amusement facilities in Japan, such as arcades and cafés. A musical theatre play

¹⁵ *Kingdom Hearts* is an IP shared with The Walt Disney Company and therefore not exclusively owned by Square Enix as they have to consult with the other company to produce content

based on their mobile game *Final Fantasy: Brave Exvius* has also been produced. In 2022, Square Enix is evaluated to have generated approximately 51.01 billion yen (~373 million euros) in net income in 2022 (Figure 2), and the Final Fantasy franchise alone is estimated to have grossed over 11.7 billion dollars (~11.4 billion euros) throughout the years. (Adler, 2022)

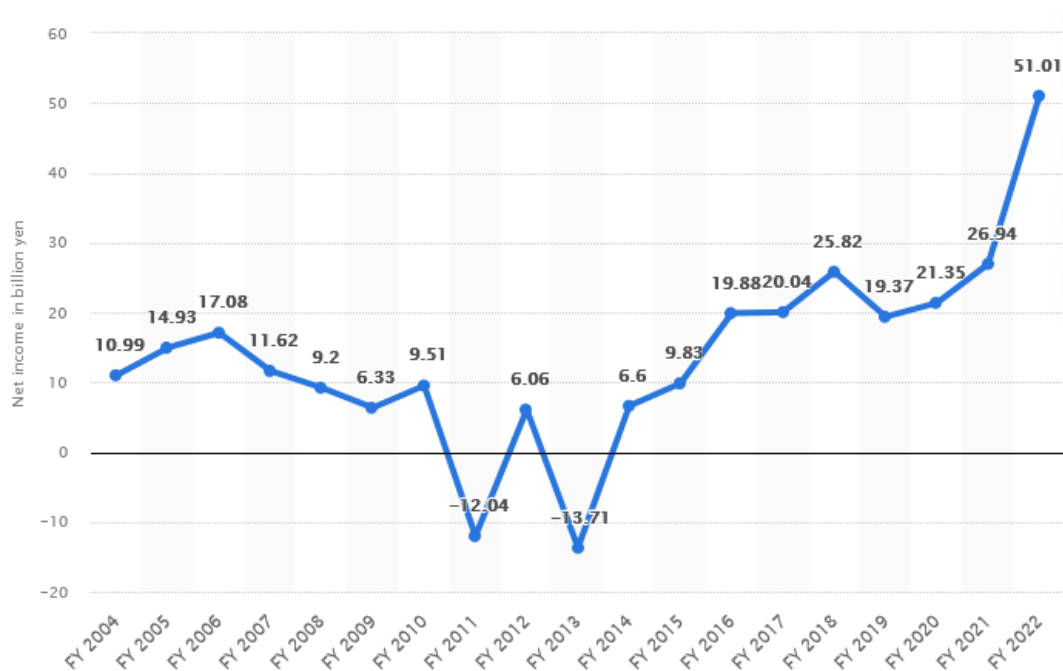


Figure 3 – Net income generated by Square Enix in the fiscal years 2004 to 2022 (in billion yen) (Source: Clement, 2022)

However, Square Enix hasn't always enjoyed its current success. Square Enix is actually two rival companies merged together since April 2003: Square (also referred to by its American brand name Square Soft) and Enix.

Enix was founded in 1975. Their initial business model was not producing, but rather outsourcing videogames, that is, finding talented people, bringing them together to produce a videogame, and then publishing it. This allowed them to grow steadily in popularity due to being the publisher of the *Dragon Quest* franchise, which captured the hearts of children and adults alike in Japan with its accessible gameplay, simple storyline that avoids melodrama, and cute characters designed by Akira Toriyama, the

author of the popular manga/anime series *Dragon Ball* (Fujii, 2006, section The origin of Enix).

Square, however, was only officially founded in 1986, and struggled to make profit. In 1987, they laid off staff and the remaining workers made one final effort before the company had to be shut down. Their supposed last game, *Final Fantasy*, was to be an epic fantasy adventure that drew inspiration from the high fantasy book trilogy *The Lord of The Rings*, written by J.R.R. Tolkien. The game was a commercial success, and so the company was saved (Fujii, 2006, section The origin of Square).

Both companies grew in the market. Square was known for its huge financial investments in each project, strict publishing scheduling (that is to say, if a game was set to be released on a date, it had to be released on that date without delays) and developing their own projects, as well as being focused on software development and cutting-edge technology. On the other hand, Enix was more cost sensitive, less time constrained, and famous for its outsourcing policy, as well as exploring more genres of games than Square. (Fujii, 2006, section Two paths of growth)

Table 1 - Comparison table between Square and Enix before merging

	Square	Enix
Founder	Masafumi Miyamoto	Yasuhiro Fukushima
Official foundation date	1986	1975
Biggest franchise	Final Fantasy	Dragon Quest
Cost management	Big investments	Cost sensitive
Publishing management	Strict	Flexible
Production	Develops own games	Outsourcing
Focus	Innovation	Creativity
Advantage points	Technological capabilities	More resistant to shifting market conditions
Disadvantage points	Not as easily adaptable to uncertainty	Undervalues experimental learning

At the turn of the century, a merger between both companies was considered in order to reduce videogame development costs, increase creative power and increase market competition with foreign developers, but after the commercial failure of Square Soft's first CGI film *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, this company had to request financial aid. After launching the first *Kingdom Hearts* game and *Final Fantasy X*, the company was back on track and their plans to merge with Enix proceeded. Square Enix was born from this union in 2003 to become one of the largest competitors in the videogame industry (Adler, 2022).

This background on both companies and their merger is reflected on each of their games and franchises. In the case of Final Fantasy during Square's management, each game was a high investment, the company strived for innovation, the latest technological improvements and epic adventures with complex characters and high fantasy storytelling. It was on the brink of bankruptcy that the franchise was created, and this "all or nothing" approach was what enabled the now merged Square to strive with Final Fantasy and turn the franchise into a successful business. As for modern Final Fantasy games under Square Enix's management, their new business model is concentrated on "polymorphic content", that is to say, the development, repurpose and expansion of franchises on multiple media formats, rather than being restricted to a single platform and a single media format (Tochen, 2005). Examples of this include *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*, *Ivalice Alliance* and *Fabula Nova Crystallis Final Fantasy*, related to the Final Fantasy franchise alone.

Other franchises of their own, such as the Mana and SaGa series, originated from Final Fantasy, and other videogame companies have made references to Final Fantasy in their games since it's one franchise with such a big impact on the industry (The Leaderboard,

2017). There have even been references in cartoons and anime as well, such as *The Amazing World of Gumball*¹⁶ and *Robot Chicken*¹⁷.

While no business model or marketing tactic is exclusive to one country alone, this polymorphic content approach is how most media businesses in Japan operate. Characters are featured in different types of media formats as if they were celebrities or idols (Tosca & Nakamura, 2020, section Comic Characters Becoming Icons Of Japanese Popular Culture Through Their Transmedial Reception), and adding to this they have biometric traits, such as a birth date, height, weight and blood type attributed to them, to make them be perceived by the audiences as real people. Final Fantasy is no exception to this, with its characters also having biometric information and having been featured in commercials for big brand names such as Nissan, Toyota and Audi (car brands), Nissin (noodle brand), and Roen (fashion brand) in Japan. The franchise was also able to strike partnership deals outside of Japan, such as McDonald's and Papa John's Pizza (fast food brands), Coca-Cola (soft drink brand), Dippin' Dots (ice cream brand), Prada, Louis Vuitton and Vivienne Westwood (fashion brands and designer, respectively), among others (Final Fantasy Union, 2017).

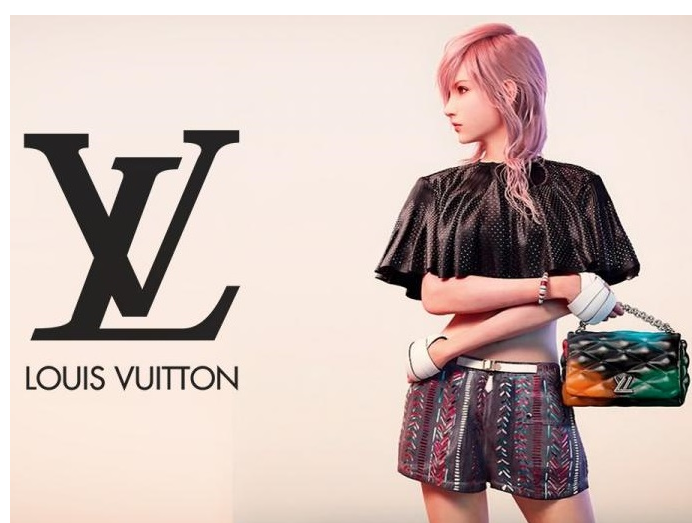


Figure 4 – FFXIII protagonist Claire “Lightning” Farron featured in a Louis Vuitton campaign

¹⁶ The Amazing World of Gumball, season 5, episode 18, “The Console”

¹⁷ Robot Chicken, season 2, episode 8, “Rodiggiti”

Besides brand deals, Final Fantasy has enjoyed some cultural impact. For instance, In the 2004 Olympics, the USA synchronized swimming bronze medallist duo Alison Bartosik and Anna Kozlova performed to the song *Liberi Fatali* from *Final Fantasy VIII*, and the game was briefly featured in the 2000 film *Charlie's Angels*. The song *Theme of Love* from *Final Fantasy IV* is integrated in the curriculum of Japanese primary schools (Hitmitsu, 2004). There are also orchestra concerts playing pieces from the soundtracks of the games in different cities across the globe, the most well-known being *Distant Worlds: Music from Final Fantasy*. The CGI film *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, while not a blockbuster success, has also been a major landmark in the popularization of CGI in Hollywood productions (Zakarin, 2016).

With all this information, one can perhaps assume that Square Enix is a strong videogame company that outgrew its internal market and started investing in the global one. The games are now translated from Japanese to English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, and sometimes Russian, Korean and Mandarin. In 2016, *Final Fantasy XV* became the first main title to release in Brazilian Portuguese and Latin American Spanish. However, before the merger, there was no official localization team or department, with the translation of the games for the Western audience being delegated to translators with close contact with the development teams. The international success of *Final Fantasy VII*, however, changed Square Enix's approach to localization.

No one expected the games to sell very well, and the foreign language versions were done on the cheap to gain a little bit of pocket money while the team prepared to move on to their next title. There was only one person serving as a go-between with America at the time, and no in-house translators in Tokyo. [...] FFVII was probably the turning point, as it showed the company that foreign languages could sell huge numbers. [interview with Richard Honeywood, member of the Square Enix localization team] (Final Fantasy Compendium, n.d.)

Final Fantasy VII changed the company's perspective and since then they have been investing in both the domestic and the global market.

However, in this year's New Year message from Square Enix CEO Yosuke Matsuda, they seem to be taking a new approach to the market by investing in the blockchain. They also sold some of their Western studios and IPs to Embracer Group, a Swedish based company (Hagues, 2022). This decision seems to be motivated by the failure of Western developed games to meet the expected sales milestones (Carter, 2022), but there is speculation that it was actually to reallocate resources back to their Japanese market, or to lower their own sale price before another larger company buys them (Murray, 2022). At the delivery of this thesis, the plans for the future of Square Enix were still unknown.

Home entertainment software M&A announced in 2022

Target/issuer name	Buyers/Investors	Announced date	Transaction type	Transaction status	Gross transaction value (\$M)	Sellers
Activision Blizzard Inc.	Microsoft Corp. (NASDAQGS:MSFT)	01/18/22	M&A - Whole	Announced	79,590	Activision Blizzard Inc. (NASDAQGS:ATVI)
Zynga Inc.	Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. (NASDAQGS:TTWO)	01/10/22	M&A - Whole	Completed	13,547	Zynga Inc.
Bungie Inc.	Sony Interactive Entertainment LLC	01/31/22	M&A - Whole	Announced	3,600	Netease Capital
Playtika Holding Corp.	Joffre Capital	06/28/22	M&A - Minority	Announced	2,228	Playtika Holding UK II Ltd.
Embracer Group AB (publ)	Savvy Gaming Group	06/08/22	M&A - Minority	Announced	1,055	Embracer Group AB (publ) (OM:EMBRAC B)
Alictus AS	SciPlay Corp. (NASDAQGS:SCPL)	03/01/22	M&A - Whole	Announced	334	Alictus AS
Six Waves Inc.	Stillfront Group AB (publ) (OM:SF)	01/19/22	M&A - Whole	Completed	301	NEXON Korea Corp.
Crystal Dynamics Inc./ Eidos Interactive Corp.	Embracer Group AB	05/02/22	M&A - Whole	Announced	300	Square Enix Ltd. Edios Inc.
ISBT Holdings Ltd.	International Game Technology PLC (NYSE:IGT)	04/11/22	M&A - Whole	Announced	174	ISBT Holdings Ltd.
AxesInMotion SL	Media and Games Invest SE (XTRA:M8G)	04/28/22	M&A - Whole	Completed	174	AxesInMotion SL

As of June 30, 2022.

