

REINVENTING THE "GAMER-GIRL"

HOW TO MARKET GAMES TO CASUALLY
GAMING, YOUNG WOMEN

JUDITH TULKENS



FOR A GAMIFIED READING EXPERIENCE, DOWNLOAD PLAYDY FROM THE APP STORE AND UNLOCK THE DIFFERENT CHAPTERS THROUGH MINIGAMES.

The logo for 'PLAYDY' is centered within a blue rounded square. The word 'PLAYDY' is written in a bold, sans-serif font. The letter 'P' is pink, 'L' is yellow, 'A' is light blue, 'Y' is yellow, 'D' is light blue, and 'Y' is yellow.

PLAYDY

TO LOOK AT THE PROTOTYPE, OPEN THE PLAYDY PAGE ON INSTAGRAM AND ACCESS ALL OF THE TEST CONTENT: [HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/PLAYDY.GAMES/](https://www.instagram.com/playdy.games/)

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A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

My aunt is a bizarre woman. But not in a funny way. On my tenth Christmas, she gave me an ugly woollen scarf that I didn't ask for and a stupid doll, which I had also never expressed an interest in. After I politely thanked her for the beautiful gifts, I sat down with my cousin to listen to his new 50 cent album; he had gotten exactly what he asked for. After dessert, my aunt called me over and told me to look in her bag. As I reached down, I could only think of one item on my carefully curated gift list that was small enough to fit inside her tote. And since she hadn't even bothered to wrap it, my wish was quickly granted. The Tamagotchi meant the beginning of my casual gaming hobby. Yet, there is nothing casual about it. Up till this very day, whenever I feel stressed about an exam or a job interview, I remind myself that no stress can ever compare to the pressure of keeping a Tamagotchi alive. I believe that people who had a digital egg on their purse in middle school got a head start in life later on.

Videogames have always been the one thing my brothers and I could enjoy without fighting. And in 2012, I launched my first 'in-house' advertising campaign with the goal of getting a Wii for our Christmas present. I am still convinced that: "Please mum & dad, Wii love you", is the finest copy I have ever written. One of my brothers then went on to become a game developer. And he is the reason we were able to turn this research project into a gamified mobile experience. So, thank you, Oscar, for your expertise, and I appreciate you not questioning my weird requests***. Finally, I also have to thank the teaching staff at LCC's MA Advertising for their guidance, support and creative stimulation throughout the year. In particular, I want to thank course director, Paul Caplan, for continuously speaking in riddles, thus pushing my mental efforts and Catherine McPherson for proofreading my work and reassuring me during following mental breakdowns. ;)

****Trigger warning: this app involves violence against adorable puppies. Every slashed puppy contributes to the dissolution of the stereotype that female gamers only play Nintendogs. So slash away!*

INTRODUCTION

Games marketing has always spoken to the imagination of consumers because of its often rebellious character. Advertisements for consoles and games dared to experiment with the limits of marketing communications in ways that remain unparalleled in other sectors. After all, only a playful campaign can truly encourage gameplay amongst its audience. This is probably exactly what Sega was thinking in 1988 when they launched the campaign for Genesis, their newest console. "Genesis does, what Nintendon't" is the slogan for what was, perhaps, the greatest advertising campaign in video game history. However, as the medium matured, and became more mainstream, so did their fans. And in the year 2021, the industry needs to find new ways of engaging with their increasingly heterogeneous audiences.

Looking at the youngest addition to today's consumer market, we observe Generation Z. In their industry report: *The power of Gen Z Influence*, Futurecast looks at the spending behaviour of this generation, and with a purchasing power of \$143 billion, any marketer would be mad not to tap into that potential. Furthermore, according to UKIE's annual publication, games is the second most popular category of apps amongst 18-20 year-olds. And looking at the mobile games market as a whole, 51% of players are female. This prompts an immediate question for the games industry: "How can we monetise this player devotion of our audience?" In other words: "How do we sell them more games?"

When you know that people's consumer behaviour is inherently intertwined with their sense of self and their aspirations (Levy 1959, Sirgy 1982), the importance of identification cannot be underestimated. In the literature section that follows, we will look into what 'identity' means for gamers. More specifically, we will look at the segment of casual gamers, who often lack the framework and resources for proper gamer identification.

Consequently, through practice research, we look into the dynamics of the casual gamer audience and try to find ways of lowering the entry barrier to gamer



identification through a prototype called PLAYDY; in essence, a community-based platform of branded content that bridges the gap between games and lifestyle. After a detailed interpretation of both statistical data and thick data (acquired through discourse analysis of in-depth interviews with several respondents), we then attempt to formulate some specific takeaways for future marketing opportunities targeted at female, Gen Z audiences of casual gamers.

All of the above has prompted, and will answer the following research question: **“Can we create a new lifestyle framework targeted at Gen Z, casual, female gamers in order to increase gamer self-identification in that demographic?”**

LITERATURE REVIEW

1) WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT GAMER IDENTITY

Historically, the gamer identity can be traced back to the early 1980s, when the industry had to deal with a large-scale recession, better known as "the video game crash". Several causes have been mentioned, including overall market saturation of game consoles and the increasing preference for personal computers. In response to this consumer crisis, the game industry started catering its marketing efforts towards a specific audience: the white, heterosexual, male. Additionally, they began emphasising what it meant to be a gamer. Precise knowledge and consumption habits, such as purchasing particular games and distinct game magazines, were necessary. Like any identity, the gamer identity was thus socially constructed (Shaw, 2012 and Consalvo, 2007).

In 2020 alone, the global game industry was worth well over \$170 billion (according to data from IDC) rendering it bigger than the movie and sports industry combined. It's no longer the geeky one-man basement-show it once was. Yet when it comes to its audience, that stereotype seems rather persistent. Some would argue that stereotypes only exist because there is a kernel of truth to them, however, when it comes to gamers there is zero statistical proof supporting the cliché image of overweight, anti-social, ugly white guys. Over the last two decades, the casual gaming revolution has done quite a lot for their image, and since the widespread success of PlayStation in the early 2000s, gamers managed to claim a new and cooler image, making it easier for players to identify as gamers.

Here we touch on another critical issue: the difference between 'gamers' and 'people who play games'. Many interview-based research projects have proven the importance of this notion in the heads of respondents. Shaw, reiterates that it is more important to look at how individuals relate to the constructed identity of a gamer, specifically by asking *if*, and not assuming *that*, those who play video games identify as gamers.

Looking into the statistical research on gamer identity, we distinguish five leading indicators that can predict the likeliness of self-identification as a gamer (De Grove, Courtois & Van Looy, 2015): frequency of gameplay, type of gameplay, the number of friends who play, age and gender. With that final one, proving to be the most significant one. The type of games one plays also seems to be an important predictor, yet a very ambiguous one as it is not yet clear whether it is the choice of a specific genre or rather the omnivorous consumption of games that define 'a gamer'.

In the 'Gallery of the gamer' report (2020), Activision Media attempts to counter the idea of "one gamer and one customer". In their professional expertise, they distinguish between six consumer personas and only three of those identify as gamers, accounting for a mere 38% of the gaming audience. The key findings for each persona are fascinating, and the research was beautifully presented through a virtual exhibition, but here it suffices to say that gamers are a much broader and more diverse audience than the stereotype gives them credit for. Every type of gamer has different needs and reasons for playing, once marketers realise that, they can start catering content on a more personalised level.

