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Understanding the Buyer Decision Process of Microtransactions in Video Games

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by

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This report is submitted as part of the final examination requirements of the Haute école de Gestion de Genève, for the Bachelor of Science HES-SO in International Business Management. The use of any conclusions or recommendations made in or based upon this report, with no prejudice to their value, engages the responsibility neither of the author, nor the author's mentor, nor the jury members nor the HEG or any of its employees.

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Executive Summary

Selling virtual goods and services for real money has become an increasingly ordinary additional revenue model for video games; these are called microtransactions. This paper aims to understand the buyer decision process specific to microtransactions in video games. For that purpose, this paper has been evaluating the validity of the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) model on the buyer decision process in the modern context of microtransactions. That model is divided into five distinct steps that consumers go through for any purchase, namely Need recognition, Information search, Evaluation of alternatives, Purchase decision, and Postpurchase behavior. When acknowledging the monopolistic position of the game developers as the sole provider of microtransactions on its respective game, the predatory marketing methods used in the industry, the captive pricing or optional-product pricing strategies, and the unbalance of power between seller and buyers, it was possible to observe that the behavior of consumers would not fit the theoretical guidelines set by the model.

An exhaustive review of the existing literature helped to draft a survey. The latter was distributed to gamers to assess their behavior and thought process while exposed to microtransactions. Both consumers and non-consumers have shared their behavior and feelings. It resulted in both qualitative and quantitative data. Additionally, online interviews have been conducted with a representative sample amongst the willing respondents based on their answers to further develop their point of view.

The results of the primary research have been interpreted through the scope of the five steps of the model, assessing each step individually and the model as a whole. The average behavior of consumers fits most of the model, apart from the third step, Evaluation of alternatives, which is not taking place due to the lack of alternative brands in a monopolistic setting. Furthermore, the results show a clear dislike towards microtransaction, even for heavy consumers. The paradox seems to be resolved by the necessity to purchase to fully enjoy the game. Additionally, a notable share of consumers behaves in a way that does not fit the guidelines. The strong stimuli of the game developers, as well as other social and psychological factors, seem to influence and shorten the buyer decision process. Ultimately, the thesis highlights the need to further research the influencing factors that lead to such behavior. The thesis also calls attention to some possible ethical and legal problems that can arise from the monopolistic position of game developers and question the possibility of having a game that is neither open source nor monopolistic, by letting third parties enter the market and compete on selling microtransactions, reducing development costs, reducing prices, and increasing customization, which would potentially maximize total welfare of the stakeholders.

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List of abbreviations & acronyms

AAA: Triple-A

BDP: Buyer Decision Process

DLC: Downloadable content

ESA: Entertainment Software Association

FPS: First Person Shooter

eSport: Competitive electronic sport

FOMO: Fear of Missing out

IPO: Initial Public Offering

IGC: In-Game Currency

IGPC: In-Game Premium Currency

JPY: Japanese Yen

GaaS: Game as a Service

MOBA: Multiplayer Online Battle Arena

MIT: Massachusetts Institute of Technology

MTX: Microtransaction(s)

USD: United-States Dollar

TAM: Technology Acceptance Model

WAP: Wireless Application Protocol

1. Introduction

1.1 Context of the study

Studying the gaming industry is talking about 2.7 billion active consumers worldwide, who spend over three billion hours a week playing (McGonical, 2010). That activity sums up to a revenue of 160 billion United-states dollars (USD) in 2020 for the entire industry (Wijman, 2020). Gaming goes beyond players who use controllers and dedicated machines (Wallach, 2020). The activity of gaming also includes every casual player who engages with simple games on their smartphone occasionally or plays on web applications such as the one embedded in Facebook. Not only is mobile gaming a part of the industry, but it is the most important one with 85 billion USD in revenues against 40 billion USD for PC and 33 billion USD for consoles (Wallach, 2020).

To put it in perspective, the video game industry has already eclipsed the industry of digital music and video streaming combined market revenues as of the end of 2020 (Statista, 2021a). A gap that is only expected to widen in the following years according to the forecasting (Statista, 2021a). The revenues generated by the video game industry appear to have especially boomed after 2000 with the democratization of the internet, consoles, mobile gaming, and other technological improvements (Wallach, 2020). Not only the platforms have changed, but also the entire business model of gaming companies has greatly evolved (Dillon & Cohen, 2013).