Gross transaction value = total deal value plus the target's total debt, unconverted preferred equity, and minority interest.

Source: Industry data

Kagan, a media research group within the TMT offering of S&P Global Market Intelligence.

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Figure 5 – Biggest mergers and acquisitions within the videogame industry in 2022 (Source: Barbour, 2022)

2.2. Final Fantasy

Final Fantasy is a Japanese fantasy science fiction media franchise created by Hironobu Sakaguchi and developed by Square Enix. The franchise centres mainly on role-playing videogames, although it also branches into other videogame genres, and it also includes other media, such as CGI films, anime, manga, and novels.

There are 15 main entries in the franchise, with *Final Fantasy XVI* being the upcoming new addition. The games are and have been available on nearly all gaming consoles from Nintendo and Sony, as well as a few platforms from Microsoft, and for computer and mobile operating systems from Google and Apple, as well as the short-lived console WonderSwan Color from Bandai Namco.

The first game in the series was officially released on December 18, 1987, for the NES in Japan. The story of *Final Fantasy* follows a group of four fated warriors of light who defeat an evil knight that kidnapped a princess, but he gets sent back in time and threatens to destroy the world by stealing the light of the crystals that keep its balance, so the warriors go on a journey to stop him. It has a medieval setting and is inspired by Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* series. The game introduced a few innovations in the market, with side perspective in battles, a large number of enemies at once, the job system¹⁸, and it is considered the first RPG to feature a minigame. Since it was expected to be the last game from the company, it was not designed to be expanded upon, but following the positive reception from the public, the production of a sequel began.

¹⁸ The class or job system is a game mechanic where the party members have roles assigned to them that grant them strengths, weaknesses, stats, abilities and equipment unique to that role. Depending on the game, jobs can be either fixed from the start, chosen by the player or changeable anytime.



Figure 6 – Final Fantasy battle screen (NES version)

Final Fantasy II was released the year after, in 1988, for the NES in Japan. Because the first game was a closed story, it could not be expanded upon with a sequel, so developers took gameplay elements and aesthetics from it and carried them to the second game with a new story and characters. This would become the norm in the franchise, where each game shares some elements, but is a stand-alone experience. The story follows a resistance group from a small kingdom fighting an evil empire. It is the first Final Fantasy game to depict the death of playable characters, and the first game where the main characters are named, although said names can be changed.



Figure 7 – Final Fantasy II battle screen (Dawn of Souls remake version for the Nintendo GameBoy Advance console)

Final Fantasy III, published in 1990, was also released for the NES in Japan. The story follows a group of kids who are blessed by the crystals and chosen to save the world

from darkness. It is the first game to introduce summons¹⁹, sidequests²⁰ and it expanded on the job system introduced in the first game.



Figure 8 – Final Fantasy III battle screen (Pixel Remaster remake version for mobile phone and PC)

Final Fantasy IV was released for the SNES console in 1991 in Japan and published in North America as *Final Fantasy II*, which would later be corrected as the other games were also localized. The story follows a dark knight as he tries to prevent a sorcerer from seizing powerful crystals and destroying the world. It is the first Final Fantasy game with a dramatic narrative and exploration of characters with more complex personalities and their interpersonal relationships to one another, as well as the first game to introduce the Active Time Battle (ATB) mechanic²¹, an innovation in JRPGs.

¹⁹ Summons are humanoid, animal or monster-like creatures in Final Fantasy games that can aid the party in battle.

²⁰ Sidequests are quests given to the player that have no direct impact on the main story of the game, being there for the purpose of expansion of lore and acquisition of rewards.

²¹ The Active Time Battle (ATB) mechanic is an evolved form of the traditional turn-based system in RPG games, where instead of each turn having a specific order, actions can be performed when the ATB gauge is full, which depends on character and enemy stats and inflicted status effects. This may require the player to time their actions, creating more engagement in battles.



Figure 9 – Final Fantasy IV battle screen (Nintendo DS remake version)

Final Fantasy V was released in 1992 for the SNES in Japan. The story follows a wanderer who by investigating a fallen meteor, finds other characters, one of whom revealing that the crystals that keep balance in the world and are sealing a great evil are in danger, so they join forces to prevent the world falling into a catastrophe.



Figure 10 – Final Fantasy V battle screen (Nintendo GameBoy Advance version)

Final Fantasy VI was released for the SNES in 1994 in Japan, but it was published in North America under the title *Final Fantasy III*, which, along with *FFIV*, was corrected later on. The story follows fourteen different playable characters and deals with more mature themes than previous games, such as nihilism, death, the use of chemical weapons in warfare, depictions of psychological torture and attempted suicide, but also including redemption and newfound hope. It is the first game to break the medieval Europe aesthetic for a more industrialized one, while also being the first game to tackle

mature themes more explicitly, and the last game from the main instalments in the franchise to have two-dimensional (2D) pixel graphics.



Figure 11 – Final Fantasy VI intro cutscene (Nintendo GameBoy Advance version)

Final Fantasy VII was published in 1997 and it marked the beginning of a new age for the franchise and the videogame industry. The game was published on PS1, severing Square's ties with Nintendo. Set in a cyberpunk post-war world, where a megacorporation rules everything, the story follows an ex-soldier who suffers from traumatic amnesia and joins an eco-terrorist group, who are trying to sabotage said corporation and stop the world from being destroyed. Along with the technological upgrade to 3D graphics and use of polygonal characters on pre-rendered backgrounds, it was the first game in the franchise to make use of CD-ROM technology and FMV²², with the game being divided into three different discs. It was also the first game in the franchise to be published in the PAL region²³. A remake of the game, or better yet, the first part, was launched in 2020, expanding on the universe and fleshing out the characters.

²² Full motion video, abbreviated as FMV, is a pre-recorded movie or animation of higher graphical quality than the use of the game's 2D or 3D models.

²³ PAL region is a term used to refer to most of Europe, Africa and Oceania, and a few regions in Asia and South America. The name derives from the Phase Alternating Line television standard for analogue colour television used in those regions, as opposed to the NTSC (National Television System Committee) standard used in Japan and most of North America, and the SECAM (from the French *Séquentiel de couleur à mémoire*) standard used in the rest of the world. In other words, these are related to the colour encoding system, image resolution, audio modulation and frame rates of analogue colour television for the region, a technology that has been replaced by digital video formatting



Figure 12 – Side by side graphical comparison between Final Fantasy VII (1997; PS1) and Final Fantasy VII Remake (2020, PS4/PS5/PC)

Final Fantasy VIII was released in 1999 for the PS1. The story follows a group of military academy students who find themselves fighting the lingering ghost of a prophesized witch from the future, eventually leading to her real apparition. It was the first game to use realistic human proportions in characters, as well as motion capture²⁴. It also featured the first vocal track in the franchise, “Eyes On Me”. It is the first Final Fantasy game to have a modern aesthetic. The game seems to have been created to be particularly appealing to western audiences, as the main protagonist was modelled after late Hollywood star River Phoenix, and another character was also modelled after late actor Robbin Williams.



Figure 13 – Final Fantasy VIII FMV cutscene (PS1 version)

²⁴ Motion capture is the process of recording the movement of people and objects. In videogame development, it refers to recording the movements of actors, and using that information to animate digital 2D or 3D character models

Final Fantasy IX was also released for the PS1 in 2000. The story follows a group of characters on an adventure where they learn about themselves and the nature of life and death as they go against an enemy who wants to extinct all current life on the world so that it can be repopulated with creatures from another moribund world. The game brought back the series' roots with a more traditional setting and fixed roles for each playable character.

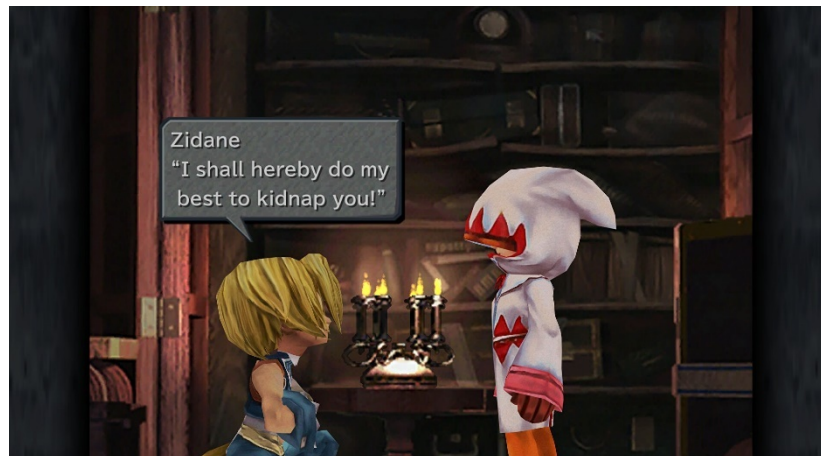


Figure 14 – Final Fantasy IX cutscene (PS1 version)

Final Fantasy X was published in 2001 for the PS2. The story is set in a post-apocalyptic world, most of the territory is flooded by Sin, a water creature that threatens to drown the entire planet and is up to the group of protagonists to stop it by going on a pilgrimage. It was the first Final Fantasy game with voice acting.



Figure 15 – Final Fantasy X main cast (PS2 version)

Final Fantasy XI, the first MMORPG in the series, was released in 2002 for PC and PS2. It was the first FF game with online features, and also the first game with 3D landscapes with enemies roaming freely and the possibility for real time battles, as opposed to random encounters used in previous games. *Final Fantasy XI* was also the first game ever to foment crossplay²⁵. It was also the final active online server on the PS2 before support was ended in 2016.



Figure 16 – Final Fantasy XI (PC version)

Final Fantasy XII was first released for the PS2 in 2006. The story follows a resistance group from a kingdom that is caught between two empires at war as they try to restore the sovereignty of their homeland. From this game forward (excluding the MMO's), the main playable character's name cannot be changed.

²⁵ Crossplay is a term used to describe the activity of playing a game with other players who happen to have a different platform. For example, players who had *Final Fantasy XI* on PC could play with PS2 players



Figure 17 – Final Fantasy XII battle (The Zodiac Age remake version)

Final Fantasy XIII was first released for the PS3 in late 2009 in Japan, and in early 2010 worldwide. The story is set in a futuristic world where everyone lives happy perfect lives until a group of people is caught at the crossfire between opposing divine wills and as they try to understand their crumbling worldviews, society starts to collapse. This game briefly brought back the transition to battle screen one last time, but contrasts heavily from any other games due to its battle mechanics.



Figure 18 – Final Fantasy XIII battle screen (PC version)

Final Fantasy XIV is the second MMORPG in the series, and it was first released for PC in 2010. This game carried over multiple elements from FFXI, but due to its negative reception, it had to be shut down in 2012. A new, improved version, titled *A Realm Reborn*, was released in 2013 for PC and PS3 (later PS4 and PS5), and it became the most profitable title in the franchise. (Kim, 2021) This new version features elements from its earlier version and from all the other games in the franchise.



Figure 19 – Final Fantasy XIV (*A Realm Reborn* version)

Final Fantasy XV was released for the PS4 and Xbox One in 2016. The story follows a reluctant young prince whose kingdom is occupied while he's on a trip with his group of friends, so we must save it with their help. It was designed to be and marketed as a “fantasy based in reality”, and it's the first game in the series to have product placement.



Figure 20 – Final Fantasy XV camera mode (PC version)

As of the delivery date of this thesis, the trailers for *Final Fantasy XVI* indicate that it's set in a medieval European setting. The voice acting for the English version was actually done first, as opposed to the other games where the voice acting for the Japanese version has priority. (Taylor, 2021)

The following table summarises the timeline of the Japanese fantasy science fiction media franchise developed by Square Enix.