2) THE MECHANICS OF IDENTIFICATION

In an attempt to understand the intricate mechanics of identity formation, we might look at Althusser's subjectivity theory. In his magnum opus *The Ideological State Apparatus* (1970), Louis Althusser explains the subconscious processes taking place when one is being hailed and the phenomenon is called 'interpellation'. Interpellation covers the idea that an opinion is not yours authentically; instead, it has been presented to you for you to accept. In this way, any beliefs or values should be regarded as social processes rather than fixed acquisitions. For example, no woman is born feminine, but she may have accepted the roles and attributes of femininity presented to her throughout her life. No one is forced to accept the roles offered by our surroundings and culture, but they present themselves in such a way that it is hard to resist them. In that way, the entire process of interpellation

is intangible but consensual. It is most fruitful when the subjects believe the presented values to be their own and rationally grounded.

A fine example of this is political preference. Whether you believe in a liberal, socialist or conservative government is often determined by your parents' views. From an early age on, these views are presented to you, and after successful internalisation, you believe them to be yours authentically. At this point, a person is referred to as 'fully interpellated'. They have accepted the role that was presented to them and started performing it independently.

We might relate the experience of gamer identity to the notion of interpellation as well. Althusser uses the metaphor of being hailed by a police officer and states that it is only in the turning around that a person realises she/he is the one being called on. In the turning around they then wilfully subscribe to the role of the subject under the state apparatus. Adrienne Shaw applies that same process to the intricacies of gamer identification. In her article *On Not Becoming Gamers: Moving Beyond the Constructed Audience* (2013), she explores how and if people who play video games turn to the hail "hey gamer". Over time, this hail has become difficult to resonate with because it incorporates much more than just: "a person who plays games". The 'gamer' hail is full of cultural values, taking elements from different life domains, such as fashion, consumption, social status, gender and specific knowledge. It is not a mere reflection of one's activities, in fact, it never really has been, due to the many stereotypes that have always been linked with the gamer identity. Of course, people with negative opinions about gaming will be less inclined to accept the 'gamer' hail.

If anything, we realise that identity is not a fixed something for individuals; it is a process that culminates in a set of values and behaviours, which in turn remain subject to change. As Hall (1966) puts it: a focus on identification is always more useful than a focus on identity, as it allows for the self-definition of an individual rather than being defined from the outside.

Another helpful framework that addresses identities as a process is: 'Social Identity Theory'. As the name gives away, identity is being approached from a social

perspective here. More specifically, identification is believed to arise from the tensions in one's social environment – one's in-group and out-group; the 'us' and 'they'. According to Tajfel (one of the first to research the social and contextual aspect of identity), 'social identity' is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981). In other words, the more one sees their immediate environment (friends and peers) as gamers, the more receiving one will be for the gamer label as part of one's own identity.

3) A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO CASUAL GAMING CULTURE

For the sake of relevance, we will not dwell on the broadness of gaming culture in general, as it would result in an extensive research project in itself and many conclusions have already been drawn on the topic. Instead, we distinguish between a core gaming culture and a casual gaming culture. Both believed to be at opposite sides of a spectrum (Cote, 2020). Gaming culture, be it casual or core, is strongly connected and inherently performed through gamer identity. Yet, the phenomenon of gamer identity is something very peculiar in itself. Not many other media hold a similar power over their followers. As Scimeca (2014) and Parkin (2013) so clearly discern: people who read books are not called 'bookers' nor are avid moviegoers called 'movers'. But the term 'gamer' refers to more than just the enjoyment of a particular leisure activity; it meets one's self-conception and the connection to a distinctive group in society.

The extensive load that comes with the term is precisely why it has been disputed so much in the past decade. Some, like Parkin, would even go as far as dissolving the term altogether. The motivations are twofold. Parkin claims that games will never be taken seriously as a medium if their audience keeps being singled out (grouped as 'gamers') by popular media. Others, like Adrienne Shaw, abandon the gamer identity because, too often, it still coincides with an atmosphere of toxic masculinity and the exclusion of casual gamers in favour of an aggressive, core

community (Shaw,2013). This initial resistance is not abnormal when you consider that casual gaming is a relatively recent phenomenon and thanks much of its popularity to all but one company: Nintendo.

Initially, a marketing strategy that relied on the concept of blue oceans and red oceans, Nintendo ventured into a new audience of players by shifting its attention from young white males to females, mothers and the elderly. This recognition of an alternative audience mid-2000 brought gaming into a new era which Amanda Cote refers to as 'the casualised era'. It capitulated on the success of easy-to-learn games that had previously been denied any serious status. In part, core gamers' initial resistance was a direct consequence of casual games' immediate success. Hardware companies suddenly realised this untapped market's lucrative potential and were attracted to the cost-efficient development process of these so-called 'easier' games. Their shift in focus and resources alarmed many hardcore gamers, terrified that their beloved multi-million-dollar, first-person shooters would be pushed further down the priority lists. In a frenzy, the hardcore centre aggressively resisted any notion of casual gamers as they experienced it to be a direct attack on their future as gamers. Their contempt remains a powerful force today still, as it has shaped many of the remaining notions and attitudes around the gamer identity.

In this context, it makes sense to touch on 'the hegemony of play', a term coined by play expert Bernie DeKoven and developed by game scholars Janine Fron, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie and Celia Pearce. Casual gamers, social and mobile games function as a counter-hegemonic force, challenging and redefining what it means to be a gamer in the casualised era. As mentioned above, casual and core identity takes place at opposite sides of the spectrum. Furthermore, Cote argues that the divide between the two is socially and culturally constructed and cultivated in an attempt to protect games' existing hegemony. In short, the casualised era is framed as a threat to the core.

Yet, defining 'a casual game' is not an easy endeavour. Some would say: "a game that is easy to learn, simple to play or is very forgiving and rewarding in nature". Others focus more on the content of the game, which should prototypically be

'non-violent'. And finally, some would go as far as separating specific game genres such as puzzle games, social games or simulation games (FarmVille would be a prime example of the latter two). As is apparent from these notions, casual gamer identity was quick to receive some stereotypes of its own, regardless of the fact that it has only been around for a decade now. The constructed identity of 'casual gamers' is essentially trivial and female, and this assumption resonates through game design, industry conventions and marketing practices. In conclusion, the idea that casual games could be played in a core way and vice versa seems strange and unsettling for the rather conservative core (Cote, 2020).

4) THE ADDITIONAL DIFFICULTIES FOR FEMALE GAMERS

Similar to the alienation of casual gamers, female gamer identity has also been at the centre of core-led provocations. Even without discerning the possible sexist layers that come with the 'gamer-girl' tag, the construed distinction between 'gamers' and 'girl-gamers' furthers the alienation of a seemingly unconventional gaming audience. We use the word 'seemingly' because the statistics don't leave much to the imagination. According to UKIE, 50% of all British gamers are female with statistics as recent as 2020. The surprise is that less than 1 out of 3 women would identify as a gamer against 2 out of 3 for their male counterparts.

Cote summarises the problem as follows: "The separation of 'girl games' from all other games construct a marginal feminine space, rather than undermining or changing video games' overall masculinisation. Second, bracketing out female games and players continues to separate gamer identity and gender identity, making a joint female-gamer position difficult to envision and embody."