Companies offering digital products, like most of the gaming ones, seem to have challenged Kotler and Armstrong's (2018) definition of a consumer product: "A product bought by final consumers for personal consumption". The product has changed from a physical product with a short and well-defined lifespan, to an infinitely replayable digital service. Those new games have been defined as Games as a service (GaaS), switching from being a product to a service, or something in between (Bagga, 2011). This shift has raised the question of making a profit out of a game that has virtually no definite end.

Even if the game has practically an infinite lifespan, to fight off competition and sustain interest from the consumers, there is a need to implement additional content. Implementing updates or Downloadable Content (DLC) is cheaper than developing a whole new game as it is built on top of an existing structure with engaged customers (Svelch, 2017). From an economic perspective, DLCs are an effective way to generate revenue without alienating the user base as they are an actual exchange of a new service for a price (Svelch, 2017). It can be the case that the initial game is offered for free with the expectation that DLC will be the main revenue

source. But regardless of the business model, most of the games are designed to allow the implementation of new content and customization (Tomic, 2019). Besides DLCs, this design method is also allowing the creation and sale of virtual goods within the game for a small amount as MTX, a concept that will be further defined later in the report (Ivanov et al., 2019).

MTX and DLC revenues have now surpassed the revenues from the initial game sale (Statista, 2021b). This is especially the case for mobile games where the initial price only accounted in October 2019 for 7% of the total revenues (Statista, 2021b). Such statistics support the business model of free-to-play games, a game that is made available for free by generating their revenues in other ways, such as MTX, DLC sales, advertising, or affiliate deals (Bercu, 2016). The idea of removing the barrier of the initial price could prove profitable if the shortfall is compensated by the share of the increased player base who will be converted into paid users when purchasing the additional content.

This newer business model has become more and more popular among developers. Up to the point where, in 2020, the choice of business model between a paid or a free product to download was equally split (Statista, 2021b). One of the reasons for this change is believed to be the proof given by the games with the most revenues in the world. Among the top thirty games in terms of revenue, two-third are using free-to-play as their main business model (Superdata, 2021).

However, as these additional contents were so profitable and successful, companies soon implemented them in most of the games, paid and subscription-based games included. For example, looking at the same top 30 games mentioned earlier, all of them have implemented in-game additional content (Superdata, 2021; Almaguer, 2018). This process has led to a vivid debate in the gaming communities between consumers having to pay for additional content after having initially paid for a game that was supposed to be “complete” and having the feeling of being restrained by too many paid barriers in their games (Alamaguer, 2018).

Ninety percent of gaming consumers affirm having purchased additional digital content for at least one of their games, with very few gamers, less than ten percent, really standing against this process by not purchasing any (Qutee, 2018, Statista, 2021a). The share of gamers purchasing any content varies heavily from one game to another, for example from 85% on Fortnite to 38% on Halo, two shooter style console-based games (Statista, 2021a). There is no obvious explanation for that gap, as there are many variables to take into consideration to compare both games.

In this context, this research intends to analyze the consumers’ behavior towards the purchase of MTX. More precisely, the report will look at the buyer decision process when considering

MTX in video games. The report will try to find and describe specific factors impacting the different phases of the said process.

1.2 Definitions

This chapter intends to clarify some of the theoretical concepts and definitions that are essential to the understanding of the report. Most of the concepts are further detailed in the literature review (Chapter 2).

1.2.1 Video games

The definition that is brought up by the Cambridge Dictionary states that a Video Game is “a game in which the player controls moving pictures on a screen by pressing buttons” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021a). Pressing buttons is to be understood as not only actioning a mechanical piece, such as a key or joystick but also an area on a screen that looks or works like it. As a result, video games not only include console and pc games, but also applications on smartphones, Virtual Reality (VR), and augmented reality. To be considered as a game, the software shall provide an activity that one engages in for amusement or fun (Oxford Dictionary, 2021a).

1.2.2 Video game industry

Due to the broad definition adopted for video games, the industry is defined accordingly. The World Economic Forum, through an article from Wallach (2020), supports a broad inclusion. The definition of the Video Game Industry includes large video games studios and independent developers, every platform whether fixed and portable, including smartphones, casual and hardcore gamers.