	Launch Date	Initial Launch Platform(s)
<i>Final Fantasy</i>	JP: December 18, 1987 NA: July 12, 1990 PAL: March 14, 2003	JP & NA: NES PAL: PS1
<i>Final Fantasy II</i>	JP: December 17, 1988 NA: April 8, 2003 PAL: March 14, 2003	JP: NES NA & PAL: PS1
<i>Final Fantasy III</i>	JP: April 27, 1990 NA: November 14, 2006 PAL: May 4, 2007	JP: NES NA & PAL: NDS
<i>Final Fantasy IV</i>	JP: July 19, 1991 NA: November 23, 1991 PAL: February 27, 2002	JP & NA: NES PAL: PS1
<i>Final Fantasy V</i>	JP: December 6, 1992 NA: October 5, 1999 PAL: February 27, 2002	JP: NES NA & PAL: PS1
<i>Final Fantasy VI</i>	JP: April 2, 1994 NA: October 11, 1994 PAL: March 1, 2002	JP & NA: NES PAL: PS1
<i>Final Fantasy VII</i>	JP: January 31, 1997	PS1

	NA: September 7, 1997 PAL: November 1, 1997	
<i>Final Fantasy VIII</i>	JP: February 11, 1999 NA: September 9, 1999 PAL: October 27, 1999	PS1
<i>Final Fantasy IX</i>	JP: July 7, 2000 NA: November 13, 2000 PAL: February 16, 2001	PS1
<i>Final Fantasy X</i>	JP: July 19, 2001 NA: December 17, 2001 PAL: May 24, 2002	PS2
<i>Final Fantasy XI</i>	JP: May 16, 2002 NA: October 28, 2003 PAL: September 16, 2004	PC PS2
<i>Final Fantasy XII</i>	JP: March 16, 2006 NA: October 31, 2006 PAL: February 23, 2007	PS2
<i>Final Fantasy XIII</i>	JP: December 17, 2009 NA & PAL: March 9, 2010	PS3
<i>Final Fantasy XIV</i>	Old version: September 30, 2010 New version: August 27, 2013	PC
<i>Final Fantasy XV</i>	November 29, 2016	PS4 Xbox One

Table 1 - Franchise summary

Apart from the main titles, there are other popular Final Fantasy games like the spin off games *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Dissidia: Final Fantasy*.

The plots tend to follow a group of characters from different backgrounds who are caught in circumstances that force them to team up to fight an antagonist who wants to rule or destroy the world, and they have to deal with their own internal struggles throughout the journey. This pattern can perhaps be explained by the fact that a group of young people fighting oppression and defeating an evil entity of immeasurable power tends to be a prevalent theme when creating anime and videogames (Margolis, 2021). Each game is a stand-alone story, with some having spin-offs, prequels, sequels or side content that expand or continue the stories from the same worlds (the polymorphic approach).

The franchise is defined by its unique characters, settings and plots, and also the recurring gameplay mechanics and features. Common recurring features include the franchise's mascots: chocobos, moogles (flying koala-like creatures with bat wings) and

cactuars (anthropomorphic cacti enemies in a running pose); the mythology inspired creatures that can be summoned to aid in battle, such as Leviathan (a sea serpent inspired by the eponymous Christian demon), Shiva (a voluptuous blue skinned woman with ice powers inspired by either the Hindu god Shiva, the Slavic goddess of fertility Živa, and the Japanese legend of *yuki-onna*, or a combination of the three); the classes of the characters, the names of weapons and certain characters (such as Biggs and Wedge²⁶), equipment and spells remain constant, as well as some gameplay elements.

In terms of design, there are three main art styles associated with the franchise. Yoshitaka Amano is the predominant artist for the first six games, producing box art, character designs and title logos. His art is defined by hand drawn whimsical shapes and forms and wide use of colour. After *Final Fantasy VI*, he stepped down but continued to be commissioned for promotional and character artwork and title logos for the following games. The style that is most associated with the franchise is from the authorship of Tetsuya Nomura, with sharp lines and edges, spiky hair and asymmetrical clothing that gave the franchise a more mature look. More recently, a new art style from Akihiko Yoshida has been adopted, with characters drawn with softer features and in a classical painting fashion. Despite their different art styles, almost all the main and supporting characters, as well as most of the antagonists, have a young and lanky look to them, with male characters in particular being androgynous, which is aligned with the general beauty standard for celebrities in Japan. Female characters, while generally well written, tend to sport outfits that reveal more skin than their male counterparts, but both genders are often put in *fanservice*²⁷ situations in the Final Fantasy franchise.

²⁶ The characters Biggs and Wedge are named after the characters Biggs Darklighter and Wedge Antilles from George Lucas' 1977 film *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*

²⁷ *Fanservice* is a term used to refer to situations that fictional characters are put in to amuse and please the audience, serving little to no purpose in the narrative. It is generally used to refer to characters in sexy outfits or nude, or characters displayed in romantic and sexual situations, but it can also be applied to over the top fight sequences or extreme gore depending on the context of media involved



Figure 21 – Final Fantasy VII protagonist Cloud Strife drawn by Yoshitaka Amano (left), Tetsuya Nomura (center), and Akihiko Yoshida (right)

As for the music, several genres were explored, such as heavy metal and tecno-electronica, but the majority of the soundtrack features classical symphonic music. The main composer of the series was Nobuo Uematsu. From *Final Fantasy X* onward, the series has had other composers as main composers responsible for the soundtracks, as Uematsu left Square Enix, although he still continues to compose music for the series and attends the tour orchestras. Other noteworthy composers include Masashi Hamauzu, Hitoshi Sakimoto, Junya Nakano, Masayoshi Soken and Yoko Shimomura.

With talented artists working on it, the Final Fantasy franchise has cemented itself as one of the biggest within the videogame industry. It popularized the console RPG genre worldwide, and is highly praised by fans, critics, and gaming journalists alike, although not without some criticism, as explained in a few paragraphs below. Final Fantasy is to this day one of the most relevant franchises in the videogame industry. Each game strives for innovation and cutting-edge graphics, but it also retains some familiarity, which makes it endearing for so many people, but also attracts some criticism.

Square Enix's "polymorphic content" approach is connected to a practice that has been named as "media mix". Media mix refers to the creation of a universe of stories in different formats about the same IP (intellectual property). In other words, a company may launch a certain videogame and also complementary anime, manga, novels and films to further expand on the story that is being told. Known as transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2003, 2006), this aims not only to enrich the universe and bring new content to old fans, but it is also a way to captivate more audience who might consume different formats of media, and therefore it is a very useful technique to promote new products and franchises. (Tosca & Nakamura, 2020)

Nonetheless, this media mix tactic can lead to a decline in the quality of the games and a fragmentation of the stories, as is the case with *Final Fantasy XV* (Bjarnason, 2021). Many fans complain that ever since the Square-Enix merger, Final Fantasy games are losing their identity while trying to adapt to the new market trends. Naoki Yoshida, director of *Final Fantasy XIV*, has addressed this issue and the polarized opinions about the franchise in an interview by stating the following:

"In terms of whether Final Fantasy is successfully adapting to industry trends, I believe the series is currently struggling. We're now at a point where we receive a wide variety of requests regarding the direction of our game design. To be honest, it'd be impossible to satisfy all those requests with a single title. My current impression is that all we can really do is create multiple games, and continue creating the best that we can at any given time." [interview with Naoki Yoshida (director of *Final Fantasy XIV*)] (Madsen, 2022)

Other complaints correspond to a lack of proper representation of people of colour, queer people, and women in the recent years.

Over the course of the 13 non-MMO, mainline games, there are 113 playable characters ("playable characters" is used to describe characters that the player can control during battle). Of those 113 characters, there are only 3 black characters, making up a mere 2.6% of the group. This is despite the fact that 19% of the people on Earth are black. [...] For a game series that claims to "explore new worlds" and has taken quite a bit from the cultures that people of color's ancestors built, the worlds they create seem to be disproportionately white. (Smith, 2020, para. 8)

Smith (2020) continues on to explain that Square Enix hires people who are not people of colour for executive and creative positions, and thus they fail to bring more nuanced perspectives into the games.

Flores (2020) expresses wariness about how female characters are written in the upcoming main game, as well as reinforcing the scarce representation of people of colour. She states that Final Fantasy women in older games had a strong presence and complex stories, while the more recent entries barely flesh out the characters.

There has also been some criticism to a lack of proper queer inclusion too, but Square Enix are aware of the issue:

“I think that expressing diversity with LGBTQ inclusion is an important issue for everyone involved in making content, not just people making games,” Toriyama-san explains. “In *Final Fantasy 7 Remake*, we rebuilt the original game using the latest technology, but we felt that it should not stop at the technical side and we needed to update the story content being shown in line with modern sensibilities.” [interview with Motomu Toriyama (co-director of *Final Fantasy VII Remake*)] (King, 2021, para. 3)

With praise and criticism clashing together, it is hard to say which one is more prevalent and if / how it impacts public perception and the Final Fantasy fandom. In the following chapter, we proceed to examine the conducted survey that concludes this thesis in search for answers to the questions that arose.

CHAPTER III – ANALYSIS OF A FANDOM SAMPLE

Together, the concepts, theory and history presented provide important insights into fandom, culture, and videogames. In order to understand, analyse and possibly assess the existing relationship with the videogame franchise Final Fantasy, it was decided that the best method to adopt for this investigation was a questionnaire to a specific target group. Chapter 3 describes the questionnaire and explains the results.

3.1. Questionnaire

A questionnaire, comprising a total of 26 questions (restricted and unrestricted questions), was created to analyse the relationship people have with the franchise Final Fantasy. As the interest was to understand the views of the Final Fantasy fan community, starting on June 29, the questionnaire was shared in two gaming-oriented community groups on Facebook, and on the Final Fantasy Discord server with the most users. It was also placed in the author's social media accounts so that her followers and close friends who are also into the hobby of videogames could participate. The communities were informed on the content and purpose of the questionnaire. It is important to note that the questionnaire had to be approved by the manager of each community before it was disseminated.

The questionnaire, created and disseminated electronically in two languages enabled participants to pick between (European) Portuguese and American English. The purpose was to reach a wider audience, and possibly English-speaking Japanese natives. Ideally the questionnaire would also be in Japanese, but given language and time constraints, this was not possible. The questions were divided into 4 parts: 1. General information; 2. Relationship with the franchise; 3. Appealing elements; 4. Cultural impact. In order to perceive the interest behind each of the question, we describe each question, per group, and the intended purpose:

1. “General Information” (5 questions):
 - “Age?”, with the options “18-25”, “26-35”, “36-45”, “46-55” and “55+”, in order to categorize participants into age interval groups;
 - “Gender?”, with the options “Feminine”, “Masculine”, “Non Binary”, “I’d rather not say” and an open answer option in order to categorize participants by gender;
 - “Region?”, with the options “Europe”, “North America”, “Central/South America”, “Africa”, “Asia” and “Oceania”, in order to categorize participants by region;
 - “Are you Portuguese or Japanese?”, with the options “Portuguese”, “Japanese” and “Neither”, in order to better study the Portuguese group of participants and whether a Japanese perspective could be provided;
 - “Is videogaming one of your regular hobbies?”, with the options “Yes” and “No”, in order to understand whether or not participants are regular players;
2. “Relationship with the franchise” (10 questions):
 - “Have you ever played any ‘Final Fantasy’ game?”, with the options “Yes” and “No”, in order to filter participants by whether their answers reflect their personal playing experience or general knowledge about the games;
 - “If yes, which one?”, with all the main title games, as well as the options “Mobile games” and “Spin off games”, in order to understand which games are the most played;

- “For how long have you known / played ‘Final Fantasy’?”, with an open answer option, in order to understand for how long participants have known the franchise;
- “Do you consider yourself part of the ‘Final Fantasy’ fandom?”, with the options “Yes” and “No”, in order to understand whether or not participants identify themselves as part of the fan community;
- “Do you usually interact with the ‘Final Fantasy’ fandom?”, with the options “Yes” and “No”, in order to understand whether participants interact with the fandom or not;
- “Have you ever produced ‘Final Fantasy’ content?”, with the options “Yes” and “No”, in order to understand whether participants are content creators, or if they engage in creating fanart, fanfiction, fanzines, fangames, articles, video essays, image and video editing, memes, and so on within the fandom;
- “Define how easy it is to access extra ‘Final Fantasy’ content”, with a Likert scale of 1 to 5, in order to understand how participants feel about the access to extra content, such as official magazines, merchandising, interviews, making of’s, among others;
- “Do you purchase other products from the company ‘Square Enix’ other than ‘Final Fantasy’?”, with the options “Yes”, “No” and “Not sure”, in order to understand if participants are also consumers of other products by the same company;
- “Do you consider that ‘Square Enix’ creates quality products?”, with the options “Yes”, “No”, “Depends on the product” and “No opinion”, in

order to understand the participants' opinions on the quality of the games produced by the company;

- “Do you consider ‘Square Enix’ a trustworthy brand?”, with the options “Yes”, “No”, “No opinion” and an open answer option, in order to understand the participants' opinions on the company;

3. “Appealing elements” (5 questions):