Finally, many gaming women have unconsciously internalised the core gaming community's stereotypes and therefore distrust other female gamers' motivations. Generally, they assume that women in games are either per definition casual gamers or play core games, only to attract male gamers' attention. Such ideas prevent women from relying on each other in the gaming spaces, and it impedes



the growth of female gaming communities. Marketing and normalising diverse play styles shall prove to be an essential first step in dismantling the core toxicity in gaming culture as it will decrease the importance of current ideas about the right way to game and the right game to play. One step in the right direction could be to explore individuals' gaming habits, both digitally and analogous, as data have shown that women's play is often more private (Shaw, 2013 & Cote, 2020).

Finally, linking back to the social identity theory, it is plausible that the hostility or perceived inequality towards females in the gaming space is partly due to the social categorisation at play. Following the differentiation between in-groups and out-groups, they may arguably be perceived as the 'out-group' relative to their male counterparts.

PRACTICE RESEARCH

1) THE STATUS QUO

As the literature study made abundantly clear, the casual gamer identity is not an uncomplicated one. And according to our hypothesis, that is partially due to the lack of contextual frameworks allowing for gamer identification. Casual gamers may not be surrounded by likeminded people in their immediate physical environment and to make things worse, they also lack a support network online – something that hardcore gamers find in a multitude of fora and digital platforms. In theory, even when a hardcore gamer wouldn't know one single other person who games, they can still find their community online. The gaming community also generates a lot of content catered to hardcore gamers. On Twitch, they have their own channels to distribute in-game footage and on YouTube game-vloggers like PewDiePie have some of the biggest followings on the platform. Since Twitch and YouTube mostly host long-form content, it demands a certain degree of devotion from its viewers; therefore, the audience is mainly core.

Instagram, on the contrary, leaves room for a more casual relationship between creator and viewer since the content is shorter and thus less of an investment. For that reason, the platform is of particular interest to this research project, as we are interested in the dynamics of gamer-identification in a casual context.

When it comes to game influencers, the spectrum of specialities on Instagram is vast. Some creators use the platform merely as an extension for the long-form content on their other channels, therefore, their following is reasonably similar over various platforms. Other niches have fully embraced the platform for its specific characteristics. One of them is the Kawaii movement. Kawaii gamers' main concern is aesthetics; everything must be pink, cute and Japanese. Instagram is the perfect outlet for them since aesthetics is the social platform's holy grail. Kawaii gamers' feeds mostly contain pictures from their game-rooms or set-ups, and they showcase a broad number of pastel accessories. In a way, the Kawaii sphere, however marginal it is, remains hardcore due to its committed nature and

following. Other game influencers choose to specialise in one brand (like PlayStation and Nintendo) or one genre (like first-person shooters or puzzle games). Whether the choice is universal game content or specialist game content, the current online offer remains core. There is little to no content available for casual gamers. Of course, a platform such as Instagram allows for individual curation of information streams, and thus casual players may follow one or two game-related accounts amongst the hundreds of accounts they follow to get a more balanced feed that, in totality, is representative of their needs and interests.

2) "NOT LOOKING FOR ANYTHING SERIOUS"

There seems to be a vacuum for creators that propagate a casual gaming lifestyle and relatable game influencers. From a marketing perspective, that is a missed opportunity and a vast untapped market.

It is common knowledge in consumer behaviour studies that people make purchases in ways consistent with their sense of self. They use possessions and specific brands to create their self-identities and communicate these to others, in turn, affirming their own beliefs again (Belk, 1988) This is the main reason branding has become such an integral part of any marketing strategy, people don't just buy products, they buy into the image that comes with a product, and that image needs to reflect their identity and aspirations (Levy, 1959 & Sirgy, 1982). Hence, it makes sense to invest time and energy in your brand's image to increase resonance with your audience.

Applying this knowledge to the casual gamer's identity crisis, it becomes evident that the entertainment market is not fulfilling all of its potential at the moment. When there is no casual gamer identity, there can be no purchase behaviour complying with it. Hardcore gamers are known for their fantastic spending behaviour (with an even increased commitment in 2020, due to the global pandemic, as published in Forbes magazine), not only do they invest in hard- and software; they also buy accessories and peripheral materials such as relevant

magazines, toys and decoration. All of these acquisitions are constant affirmations of their gamer identity. Such spending behaviour does not exist within casual circles right now.

Concluding, we can assume that lowering the commitment barrier for identification (from core to casual) may increase purchase commitments amongst the casual gaming audience.

3] "PLAYDY", OR THE WISH FOR SOMETHING NEW

Following the conclusion above, we created the mission statement for our prototype, PLAYDY:

PLAYDY is the Instagram account for 'Ladies who Play'. Whether that is in a casual or in a core way, PLAYDY caters to all. It bridges the gap between games and lifestyle and targets primarily casual gamers. Through relatable content, PLAYDY aims to improve casual gamer identification amongst its following.

A couple of fundamental choices require some explanation.

Firstly, PLAYDY is an Instagram based community channel because we already established that Instagram better allows for casual non-committed relations between brands/ influencers and individuals, compared to a medium such as YouTube.

Secondly, PLAYDY content is strictly lifestyle-based and peripheral. This means that a PLAYDY post can never consist of mere in-game footage; there should always be an added value that connects the game-related content to a broader lifestyle framework. This is crucial for lowering the entry barrier to casual gamer identification, and it is also the distinguishing factor for PLAYDY's potential success.

As mentioned, the current offer of game-related content is very hardcore and relates to nothing more than just games. It requires extensive knowledge of the

games industry and culture but needs little knowledge of different parts of the cultural domain. PLAYDY, on the other hand, looks at its target audience's broader lifestyle – of which games are a component, but maybe not the key element. The following persona map gives a nice indication of PLAYDY's target audience. (This persona map is designed with information from the literature review and reinforced with testimonies that came from the interviews with respondents.)

THIS IS SAMUS

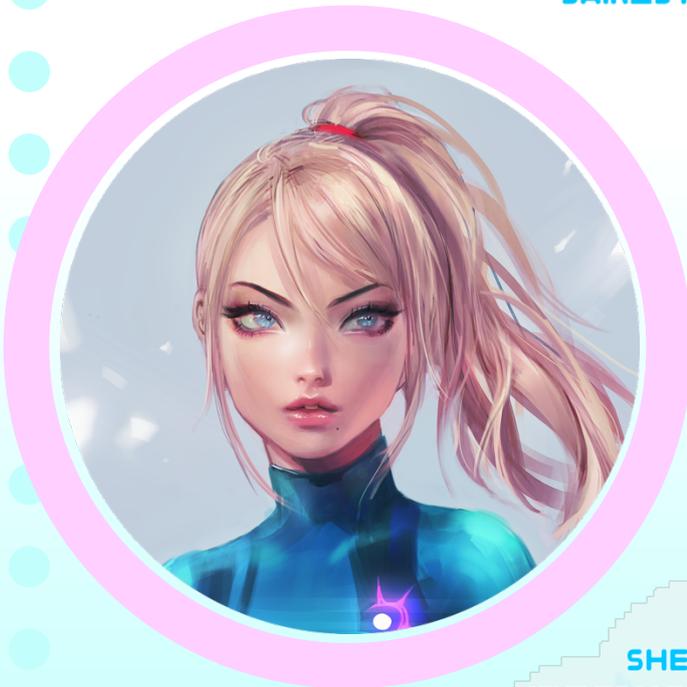
SAMUS PLAYS GAMES A COUPLE OF HOURS A WEEK, DEPENDING ON HER SCHEDULE.