1.2.3 Monetization

Professors Lehdonvirta and Castranova (2014) state in their book *Virtual Economies* that once the publisher has found users to consume the content, the question remains on how to extract money out of them. They express that physical retail, digital retail, subscriptions, advertising, and the sale of virtual goods and currencies are the monetization model for video games. Therefore, monetization can be understood as the process of earning revenue from the video game (Lehdonvirta & Castronova, 2014; Oxford Dictionary, 2021b).

1.2.4 In-game Currency (IGC)

Within a game ecosystem, goods are traded with an in-game currency (IGC) that is related to the game lore (Zhirkova and Saric, 2020). That currency is acquired through gameplay and used to access basic objects necessary to the game's functioning. In-game Premium Currency (IGPC) is used to acquire premium objects that IGC does not offer. They are almost only acquirable by paying with real currency. Sometimes games offer a fraction of these through gameplay through a reward system, which is most of the time not enough to make a single purchase (Guo et al., 2019).

1.2.5 Microtransaction (MTX)

The Oxford Dictionary (2021c) defines a Microtransaction (MTX) as “a very small financial transaction conducted online”. A definition that is open for interpretation. As a result, literature does not always consider MTX in the same way. Olsson and Sidenblom (2010) are considering MTX to be a business model, in which selling small digital items or IGPC is the only revenue stream. Ivanov et al. (2019) are describing MTX as a monetization type, an exchange of digital goods for a real currency price. The game distributor Steam simply associates MTX with In-game Purchases (Steam, 2021).

However, micropayments are not only present in the gaming industry. They can be found in other industries such as music or news (Kumer, 2014). However, MTX is a terminology reserved for gaming following the idea of a transaction for virtual goods. Therefore, the report will use Lehdonvirta and Hamari's (2010) adapted definition of MTX being a revenue model in gaming that involves selling some form of in-game goods or services, “avatars” or currencies to the users of an online service for real money.

1.2.6 Downloadable content (DLC)

To define Downloadable Content as any content that can be downloaded over the internet is too simplistic and thus incorrect. While such definition might have been true at the age of the Atari 2600 and the internet's debut, DLCs have evolved in many ways. Oxford dictionary defines DLC as “additional content for a computer game, which can be bought or obtained as a separate item” (Oxford Dictionary, 2021d). However, that definition stipulates that DLCs only concern computer games, which is no longer the only digital support where DLC can be found. Furthermore, the idea that DLC is sold as a separate item is not necessarily the case, as some are already embedded within the game, but only available later. Therefore, the report will define a DLC in the framework of video games as “additional content for a video game, which can be obtained through a separate transaction”. Most DLC are virtual items such as cosmetics, power-ups, avatars, or game content such as extra levels or diverse gameplay.

1.2.7 Buyer Decision Process (BDP)

The Buyer Decision Process theories are described within Consumer Behavior studies. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), Consumer Behavior is answering how individual consumers relate with each other and with other elements of the world around them that affects their choices among various products, services, and companies. Within that field of study, Kotler and Armstrong have come up with a specific model illustrating how consumers make their buying decisions, which is called the Buyer Decision Process Model. The Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model is divided into five steps: Need recognition, Information search, Evaluation of alternatives, Purchase decision, and lastly Postpurchase behavior. That model is further described in the state of art, under chapter 2.1.2.

1.3 Gaming monetization's history

1.3.1 Precursors

While the use of the term "microtransaction" is recent, some of the first money transactions could be categorized as such. The first widely available games were made during the early 1970s in the form of arcade machines (Costrel, 2020). The release of Pong in 1972 was sold to physical stores which maintained the machines and let players enjoy playing for a price (Costrel, 2020; Atari, 2021). Usually, the cost of one game was a few United-states dollar (USD) quarters in the United States (US) or a few hundred Japanese Yen (JPY) in Japan (Duverge, 2016). While playing the game and losing, the player was offered the opportunity to pay for one extra game, also called one extra life. It was simply done by inserting an additional coin. This process fits the definition of MTX and is commonly agreed to be the first MTX in video games (Duverge, 2016).