- “What’s your favorite ‘Final Fantasy’?”, with all the main title games, as well as the options “Mobile games” and “Spin off games”, in order to understand which games are the most popular amongst the participants;
- “Explain your preference”, with an open answer option, in order to understand the reasons for the participants' preferences;
- “Pick the elements you consider more appealing in a ‘Final Fantasy’ game”, with the options “Plot”, “Characters”, “Setting”, “Audio design / soundtrack”, “Gameplay”, “Graphics”, “Art direction”, “Accessibility”, “Innovation”, “Personalization”, “Mascots (chocobos, moogles, etc.) and merchandising”, in order to understand which traits are most important for the participants in the franchise;
- “What makes ‘Final Fantasy’ stand out from other games in your opinion?”, with an open answer option, in order to understand if and how participants resonate with the franchise;
- “Do you think ‘Final Fantasy’ games are created with the intent to appeal to the global market more than the domestic market?”, with the options “Yes”, “No”, “Not sure” and an open answer option, in order to understand if participants feel the games target a global market more than the domestic one;

4. “Cultural impact” (6 questions):

- “How do you define the relationship between media and culture?”, with the options “Culture defines what kind of media is created”, “Media defines the dominant culture”, “Both have an impact on each other” and “No opinion”, in order to understand participants’ opinions on the impact of media and culture on one another;
- “Do you consider cultural elements an important part of ‘Final Fantasy’?”, with the options “Yes”, “No”, “Not sure”, in order to understand if participants are aware of the prevalence of cultural elements;
- “Do you think ‘Final Fantasy’ includes familiar cultural elements?”, with the options “Yes, the inspiration in *The Lord of the Rings/Star Wars* and other familiar narratives”, “Yes, some settings and creatures draw inspiration from my culture or other real-life cultures”, “No”, “Not sure” and an open answer option, in order to understand if participants are aware of the prevalence of familiar cultural elements in the franchise;
- “Do you think ‘Final Fantasy’ presents cultural diversity?”, with the options “Yes”, “No” and “Not sure”, in order to understand participants’ opinions on how the games handle cultural elements;
- “How do you think ‘Final Fantasy’ would benefit from cultural elements?”, with the options “More ethnic diversity”, “More diversity in gender and sexual orientation”, “More diversity in setting”, “More diversity in creatures inspired by different mythologies”, “More musical diversity”, “Not sure”, “I don't think more cultural elements are

necessary” and an open answer option, in order to understand what cultural elements participants think that could improve the franchise;

- “Do you think discussion spaces about media and their impact on society are important?”, with the options “Yes”, “No” and “Not sure”, in order to understand participants’ opinions on the relevance of having open conversations about media and its effects on society.

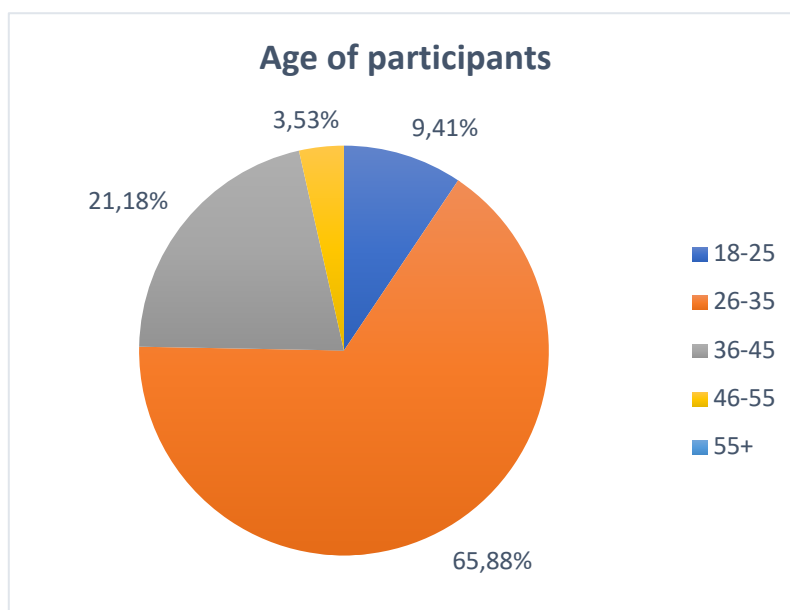
At the end of the analysis, other ideas emerge. Questions such as: "Do you feel like media has ever affected your life in a perceptible way?", “Do you feel like participating in a fandom has altered your cultural identity?”, “Are you aware of the ‘Cool Japan’ initiative?”, “What is your opinion about Square Enix’s approach to the market before and after the merger?”, “Do you feel more interest in visiting Japan or consuming more Japanese content after playing a ‘Final Fantasy’ game?”, “Do you think that being aware of what the fandom demands is important for the success of media businesses?”, “Do you consider that corporate decisions can impact customer experience even if they don’t directly impact the quality of the products?”, and many others, may perhaps lead to a new and improved questionnaire. However, despite the curiosity, we are aware that questionnaires that are too long and/or launching a new survey would not guarantee answers from the same people.

3.2. Results and Discussion

Given the nature of the questions, a mixed (quantitative and qualitative-interpretative) approach was used to analyse not only the results obtained from the questionnaire, but also the quality of the questions. As the questionnaire was created for this thesis and had not been validated previously, we may consider this experimental study as a form of validating the data collection instrument.

As of the delivery of this thesis, data from 85 individuals was collected. Although the questionnaire was disseminated in multilingual communities (communicating in English), a sizable number of respondents were Portuguese and only a small number of respondents were in English. This may be due to the fact that getting posting permission in Portuguese groups was easier than in English speaking groups, which seemed to have stricter rules to approve the posting of questionnaires. Thus, the number of English respondents is not enough to be considered a representative sample.

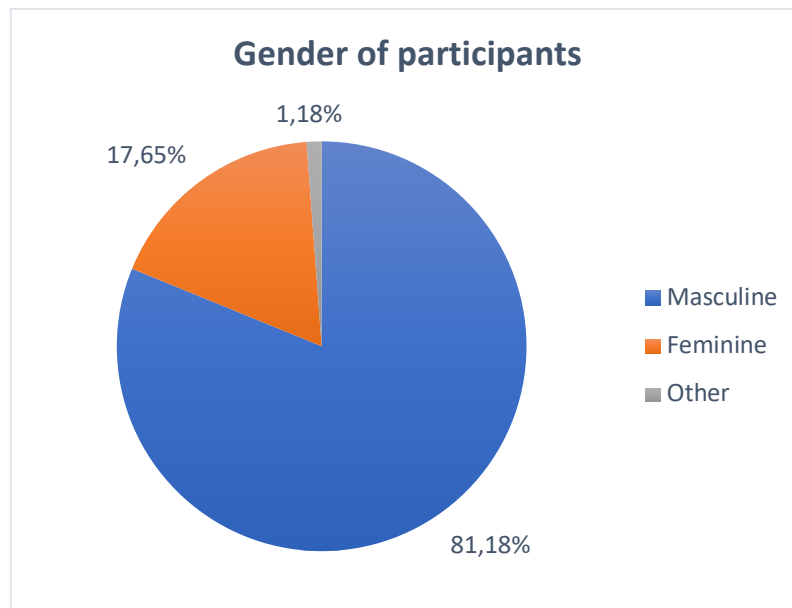
The largest age group was 26-35, with 56 answers, or 65,9%, followed by 36-45 with 18 answers (21,2%), 18-25 with 8 answers (9,4%), and lastly 46-55 with 3 answers (3,5%), with no participant being above 55. This age distribution can be explained by the fact that most of the participants would have experienced *Final Fantasy* in their youth, when *Final Fantasy VII* was first launched in Europe.



Graph 1 – Age distribution of participants

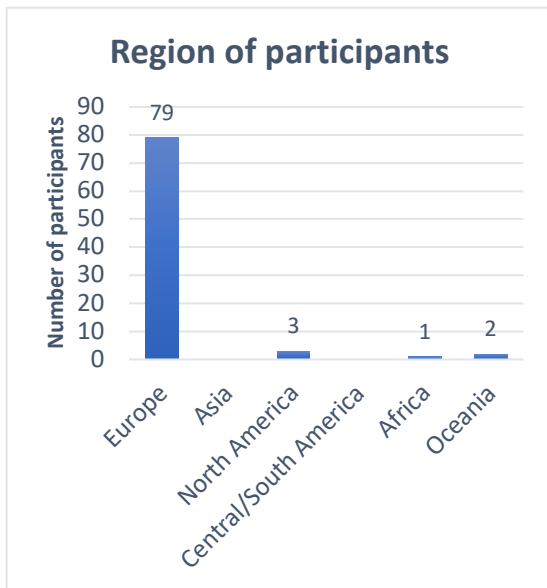
69 participants (81,2%) are men, while 15 (17,6%) are women, and 1 (1,2%) is not within the binary. This may be interpreted as videogames being a predominantly male hobby, but it may also be that the reach of the questionnaire was not sufficiently wide-ranging, as 3 out of the 7 non-Portuguese participants are female (42,9% within

nationality), as opposed to 12 out of the 78 Portuguese participants (15,4% within nationality) being female.

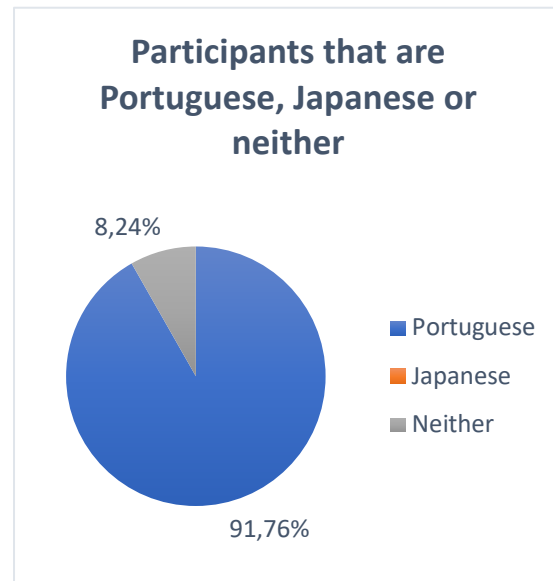


Graph 2 – Gender distribution of participants

79 participants (92,9%) are from Europe, with 78 (91,8%) being Portuguese and the remaining 7 (8,2%) being non-Portuguese. There are 3 (3,5%) participants from North America, 2 (2,4%) from Oceania and 1 (1,2%) from Africa. However, no participant is Japanese, so it was not possible to get a Japanese perspective on the Final Fantasy franchise, and since it was not possible to find data on sales per region, dividing participants per region and making a question to discriminate if they were either Portuguese, Japanese or neither became obsolete. Instead, we can now see that perhaps it would have been better to create an open answer question to ask each participant their nationality.

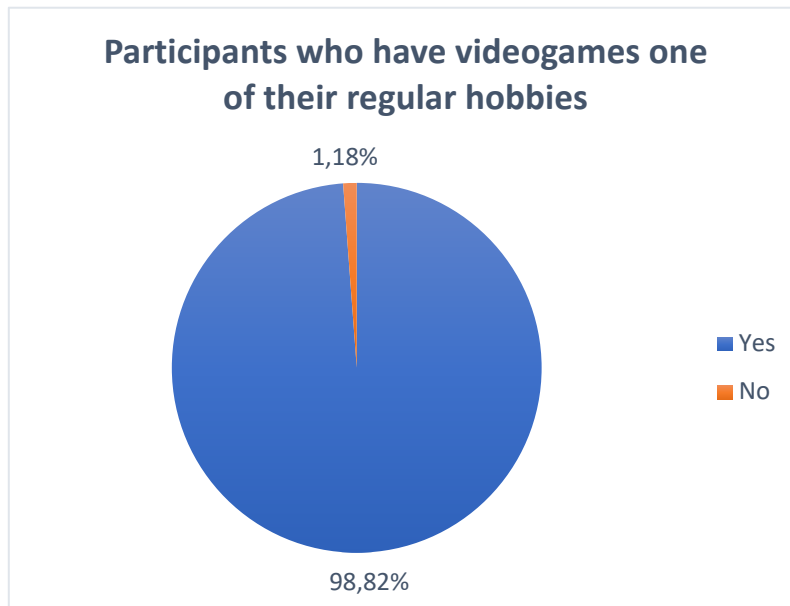


Graph 3 – Distribution of participants per region

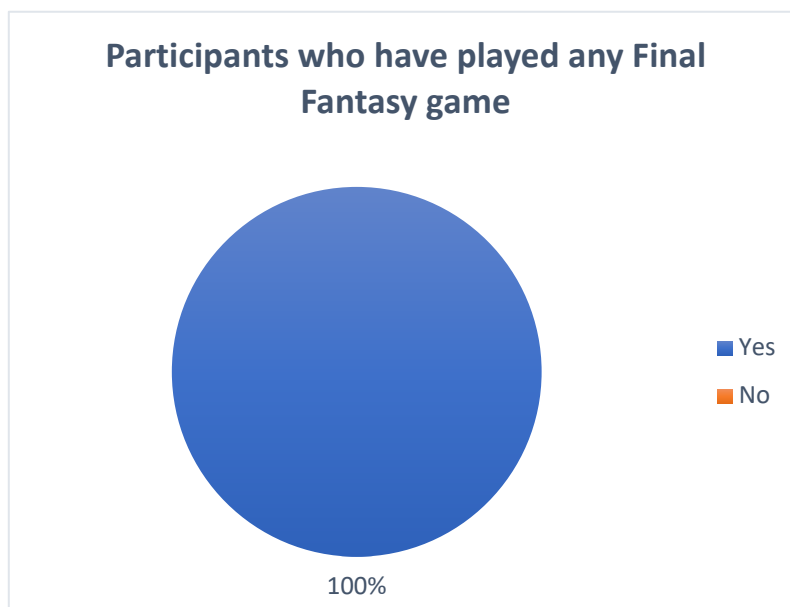


Graph 4 – Distribution of participants by nationality

All participants except 1 consider videogames a regular hobby and all 85 participants know and have played a Final Fantasy game. This qualifies all participants as familiar with both the videogames and Final Fantasy, meaning that the answers were based on informed opinions. However, the sample fails to provide a perspective from someone outside of the community, that is to say, someone with less knowledge with the hobby and the franchise. Additionally, the focus of the questionnaire on Final Fantasy might be one of the reasons why people may have abstained from answering as perhaps they may not have been familiarised with the topic.