SHE HAS A COUPLE OF FRIENDS THAT SHE PLAYS WITH, HOWEVER, NONE OF THEM REALLY CONSIDER THEMSELVES GAMERS.

EVEN THOUGH SHE IS A REGULAR GAMER, SHE WOULD NOT CONSIDER GAMING HER PRIMARY HOBBY OR INTEREST.

HER OTHER INTERESTS ARE: MOVIES, NETFLIX, FASHION, LIFESTYLE, SPORTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA.

SHE FOLLOWS THE GAMING NEWS BUT NOT IMMEDIATELY ANY GAME INFLUENCERS BECAUSE THEY ARE A BIT TOO HARDCORE FOR HER TASTE AND THEY DON'T PLAY THE SORT OF GAMES SHE'S INTO.



METHODOLOGY

To test our research hypothesis, we incorporated thick data into the prototyping of PLAYDY from an early stage on. In fact, the multiple updates to the Instagram account have always been synchronous with the gathering of new insights from respondents. All of our data come from in-depth, informal interviews with respondents. In total, we had 8 participants, and all of them were sourced through snowball sampling. That way, there was an initial sense of trust, as most respondents were first or second-degree acquaintances.

For the interviews, we designed an interview guide with several topical probes and key questions. (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011) The interview consisted of three parts: the first part enquired about the personal background of the respondents and their relation to games. Due to its easy nature, this first part was mostly intended to establish a comfortable environment for the respondents. That way, it would be easier to ask the key questions in the second part of the interview. The second part of the interview enquired about respondents' information consumption about games. Finally, in the last part of the interview, there was room for anecdotal information from respondents, experiences or opinions they felt like sharing. The interview's final part also always included some reformulations of earlier questions to allow the interviewees to answer the question again. We noticed that, for multiple respondents, it was the first time they actively thought of their gamer identity in this metacritical way, and thus, it was also the first time they had to formulate their thoughts. By mentioning a subject again, later in the interview, they had a chance to give a more detailed answer as they had been able to reflect on it throughout the interview.

[For the authenticity of this research paper, respondents have also agreed to being quoted.]

ANALYSIS

1) PRE-PROTOTYPING

When enquiring about how respondents got into gaming, their answers were usually very similar. However, their first games and gamer identities proved to be very different from an early stage on. Some respondents entered the gaming sphere through fathers or older brothers. Shona recalls that her dad was a massive World Of Warcraft fan, and that is how she ended up with an account in the first place. Melly remembers being fascinated at her older sister's games, puzzles and the many virtual worlds she wandered around in. The fantastical stories and backdrops were the reason she joined in on the fun. Eline followed the classical Nintendo path and stayed loyal to her casual gamer roots throughout high school by jumping onto every big mobile game. Even now, well through college, she still takes pride in her Wii skills and frequently beats every one of her flatmates on Mario Kart. Sophia got into gaming through her brother, and they still play League Of Legends together most of the time. She's also a devoted Sims player but admits that her gamer identity mostly comes from the fact that she is skilled at 'LOL': "If I would only play the Sims, I'm not sure I would identify as a gamer still."

All of the respondents' stories are different, and they enjoy entirely different games, but they all share the casual gamer identity. However, when discussing how they experience or express that identity, the answer was much more universal: "not". Most of our respondents did not feel particularly attached to the idea of a 'gaming community'. Even if they recognised the existence of such a thing, they never participate in it, nor do they wish too. Most of them had one or two friends that gamed as well, but gaming was not often a topic of conversation offline. (Apart from one respondent who admitted that she often talked about the Sims with one of her friends.) When we asked about their consumption behaviour outside of games, the majority of them did not follow any game influencers or watch gameplay videos; motives were double as two quotes illustrate: "I don't really watch streamers because I'm not interested in seeing them play, I just want to play

myself." VS "I watch streamers sometimes, but I don't follow them on Instagram because I am not interested in their candid pics, for me, it's all about the games." Taking all of the responses into account we conclude that streaming platforms and video footage are often perceived as too hardcore, but the opposite, following a gamer on Instagram often proves too irrelevant.

At this point, our initial hypothesis still stands strong. There seems to be a demand for identifiable content that bridges the gap between – in the words of our respondents – the casual gamer experience and the relevant gamer experience. With this in mind, PLAYDY's content creation could commence.

2) PROTOTYPING

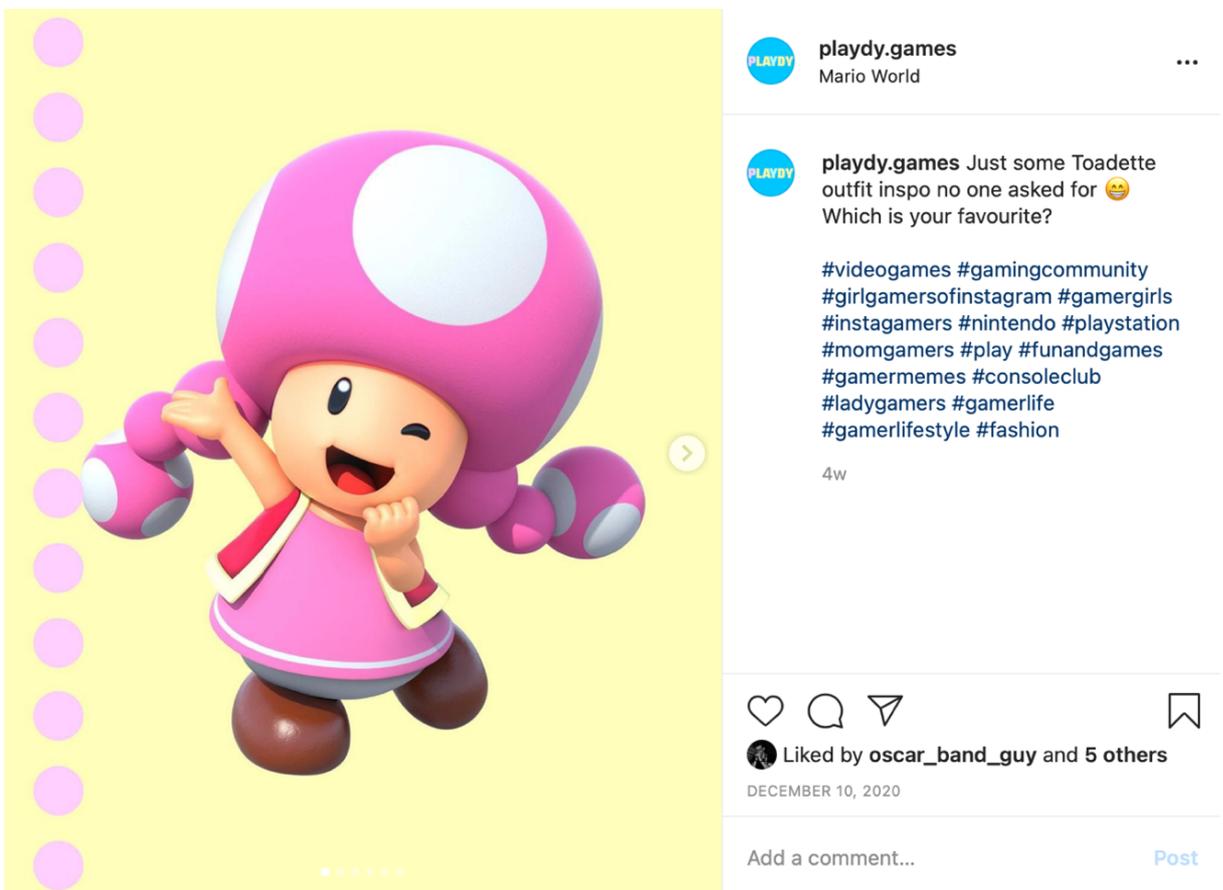
The concept of PLAYDY is inspired by other proven, successful lifestyle concepts such as Hypebeast, Hypebae, High Snobiety, Complex, ManRepeller, Dazed etc. These are all blogs and online magazines with a vast following on Instagram due to their easily accessible, versatile and aesthetic nature. Even though all of the competitors named above explicitly position themselves as ambassadors of 'lifestyle' –a very comprehensive notion–, only two of them regularly dare to venture into the realms of 'gamer lifestyle'. PLAYDY's main inspiration would be an account such as Hypebae, since it reports about female-focused lifestyle trends which regularly cover news from the entertainment industry, including games.