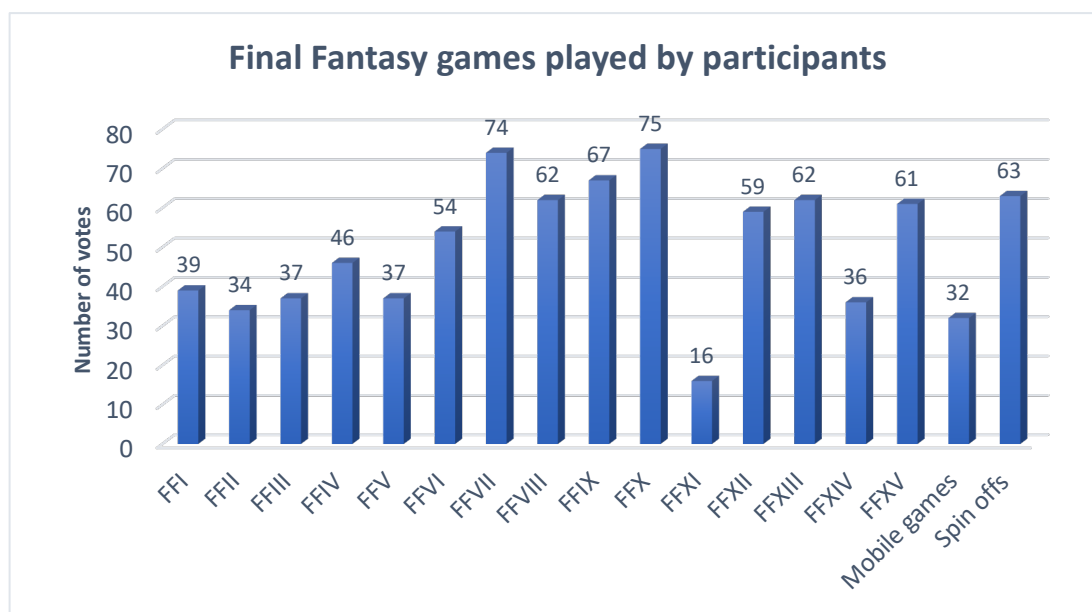
Graph 5 – Number of participants who have videogames as a hobby



Graph 6 – Number of participants who have played Final Fantasy before

Within our sample, the most played games are *Final Fantasy X* with 75 votes (88,2%), and *Final Fantasy VII* with 74 votes (87,1%), followed by *Final Fantasy IX* with 67 votes (78,8%), spin-off games with 63 votes (74,1%), *Final Fantasy XIII* and *Final Fantasy VIII* both with 62 votes (72,9%), *Final Fantasy XV* with 61 votes (71,8%), *Final Fantasy XII* with 59 votes (69,4%), and *Final Fantasy VI* with 54 votes (63,5%). Next are *Final Fantasy IV* with 46 votes (54,1%), the original *Final Fantasy* with 39

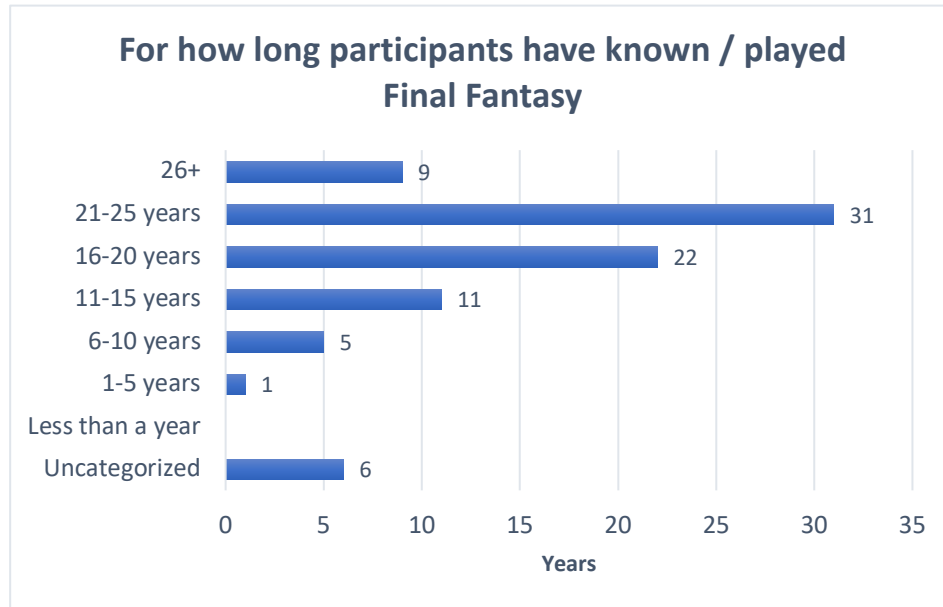
votes (45,9%), *Final Fantasy III* and *Final Fantasy V* both with 37 votes (43,5%), *Final Fantasy XIV* with 36 votes (42,4), *Final Fantasy II* with 34 votes (40%), and mobile games with 32 votes (37,6%). The least played game is *Final Fantasy XI* with 16 votes (18,8%). This distribution may be explained by the fact that most of the participants would have experienced Final Fantasy in their youth, when *Final Fantasy VII* was first launched in Europe and the years and games that followed. Additionally, the answers are in line with the games that are considered most popular.



Graph 7 – Most played Final Fantasy games among participants

Regarding the question on how long participants have known the Final Fantasy franchise, we may speculate that an open answer was not the best option. Instead, perhaps an interval of times, as we now present, would enable a clearer analysis of all the answers. As it is, 6 answers (7,1%) cannot be categorized. All participants have known the franchise for more than a year. 1 participant (1,2%) has known the franchise for 1-5 years, 5 participants (5,9%) have known the franchise for 6-10 years and 11 participants (12,9%) for 11-15 years. The majority of the participants had known the franchise for 16-20 years (22 participants, or 25,9%) and for 21-25 years (31 participants, or 36,5%). There are 9 participants (10,6%) who have known the franchise

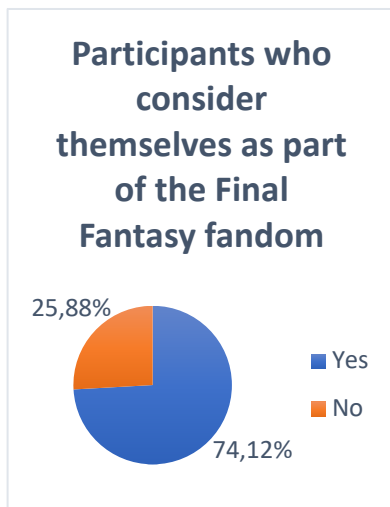
for longer than 26 years. Yet again, this distribution may be explained by the fact that most of the participants experienced Final Fantasy for the first time when *Final Fantasy VII* was first launched in Europe and the years that followed.



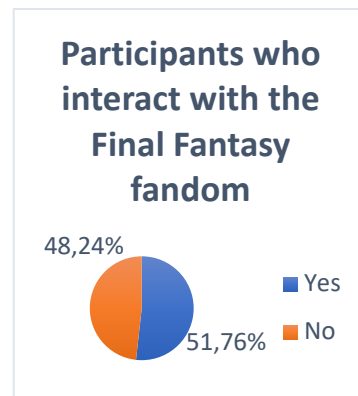
Graph 8 – Distribution of participants by how much time they have known or played Final Fantasy for

A total of 63 participants (74,1%) consider themselves as part of the Final Fantasy fandom, while 22 participants (25,9%) do not consider themselves as such. 44 participants (51,8%) admitted that they interact with the fandom, while the remaining 41 participants (48,2%) do not interact with the fandom. 30 participants (35,3%) replied positively to content production within the fandom, while 55 participants (64,7%) said no (Graphs 9, 10 and 11). This suggests that the majority of participants consider themselves as being a part of the Final Fantasy fandom, but only nearly half interact with it, and not many engage in content creation. In terms of content creation, 8 of the 15 female participants (53,3% within gender) are content producers, as opposed to the remaining 22 out of 69 male participants (31,8% within gender). This could perhaps indicate that women may be more proactive in fandom spaces as the ratio within gender suggests nearly half of them produce content. However, we recognise that the reduced

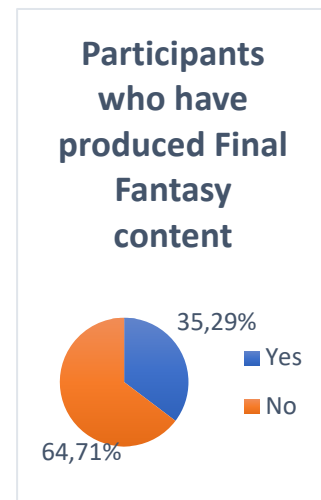
sample size is not representative and thus, it is not possible to draw a conclusion as, in gross numbers, more male participants are content creators in total.



Graph 9 – Distribution of participants who identify themselves as being part of the Final Fantasy fandom

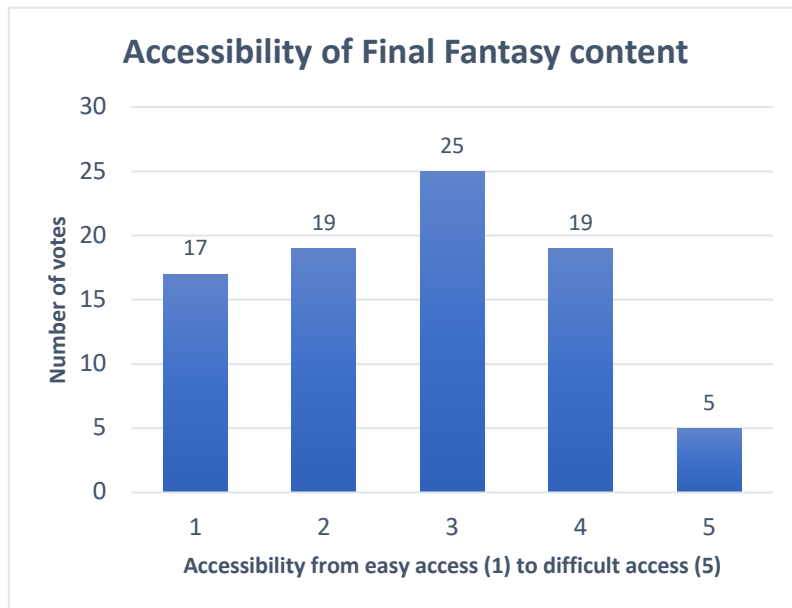


Graph 10 – Distribution of participants by whether they usually interact with the Final Fantasy fandom or not



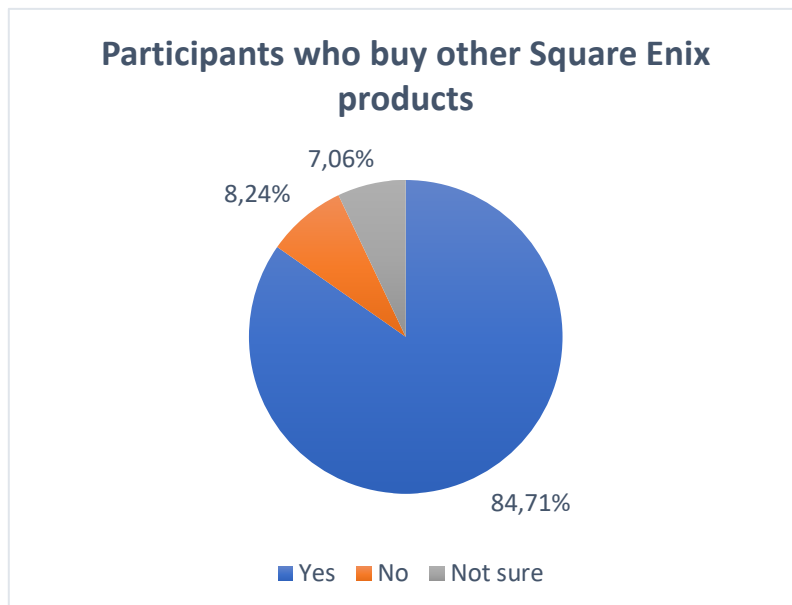
Graph 11 – Distribution of participants by production of Final Fantasy content

In terms of accessibility, only 5 participants (5,9%) classified the lowest level of the Likert scale, meaning that it is easy to access extra content, while 17 participants (20%) selected the level, meaning that they find it extremely hard to access extra content. The majority of votes (25 participants, or 29,4%) was placed in the middle, while the intermediary levels received 19 votes (22,4%) each. This may mean that participants consider that it is fairly easy to access extra content, but also recognize that it can be harder to get it.