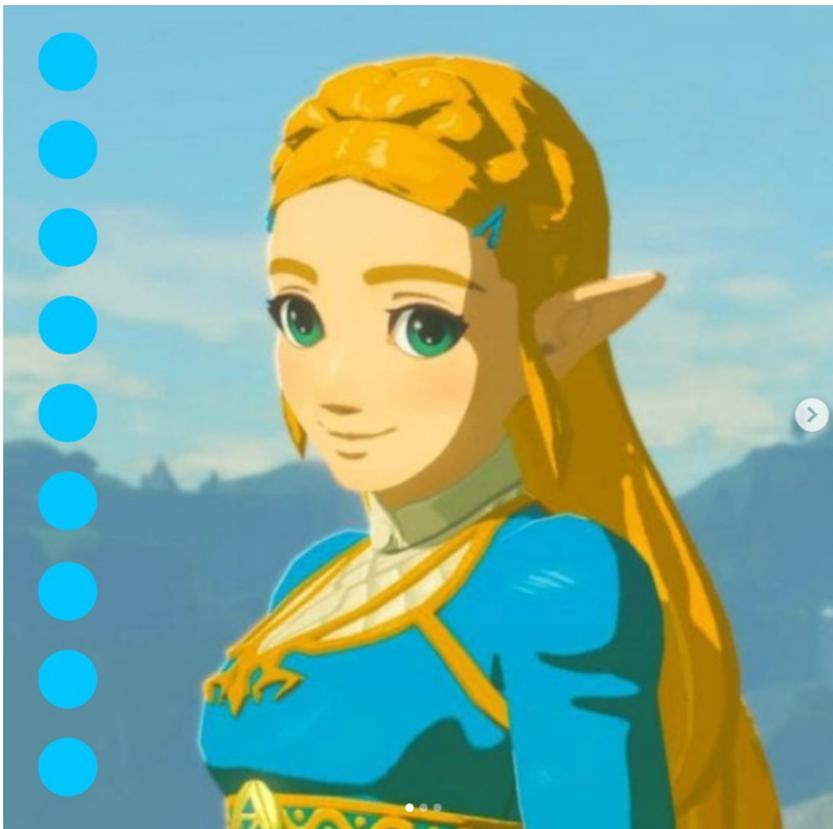
With the content-creation of PLAYDY, there was a strict checklist before publication, every post had to follow three main principles:

- 1) The post is not just a reshare, but there is an added value to it, which we refer to as 'the PLAYDY factor'.
- 2) The post is equally relevant under #lifestyle as it is under #games.
- 3) The post does not show in-game graphics or gameplay footage.

This last principle may seem benign, yet it is quite a radical one when examining the current landscape of game-related content out there. Therefore, it is precisely the right amount of exploration and experiment for a tentative practice-research project like this.

To illustrate the workings of the three principles, you can witness some of PLAYDY's Instagram posts below. The images chosen here are not exhaustive, but they are the ones most commonly referred to by respondents via top-of-mind awareness. Prior to the interviews, respondents were asked to familiarise themselves with the Instagram page and then during the interview, they were asked for their three favourite posts.





playdy.games
Zelda

playdy.games Some Zelda inspired looks to channel your inner quarantine queen. 🌿

All outfits pulled from @yoox

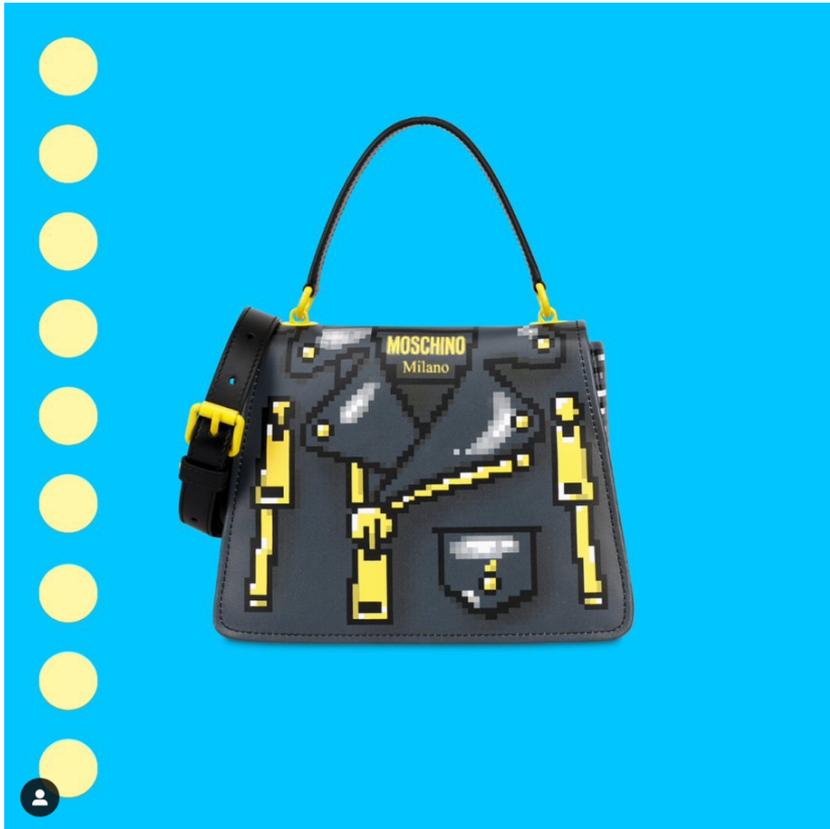
#videogames #gamingcommunity
#girlgamersofinstagram #gamermaids
#instagamers #nintendo #playstation
#momgamers #play #funandgames
#gammemes #consoleclub
#ladygamers #gamerlife
#gamerlifestyle #fashion
#lockdownstyle #OOTD
#zeldabreathofthewild #zelda

9h

♥️ 💬 📌
Liked by oscar_band_guy and 9 others
9 HOURS AGO

Add a comment... [Post](#)





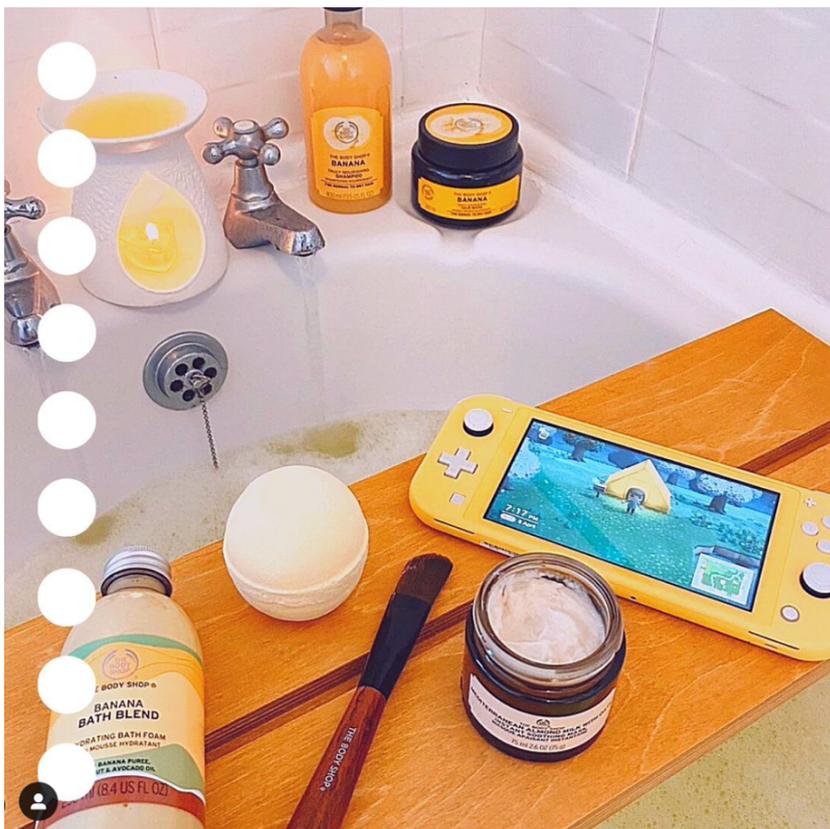
playdy.games ...

playdy.games The question is, can we pay in Simoleons @moschino
4w

playdy.games #videogames #gamingcommunity #girlgamersofinstagram #gamergirls #instagamers #nintendo #playstation #momgamers #play #funandgames #gammemes #consoleclub #ladygamers #gamerlife #gamerlifestyle #fashion #ootd
4w Reply

Liked by oscar_band_guy and 5 others
DECEMBER 5, 2020

Add a comment... Post



playdy.games ...

playdy.games Sundays are for selfcare. And turnips, obviously.
4w

playdy.games #videogames #gamingcommunity #girlgamersofinstagram #gamergirls #instagamers #nintendo #playstation #momgamers #play #funandgames #gammemes #consoleclub #ladygamers #gamerlife #gamerlifestyle #selfcare #metime
4w Reply

Liked by callmekino and 5 others
DECEMBER 6, 2020

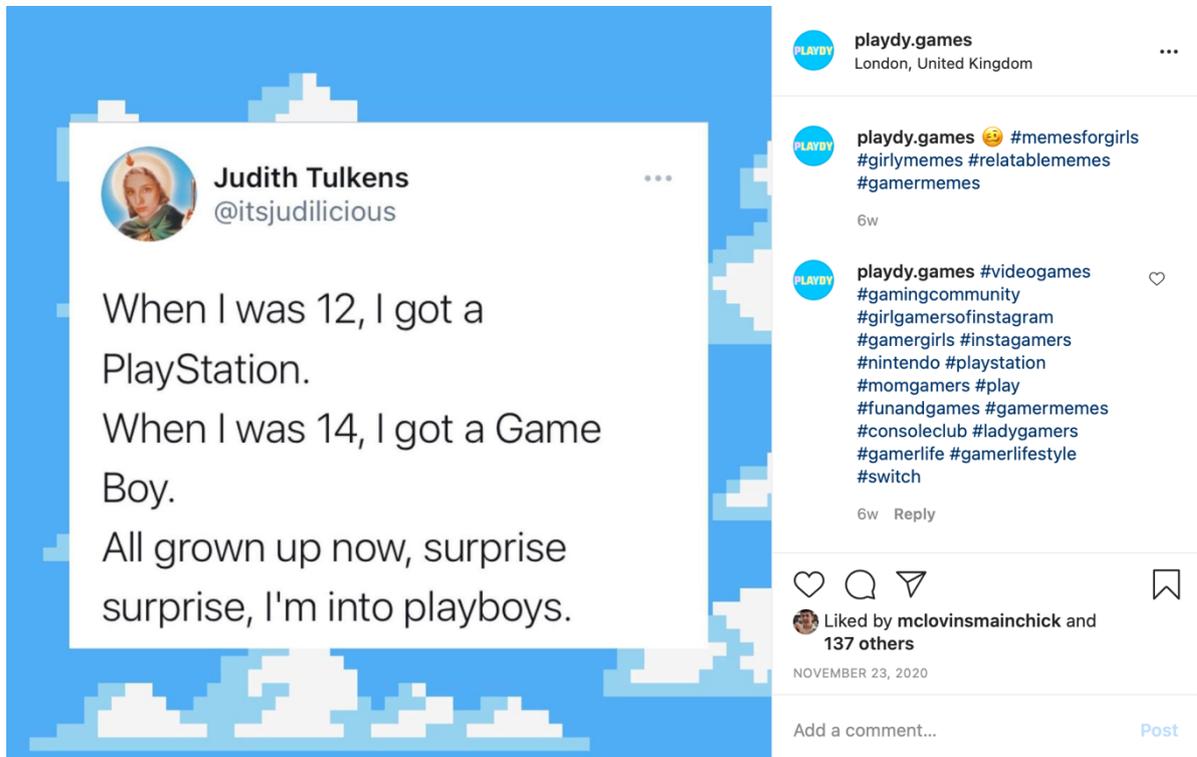
Add a comment... Post

3) POST-PROTOTYPING

When discussing respondents' feelings regarding the content, we can distinguish certain patterns. Firstly, almost all of them singled out the post of Toadette inspired outfits. When asked why, most of the answers stressed the fact that it feels relatable. Shona says: "It just feels personal, because I know the Mario Universe and I would actually really wear that." Eline ads: "It's cool because I don't see that sort of posts anywhere else." Later in the questionnaire, when asked what sort of content they would like to see more of in the future, many respondents again referred to the Toadette post, confirming our core belief that lifestyle inspired content is in high demand. The Toadette post was one of the most prototypical mergers of lifestyle and games, and it is a post that could easily be featured by classic lifestyle platforms and online fashion magazines. At first sight, the most obvious instances of lifestyle-related posts performed best, as another crowd favourite was the image of a Switch console next to some bathing products. A classic Pinterest style flat lay. Sophia says: "This is actually the sort of thing I would love to see more of, like regular lifestyle influencers incorporating games into their daily pics, making the combination of being a gamer but also enjoying many other things such as quality time and pampering less of a stretch. I would love to follow an influencer like that, but I don't think I've ever come across such a profile."