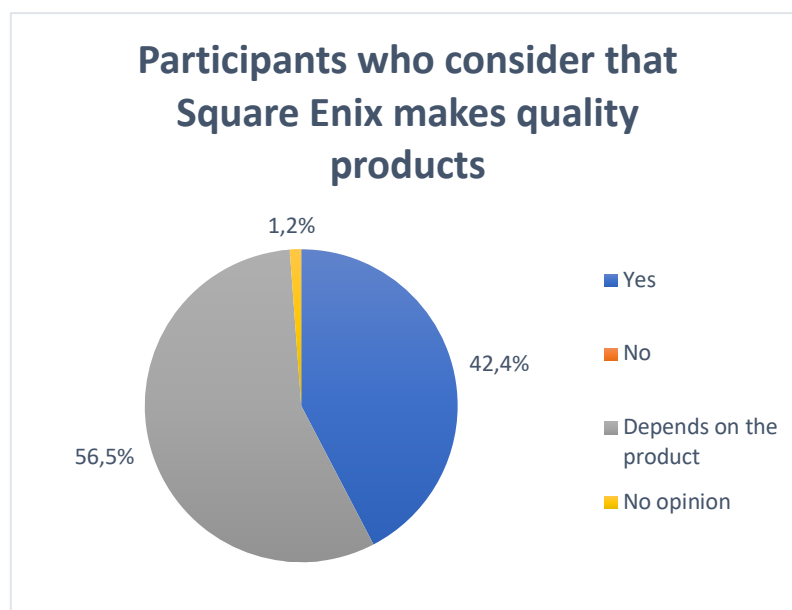
Graph 12 – Accessibility of Final Fantasy content, on a 1-5 scale, 1 being the easiest and 5 being the hardest

When asked if they purchase other Square Enix products, 72 participants (84,7%) said yes, 7 participants (8,2%) said no, and 6 participants (7,1%) stated that they are not sure. This indicates that most respondents consume other products from the same company, with only a few consuming exclusively Final Fantasy games or, on the other end of the spectrum, a few not knowing about the developers of the games they play.

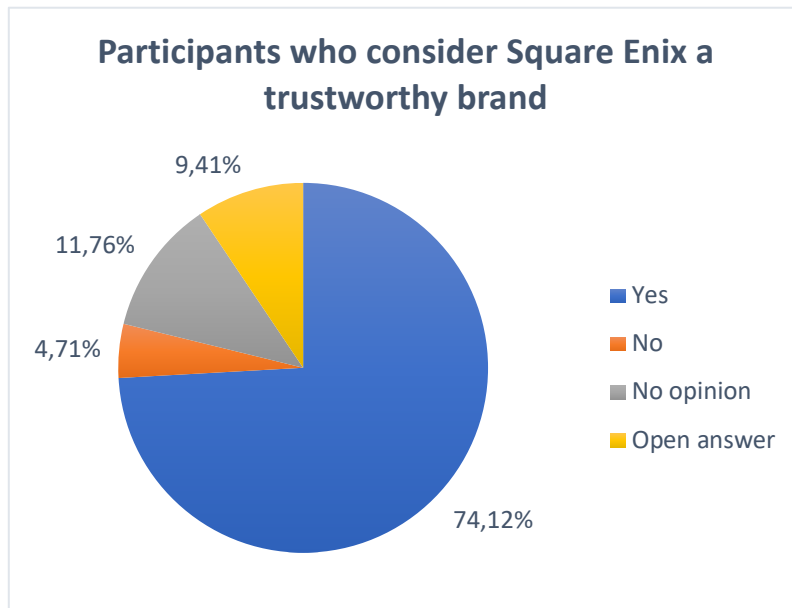


Graph 13 – Distribution of participants by whether they buy other Square Enix products

Drawing on the previous answers, one may assume that Square Enix is a company that assures quality experiences, but, according to 36 participants (42,4%), Square Enix produces quality products, while 48 (56,5%) said that it depends on the product, while 1 (1,2%) expresses no opinion. No participant has expressed that the company does not produce quality products. When asked if Square Enix is a trustworthy brand, 63 participants (74,1%) said yes, 4 (4,7%) said no, 10 (11,8%) said that they have no opinion, and a total of 8 (9,4%) gave open answers. One participant was not sure, three stated that the new games are “hit or miss” and that they depend on the franchise, and three claimed that Square Enix used to be more trustworthy, with one explaining that the focus on online gaming is the cause of the decline on brand trust. This reveals that participants generally have a favourable opinion on the brand, but point out that the quality of the content produced can be inconsistent, especially regarding the most recent games. This may be correlated to their polymorphic approach, which tries to expand stories as much as possible and ends up fragmenting them. Furthermore, this may be due to a loss of identity while trying to appeal to as many people as possible.

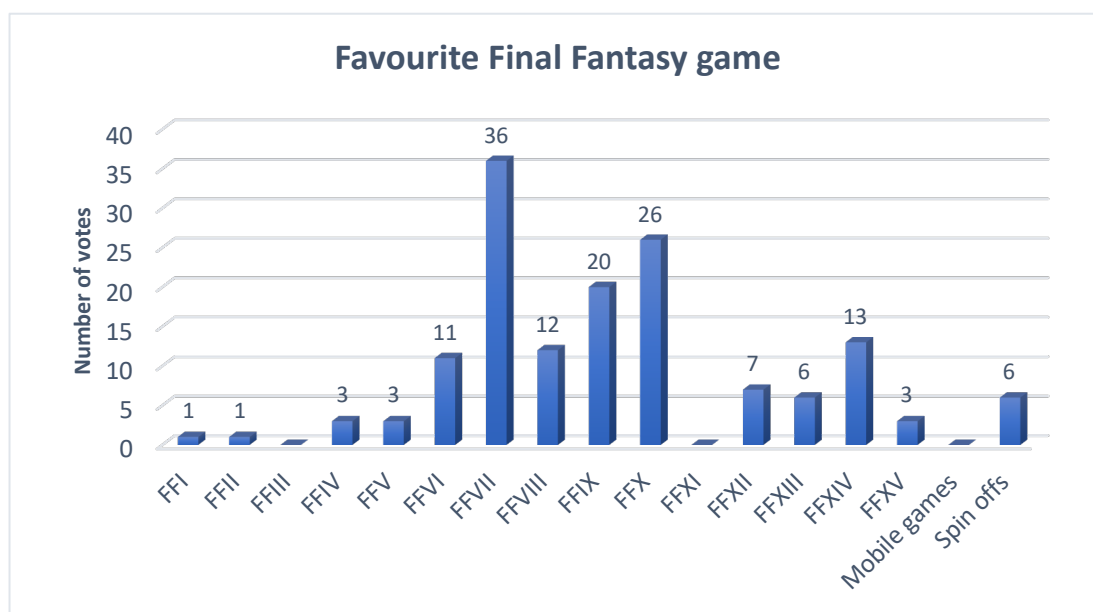


Graph 14 – Distribution of participants by their opinion on the quality of Square Enix products



Graph 15 – Distribution of participants by their trust on Square Enix as a brand

Regarding favourite games, *Final Fantasy VII* gathered the most votes (36 votes), followed by *Final Fantasy X* (26 votes), *Final Fantasy IX* (20 votes), and *Final Fantasy XIV* (13 votes). The other games voted were *Final Fantasy VIII*, with 12 votes, *Final Fantasy VI*, with 11 votes, *Final Fantasy XII*, with 7 votes, *Final Fantasy XIII*, and spin off games with 6 votes each, *Final Fantasy IV* and *Final Fantasy V*, with 3 votes each, and *Final Fantasy* and *Final Fantasy II*, with 1 vote each. *Final Fantasy III*, *Final Fantasy XI* and mobile games gathered no votes.

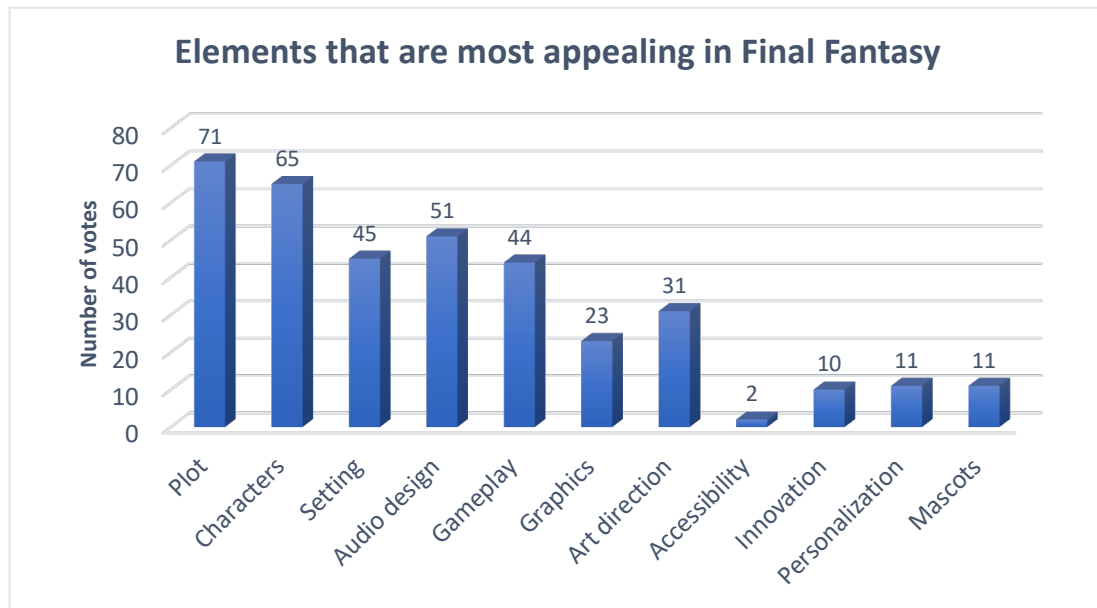


Graph 16 – Favourite Final Fantasy games among participants

When asked about the reasoning for their preferences, those who gave an answer justify them as follows: participants mostly refer to the plot (25 mentions), characters (16 mentions), gameplay elements (12 mentions), setting (11 mentions), design (3 mentions), soundtrack (5 mentions) and minigames (3 mentions). 14 participants admit that their preference is due to the fact that it was one of the first videogames or the first Final Fantasy game they ever played and therefore, nostalgia is one big reason for their personal preference. One participant said that they play more than once because of their appreciation, one referring to emotional attachment, and another even detailing how they only truly understood the game years later. 7 participants mention that the games left a huge impression on them, with one referring to the morals of the game and another referring to the call to action that the game's message makes them feel. One other participant mentions the mature themes of the game, and one even mentions that they resonate with the lore. One participant refers to the technical improvements over other videogames, and another participant mentions that besides the elements such as plot and characters, immersion, the ability to play online, and the dedication and transparency of the development team are very important to them. Two participants

mention personal reasons. This was an open answer question, and the answers provided overlap with the question that follows, but this personal space provided some valuable insight into how participants feel and experience the games. While not all participants decided to share their thoughts, those who did revealed information that could not be accounted for within the context of the question that follows, such as referring to the role of nostalgia.

In terms of what participants find most appealing in general, the plot of the games was voted a total of 71 times. This makes it the most important element in the games according to participants, followed by characters with 65 votes and audio design with 51 votes. The next element is the setting with 45 votes, gameplay with 44 votes, art direction with 31 votes, and graphics with 23 votes. The least voted elements were personalization and mascots with 11 votes each, innovation with 10 votes, and accessibility with 2. This information is aligned with the reasons given for their favourite Final Fantasy games, where the plot and characters were considered to be the most important elements. In contrast, the audio design is another one of the most important elements, which could not be inferred by the open answers provided previously.