Additionally, posts that combined games and pop culture also seemed to resonate well with the audience. One post about some Baby Yoda inspired macarons, and the comparison with Blair Waldorf (a character from the iconic Gossip Girl series) was expected to perform well with women in their early 20s and, as intended, it did. Another post that shared the news of Dua Lipa becoming a playable character in the latest FIFA update also performed well online and sparked many offline conversations with the respondents; many of them stated that they "love seeing stuff where the real world and the game world converge."

Finally, to get a bit of a statistical indication of our audience, we created a paid promotion for one of the earliest posts. With a budget of £6 over 2 days, we backed the following post.



The reason we backed this specific post is that it has a meme quality to it and functions well without additional context as a stand-alone post, which is the way an audience will encounter it as well (either as a sponsored post in their feed or as a post in their Instagram discovery page). For our promotion, we created a target audience of women between the age of 14 and 40 who live in London and have an existing interest in videogames and lifestyle. Thus, a fairly vast concentration of users. This general target audience made the statistical insights even more interesting. After two days, our post had 138 likes, and the reports on the promotion showed that 69% of the likers were in the age segment 14-17 and another 19% in the category 18-24. Even though the results of one post alone are trivial in the broader scope of analytic usefulness, this still means that the content resonates with our target audience: Gen Z women. It is also no surprise that it performs exceptionally well with the 14 to 17-year-olds, because in the words of respondent Helena: "These are the sort of posts I would have loved in high school,

I mean, I still like it now obviously, but in high school, I would have been utterly obsessed with it."

Taking a look at the page's overall statistics, we uncover some additional insights. The best-liked posts (regardless of their relevance to games and lifestyle) were always the most aesthetically pleasing ones with distinct colours and minimalistic designs. Yet, they were completely different from the posts that drove the most visits to the profile. Those were always clearly fashion or lifestyle-related with the Toadette outfit post on top. Throughout this practice-based phase of the research, we view likes as indicators of identifiable content (following the rule that people like what they can relate to – as professed by virtually every blog about social media practices), and thus the best-liked posts would be the most promising for making the gamer identity more accessible.

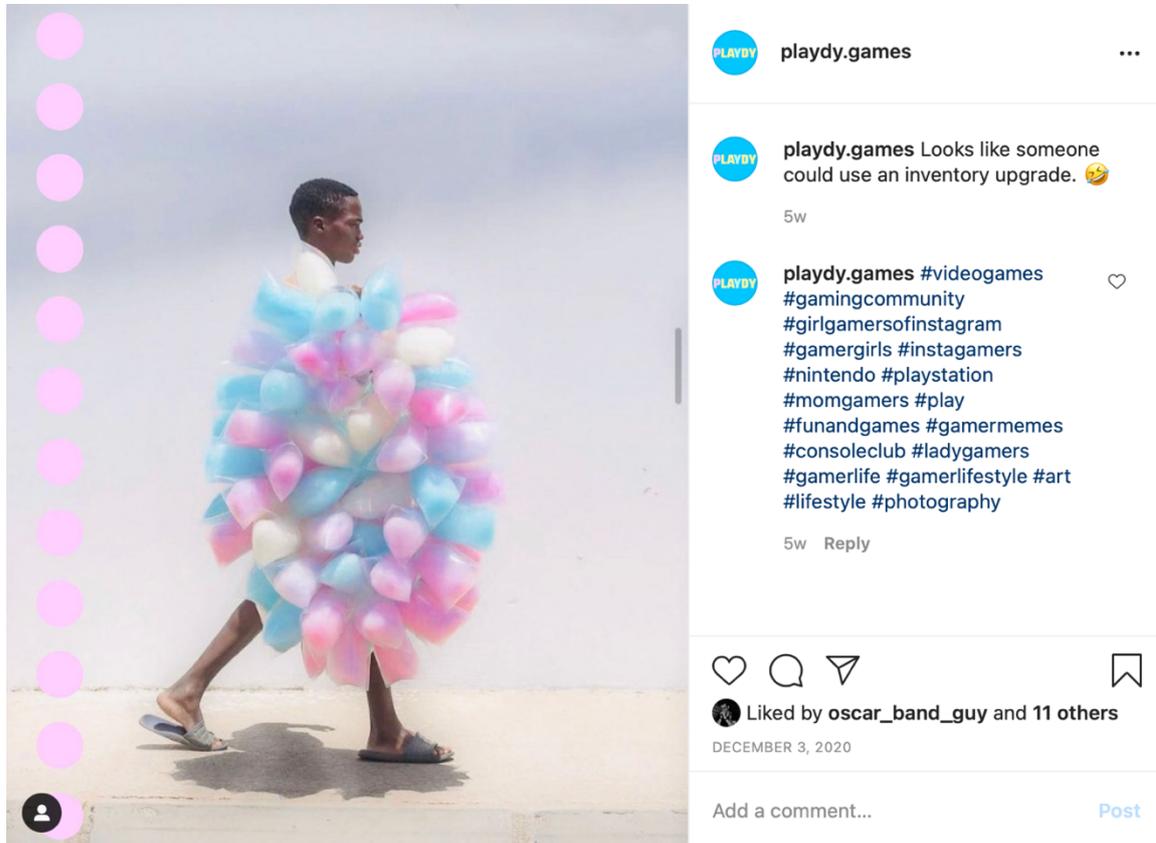
When asked about their least favourite posts, most respondents mentioned a post of game-inspired cookies and images of a sneaker collaboration with Mario Bros. The words they used to signify their feelings were "unnecessary" and "boring". Indeed, when we check the posts against our three initial principles, they are most likely to violate the principle of 'added value', and if not trodden carefully, an abundance of such posts might make the PLAYDY account look like a mere promotional/ repost account.

4) RE-PROTOTYPING

After establishing the success of content that bridges lifestyle and games, we permitted ourselves to play around with the sheer scope of this intersection. What does 'games' encompass? How can we move from 'games related' content into 'gamified' content? And when does the experiment become irrelevant?

The result was somewhat surprising, and our target audience seems to value left-field thinking over predictable content, to say the least.

The first 'alternative' post (in essence, one that doesn't immediately reveal a link with games) is an art photo. The gamified touch lies in the caption, which reads "Looks like someone could use an inventory upgrade. 🤔"



The post scored 11 likes (bear in mind, at this point, PLAYDY only had 30 followers) which was twice as much as a post about a collaboration between Moschino and The Sims, and the latter is clearly more relevant in both the lifestyle and games department. Another highly successful post that had seemingly little relevance to a gaming audience was a carousel post of a walking route past landmarks in London that you can do in under 30 minutes. The caption read "1 destination. 6 levels. 30 minutes. Who's game? #walksinlondon". This post scored 10 likes and is still among the 20% best performing posts.