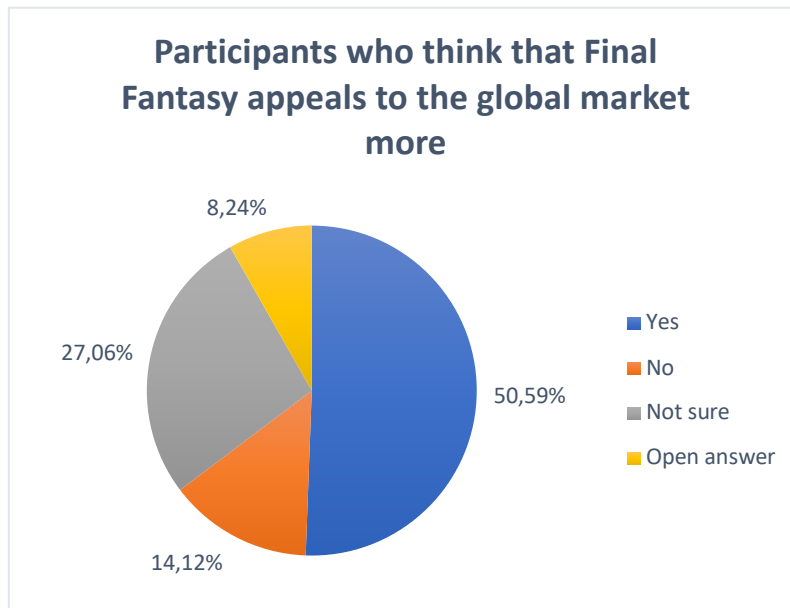


Graph 17 – Elements that participants consider the most important in Final Fantasy games

Participants consider that Final Fantasy stand out from other intellectual properties in videogames because of the general quality of the game (27 mentions), its heavy focus on the quality of the story (18 mentions), the ability to deliver a unique and original experience (9 mentions), the franchise’s longevity (4 mentions), brand recognition (4 mentions), the balance between familiarity and innovation (2 mentions), the ability to play one game without having to know anything about the others (2 mentions), their graphical innovation (2 mentions), the participants’ resonance with the themes of the game (1 mention), the community (1 mention), the delivery of quality soundtracks (1 mention), and the attention to detail (1 mention). One participant calls Final Fantasy a “JRPG for the international audience”, while other says that they enjoy Final Fantasy but prefer other franchise from the same company. Eight participants says that in the later years, they’ve been disappointed with how the franchise has been handled, with two explaining that while they still enjoy some of the games, they hope that the new games can revert the negative tendency that the franchise seems to have spiralled into. This was an open answer question, with participants particularly interested in sharing their impression. The reasons pointed out for the franchise’s appeal are mostly related to

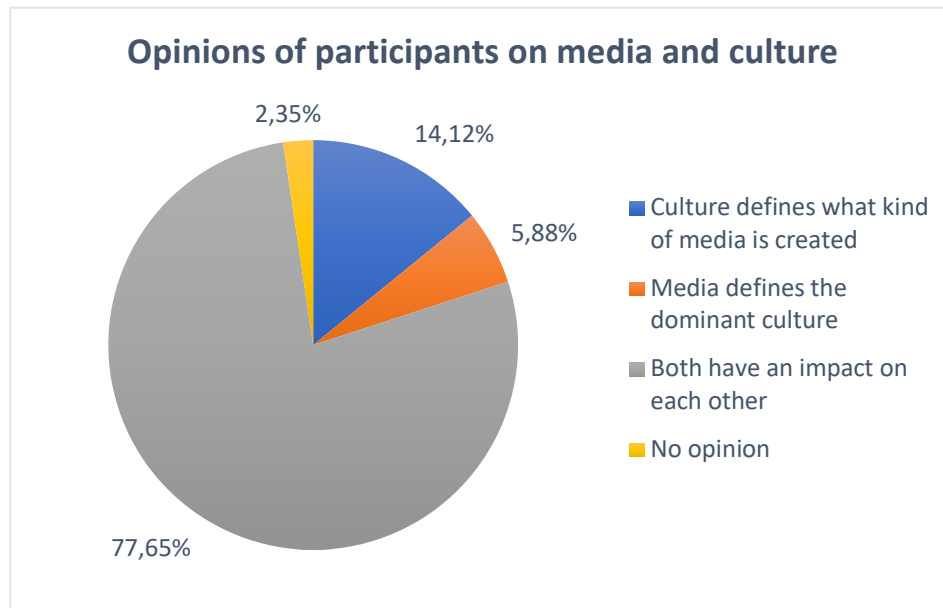
its quality on different levels and the delivery of original experiences, followed then by brand recognition and the franchise's longevity, with a few interesting answers such as the sense of belonging to the community and resonance, yet again. However, a considerable number of participants expressed their disappointment with the evolution of the franchise, which again can be traced back to the most recent games. These are seen as inconsistent due to their polymorphic approach and seem to have lost their identity while trying to appeal to a greater audience.

When asked if they think that the games are created with the intent to appeal to the global market over the domestic one, 43 participants (50,6%) said yes, 12 participants (14,1%) said no, 23 participants (27,1%) said that they are not sure, and 7 participants (8,2%) provided an open answer. 6 participants say that in previous years it did not appeal to a global market but that nowadays it does. One respondent identifies *Final Fantasy VII* as the turning point while another respondent claims that the turning point was *Final Fantasy XII*. It is our perception that this question could have been worded differently to make it clearer, there seem to be a struggle to understand it. Nonetheless, the answers point to a noticeable shift in the business model.



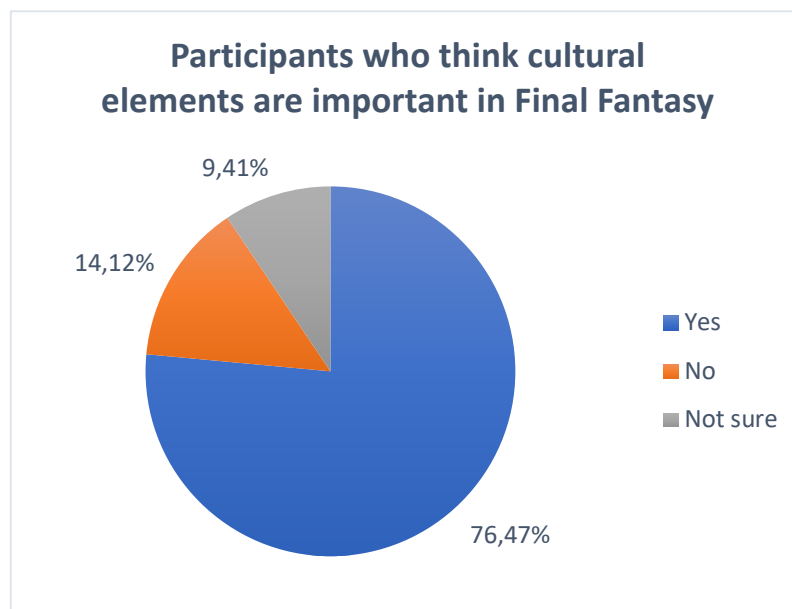
Graph 18 – Distribution of participants by their thoughts on whether Final Fantasy games are created targeting the global or domestic market more

When asked about the relationship between media and culture, 12 participants (14,1%) believe that culture defines what kind of media is created, 5 participants (5,9%) believe media defines the dominant culture, 66 participants (77,6%) believe that both have an impact on each other, and the remaining 2 (2,4%) have no opinion. This may mean that most participants believe that culture influences media, but that media also has power over culture; while other answers tip towards culture being more prevalent than media, not the other way around.



Graph 19 – Distribution of participants by their thoughts on the influence of culture over media and vice versa

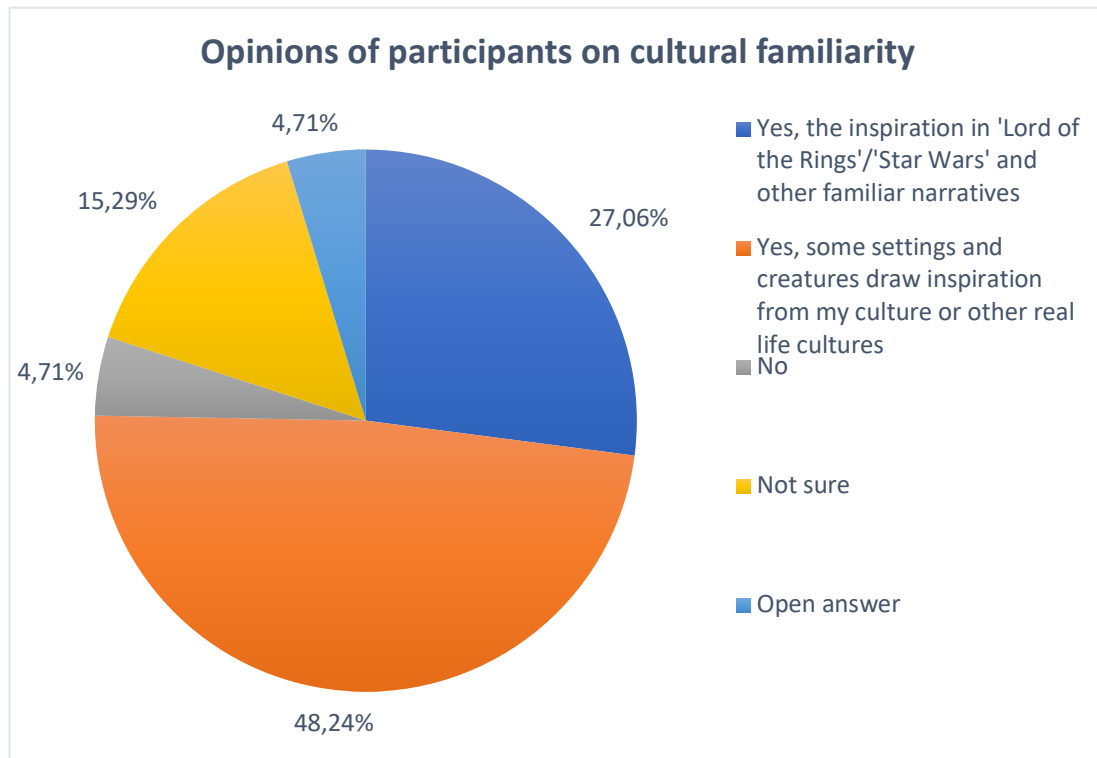
Regarding participants' opinion on whether cultural elements are an important part of Final Fantasy, 65 (76,5%) participants said yes, 12 participants (14,1%) said no, and 8 (9,4%) said they are not sure. Thus, most participants recognize the impact culture can have on media and, in this case, one of their videogame franchises.



Graph 20 – Distribution of participants by whether they consider that cultural elements play an important role in Final Fantasy games

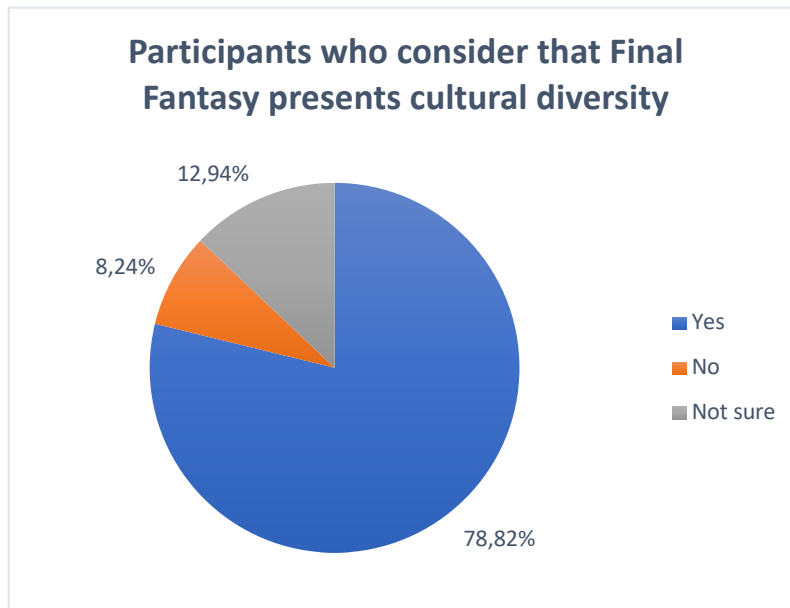
When asked if they think that Final Fantasy includes familiar cultural elements, 23 participants (27,1%) voted positively for the inspiration in *The Lord of the Rings/Star*

Wars and other familiar narratives, 41 participants (48,2%) voted positively for some settings and creatures inspired by their culture or other real-life cultures. On the other hand, 4 participants (4,7%) voted negatively, 13 participants (15,3%) voted that they are not sure, and 4 participants (4,7%) provided an open answer, with one participant stating that both options are true; one participant singling out the mythological elements, another recognizing Japanese elements, and one participant referring to *Star Wars* only. Perhaps the question was not formulated properly, as it may have trapped respondents into picking either narratives or settings and creatures, or neither, with no option for both. This is because the original intent was to understand if the cultural elements felt familiar from a narrative standpoint or a more aesthetic one, when the thesis was being organized. There was also an original intent to explore the influence of western culture on Japanese media, more specifically how *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings* had an influence on Final Fantasy games, but that idea was slowly discarded in favour of a deeper focus on how the videogame industry works and the relevance of fandom. Regardless, participants were more positive towards aesthetic inspiration rather than the narrative. This may be explained perhaps because the aesthetic influence is more perceptible to the eye in every game, while the narrative influence was more noticeable in earlier games.



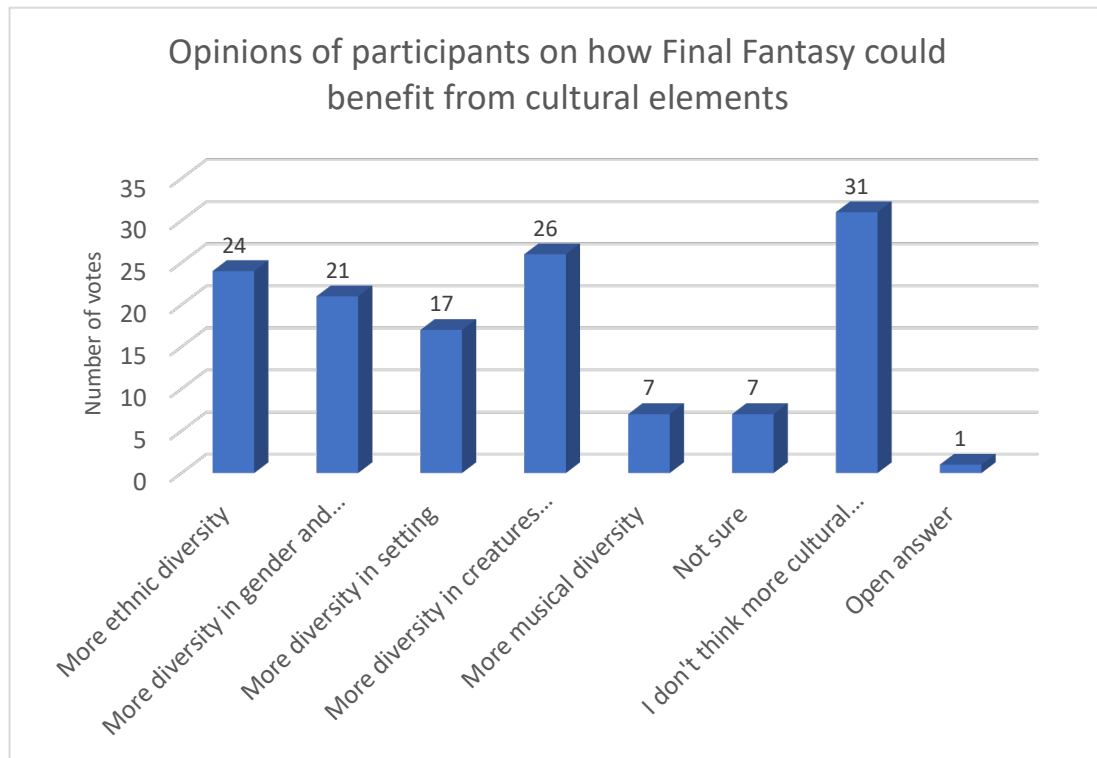
Graph 21 – Distribution of participants by whether they consider that Final Fantasy includes familiar elements

When it comes to participants' opinion on whether Final Fantasy games present cultural diversity, 67 participants (78,8) said yes, 7 participants (8,2%) said no, and 11 participants (12,9%) said that they are not sure. This reveals that most participants think that different cultural elements are present in every game, while a small amount is not sure or doesn't think the games contain these elements. It would have been interesting to know the opinions of the participants who did not vote positively, as their feelings may arise, for example, from thinking that stories that take place in fantasy worlds cannot truly represent an existing cultural element in a fictional equivalent of the real world. We are aware that is, obviously, our interpretation, thus the need for an in-depth analysis on the reasons for these answers.



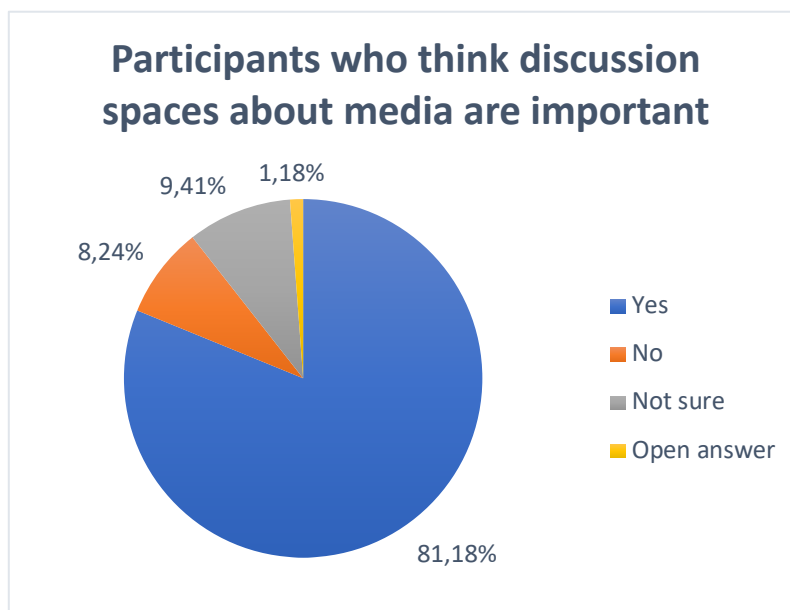
Graph 22 – Distribution of participants by whether they consider that Final Fantasy presents cultural diversity

In terms of how could Final Fantasy games benefit from cultural elements, 24 votes went to more ethnic diversity in characters, 21 votes went to more diversity in gender and sexual orientation, 17 votes went to more diversity in settings, 26 votes went to more diversity in creatures inspired by different mythologies, 7 votes went to more musical diversity, 7 votes went to not sure, 31 votes went to thinking that more cultural elements are not necessary, and 1 participant mentioned different art designs in the open answer. These numbers suggest that participants are generally satisfied with the franchise on this issue. Most participants selected more diversity in ethnicity and creatures and monsters inspired by different mythologies as a way for the franchise to benefit. This may suggest that they are hoping for aesthetic innovation. This is followed by more diversity in gender and sexual orientation, followed by more diversity in settings. The small number of votes on musical diversity may suggest that fans are satisfied with the soundtracks.



Graph 23 – Opinions of participants on how Final Fantasy could benefit from cultural elements

Finally, when asked if they think that discussion spaces about media and its impact on society are important, 69 participants (81,2%) said yes, 7 participants (8,2%) said no, 8 participants (9,4%) said that they were not sure, and 1 participant (0,7%) provided an open answer, stating that it is important, but creative freedom should be respected. This may demonstrate that most participants recognize the power media has on society and believe that it should be more discussed.



Graph 24 – Distribution of participants by whether they think discussion spaces about media and their impact on society are important

As it was, the questionnaire provided a valuable number of answers, from which we were able to draw conclusions. Participants are mostly Portuguese, mostly male, mostly young or adults, and all of them play videogame regularly. They mostly consider themselves as part of the Final Fantasy fandom, half of them usually interact with it and not many are content producers within the fandom. Most participants have known the franchise since *Final Fantasy VII* was launched in Europe, and they understand that accessing extra content can be hard. The most played games and favourite games are in line with the best-selling, most popular and most innovative games, in general. Most know about Square Enix and consume other products from the company, but the most striking pattern in the answers is that many fans have been disappointed with how the franchise has been handled these past few years, expressing this concern in several unrestricted questions. Most participants consider Final Fantasy games quality products, praising the plot, characters, and soundtrack, with some expressing that what makes this franchise unique is the delivery of original experiences and a balance between familiarity and innovation. Nonetheless, again many consider that Square Enix has been losing its grasp on the market since its business model changed.

Overall, Final Fantasy is a very beloved franchise, but Square Enix's most recent corporate decisions make the future of the company uncertain, and the quality of the games dropped.

CONCLUSIONS

Media is an integral part of modern societies. The internet and the media have allowed people from anywhere in the world to have easier access to more content from different sources. This promotes cultural diffusion by allowing people to experience new foods, new clothes, new languages, new forms of thinking and new types of art and media works. Popular culture content, in particular, benefits from this phenomenon by unlocking new prospecting markets and consumers. It is also more widely accepted to be commonly consumed as the concepts of high and popular culture are less stiff with globalization, and this spurs the growth of media franchises.

Popular media franchises bring about fandoms. Many people that enjoy the same things become a part of these fan communities where they can discuss their favourite media and explore their creative talents. Fandoms, therefore, play an integral role in the longevity of a media franchise, as fans are not only faithful customers, but also promoters of the product through their fan works and discussions. This is true for videogames as well.

Videogames are a type of media distinguished by its interactivity and challenge. They were originated in the USA, but as the industry evolved, Japan became a major competitor, dominating the sector with its business models and videogame franchises. These attract a huge following for the experiences that they deliver, as fans resonate with many game elements despite cultural differences.

Resonance plays a huge role in how people interact with media, but it cannot be produced at will, it stems from personal experiences, personality, and background, which makes someone feel affinity for a type of stories rather than others.

There are many positive aspects that come with media, as information can be accessed instantly, and people can learn about different realities, explore new interests and find inspiration to create new things. It can also be a tool for cultural diffusion, as more

people from all corners of the world create content with their own cultural peculiarities to share with the world. Media is also a tool to promote products and brands, as is the case with Japan. This nation promotes a positive image and openness to commerce in other countries through its pop culture diplomacy and exportation of cultural products like animation and videogames.

While some may consider it to be a fairly recent industry, videogames are a media rich in history and cultural elements. This is especially true for franchises that have been around for some time, as is the case with Final Fantasy. This franchise draws inspiration from different cultures for its characters, settings, and other elements, but it also reflects its culture of origin, and namely the corporate culture of Square Enix, when its evolution across the years is studied.

Square Enix is the result of the fusion between two different companies with distinct approaches to the market, and that impacts how the games are developed and marketed. Before the merger, Final Fantasy games were daring and risky investments, but after the merger the new media mix approach has been about creating expanded universes with multiple media formats.

While not being a brand that is immediately recognizable outside the gaming sphere, Final Fantasy has enjoyed some cultural impact in pop culture in a variety of areas. The franchise has been successful due to its compelling narratives and characters but is currently struggling with the new market trends and the fragmentation that comes with the media mix business model. Square Enix is aware and actively trying to fix some of the issues that it takes criticism for, but other corporate decisions suggest that they are either losing interest in the global market or that they are having a hard time understanding and meeting their clients' demands.

Regarding the group studied, it was possible to infer through their answers what draws people to media and to join media-based fandoms, the role of resonance, as well as how respondents perceive the company that is producing the games that they play and how they don't always like some decisions despite being regular consumers. It was also possible to see participants' awareness on the importance of discussing media and whether or not media holds more power over culture or otherwise. Unfortunately, the answers were still very limited to a particular segment. The majority of participants were Portuguese, male, and gamers. This sample lacks the variety that other participants, especially non-players and people from more nationalities, would bring to the study.

From the beginning, it was clear that while there was a lot of information, articles and studies on the subject, I would also face some limitations. I did not expect to not find data available on game sales per region or country. This would have been useful to compare the commercial success of each game in different regions. I was also not expecting English speaking groups to be so protective of fandom spaces, as opposed to the Portuguese groups, but I understand why people were very reluctant to let me disseminate the questionnaire in their groups. I was also surprised by the relatively low participation of women in the questionnaire, as I expected it to be approximately even among genders. However, I also understand that women might be more selective of their fandom spaces and that videogames are considered a male dominated hobby in Portugal. Regardless, all the answers provided very interesting results and allowed us to see that it is worth turning our academic attention to this growing industry.

On a final note, there is a lot of media from different countries and regions being created, consumed, and creating legions of fandoms worldwide, and while this diversity of content brings about new ideas and markets, it is important to be cautious, regardless

of the format. As societies become increasingly dependent on and addicted to new technologies to function, we also need to reconsider our definition of culture and start including entertainment media because it weighs heavily on society with both great and dire consequences.

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