Finally, less controversial, but equally surprising we posted about this new analogue card game called 'Hygge', followed by an aesthetic picture of a cosy afternoon and a book about the hip, Swedish lifestyle. The post scored 17 likes and is thus the best liked post so far. Furthermore, in the overall analytics of PLAYDY's

Instagram page, the three gamified posts mentioned in the above section outperformed all of the other more prototypical content and are among the five most liked posts. Needless to say, that this is a stellar insight we didn't anticipate at PLAYDY's conception.



playdy.games
Home Sweet Home

playdy.games SOME DAYS ARE FOR HYGGE. ☕

#videogames #gamingcommunity
#girlgamersofinstagram #gamergirls
#instagamers #nintendo #playstation
#momgamers #play #funandgames
#gammemes #consoleclub
#ladygamers #gamerlife
#gamerlifestyle #boardgames
#socialgames
#hygge

1w

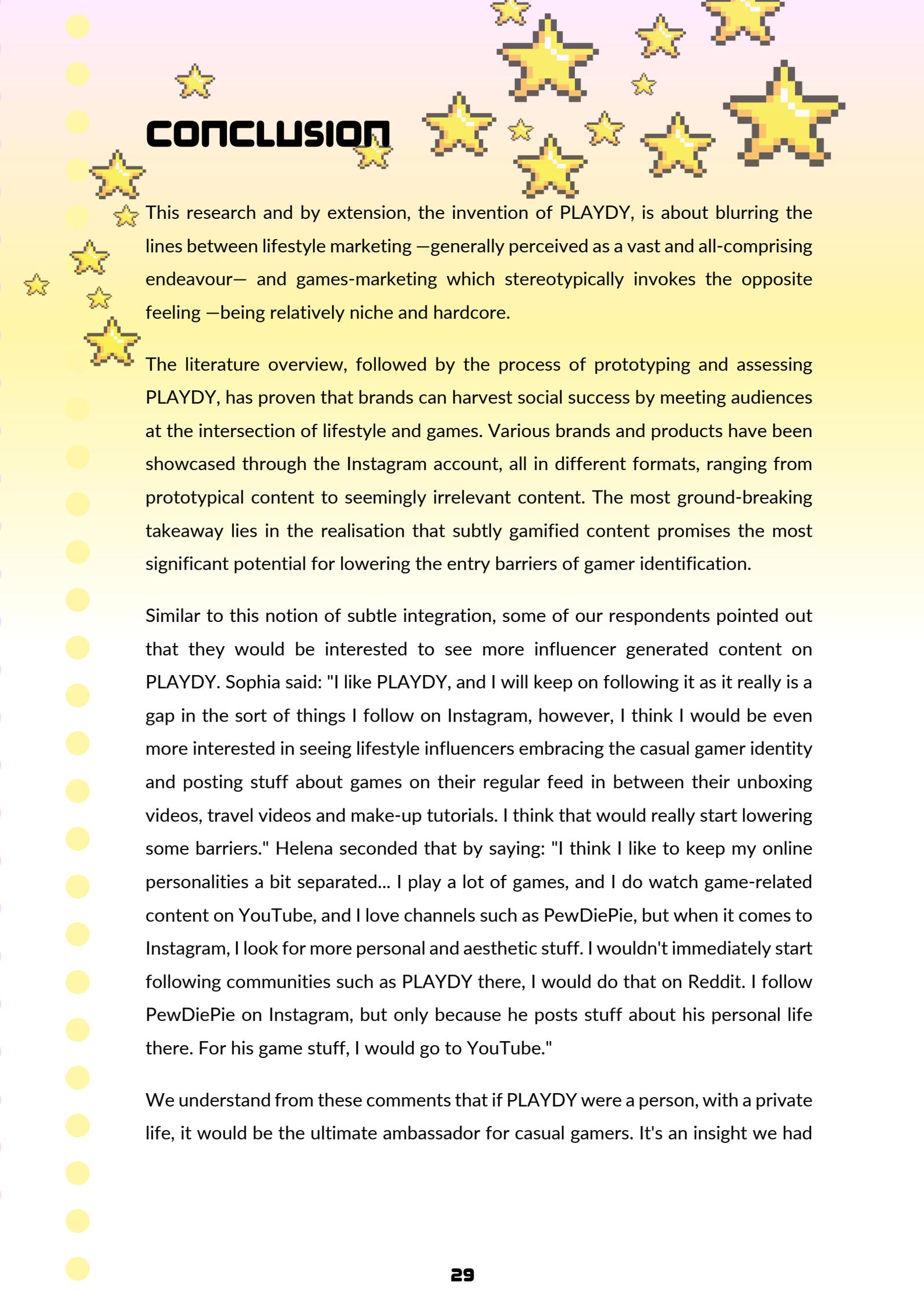
♡ 💬 🗑️ 📌

Liked by **mclovinsmainchick** and **16 others**

DECEMBER 28, 2020

Add a comment...

Post

The page features a decorative border on the left side consisting of a vertical line of yellow circles. Scattered across the top and left areas are several yellow, pixelated stars of various sizes. The word "CONCLUSION" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, centered at the top of the page.

CONCLUSION

★ This research and by extension, the invention of PLAYDY, is about blurring the lines between lifestyle marketing –generally perceived as a vast and all-comprising endeavour– and games-marketing which stereotypically invokes the opposite feeling –being relatively niche and hardcore.

The literature overview, followed by the process of prototyping and assessing PLAYDY, has proven that brands can harvest social success by meeting audiences at the intersection of lifestyle and games. Various brands and products have been showcased through the Instagram account, all in different formats, ranging from prototypical content to seemingly irrelevant content. The most ground-breaking takeaway lies in the realisation that subtly gamified content promises the most significant potential for lowering the entry barriers of gamer identification.

Similar to this notion of subtle integration, some of our respondents pointed out that they would be interested to see more influencer generated content on PLAYDY. Sophia said: "I like PLAYDY, and I will keep on following it as it really is a gap in the sort of things I follow on Instagram, however, I think I would be even more interested in seeing lifestyle influencers embracing the casual gamer identity and posting stuff about games on their regular feed in between their unboxing videos, travel videos and make-up tutorials. I think that would really start lowering some barriers." Helena seconded that by saying: "I think I like to keep my online personalities a bit separated... I play a lot of games, and I do watch game-related content on YouTube, and I love channels such as PewDiePie, but when it comes to Instagram, I look for more personal and aesthetic stuff. I wouldn't immediately start following communities such as PLAYDY there, I would do that on Reddit. I follow PewDiePie on Instagram, but only because he posts stuff about his personal life there. For his game stuff, I would go to YouTube."

We understand from these comments that if PLAYDY were a person, with a private life, it would be the ultimate ambassador for casual gamers. It's an insight we had

anticipated already but lacked evidence for up until the final stage of our practice-research.

When brands start partnering with lifestyle influencers to deliver assets that range from gamified content to content about games, the casual gamer identity has the potential to be embraced by a wider audience. Not only is this a marketing opportunity for the entertainment industry with great lucrative engagement, it could also be another step towards diversifying the community as a whole, and blurring the lines between core and casual will only result in greater inclusivity.

With major advertising players such as Publicis, announcing plans to intensify their marketing efforts in the games department (see announcement about *Publicis Play*, a new division solely focused on games marketing for Publicis' client portfolio), this branch of the entertainment industry is finally being recognised for its overwhelming size and future growth potential. As we move into new ways of leveraging games as a medium, we should not lose track of the gaming audience; more specifically, the fact that there is not one gaming audience. There are only different gamers who play different games and have different identities. Hopefully, this research has been able to shed new light on one of those audiences: casually gaming, Gen Z women, and will contribute to innovative ways of engaging audiences through branded content online.





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