When the Japanese game *Space Invaders*, designed by Tomohiro Nishikado, became a blockbuster and hit its peak popularity in 1978, some arcade game stores were only referred to as *Invaders Houses* (Costrel, 2020). At some point, there were so many hundred JPY transactions that Japan had to briefly declare a shortage of hundred JPY coins (Costrel, 2020). During the same period, the first popular multi cartridge-based consoles, the Atari 2600 started booming (Atari, 2021). The console had to be bought separately from the cartridges. The latter were designed by independent game developers and studios just like today. Having third-party designing games for the console was very welcome, especially at that time, as the range of available games was the main selling argument for a home console (Costrel, 2020). None of them used MTX or DLC, but rather different versions of games.

The first customization resembling a DLC was created in June 1981 by the three MIT students, Doug Macrae, Steve Golson, and Mike Horowitz (Fulton, 2008; Costrel, 2020). The sophomore trio purchased Arcade machines that were run within the MIT campus, for the entertainment of their peers (Couch, 2019). They soon realized that the revenues were skyrocketing for brand-new games, but they soon faded over time (Couch, 2019). The games were becoming too easy with experience. A player that used to play about two minutes for a quarter at first soon was playing ten minutes games for the same coin (Couch, 2019). On top of that, the games were becoming repetitive and too straightforward (Costrel, 2020). At that point, the three MIT students became convinced there was something to be done to the games that would improve profitability.

They pulled their resources together to fund the company *General Computer Corporation* (GCC) (Couch, 2019). They designed an *enhancement kit* for the game *Missile Command* from Atari, to be placed directly within the arcade machine. It would modify some of the game settings and add some new content such as new difficulty, faster pace, and sound effect (Couch, 2019; Costrel 2020). Such modification by third parties to the game manufacturer is called a mod (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021b). Modding games extends the game lifespan and brings back some of the players who had been bored after beating the game too many times (Costrel, 2020). However, they were not the owner of the game and were selling these kits to arcade game centers without having prior approval from the game manufacturer, profiting from a legal grey area (Fulton, 2008). GCC was hoping that their kit *Super Missile Attack* was not infringing Atari's copyright (Couch, 2019). But as word-of-mouth was spreading, it came to the knowledge of Atari. Parties soon met in court following a claim by Atari for 15 Mio USD in damages for copyright infringement, trademark dilution, and misrepresentation of origin (Costrel, 2020).

Atari's strategy to eliminate the modding threat totally changed when they came to realize that if they would lose in court, it would set a precedent under US law, allowing anyone to create enhancement kits for any future game (Costrel, 2020). A situation that would be far worse for them. Atari decided to settle things quietly under the main condition that GCC would not sell any more kits without the game manufacturers' consent (Couch, 2019). However, GCC had already developed, in the meantime, another kit for the game *Pac-Man*, owned by Midway. Following the requirements of their settlement with Atari, GCC contacted Midway USA for permission to sell it. At that point, Midway saw the enhancement kit as a great way to improve the game without altering the assembly line of the Pac-Man arcade machines (Costrel, 2020).

1.3.2 Early days

With the rise of home consoles, at first with the Atari 2600 and Later with the Super NES or the Sega Genesis, and thanks to new technological advancements, the video game industry had fresh opportunities to distribute games in several new ways. The first commercially available DLC is described by Burns (1983) in his article published in the Antic Magazine vol.2 No. 4 from 1983. The article states that in that year the entrepreneur William von Meister, active in the phone-in data service industry, took an interest in gaming. He started *Gameline,* a division of Control Video Corporation (CVC), to sell videogames on demand through phone line data downloads. To use that service, the customer required a special high-speed modem, called a Master Module, purchasable for around 50 USD. On top of that price, the customer had to pay a monthly membership fee of 15 USD. Finally, the customer could download a defined list of video games for 1 USD each. Once downloaded, the game could be loaded five to ten times. A process that would allow players to test games before purchasing them or simply play for a cheaper price and in a more comfortable environment than at an arcade game center (Burns, 1983). That process was closer to cloud-based game streaming than DLC, as the user did not end up having any product at the end of the transaction.

On PC, *Doom* made the experiment to release their innovative game on a server to be partially downloadable for free already in 1993 (Costrel, 2020). To gain access to the full game, as well as the first ever online 3D multiplayer and the opportunity to add DLC mods to the game, the consumer had to purchase a license for the rest of the game (Costrel, 2020). The huge success of the experiment might have opened the way for the new business model of freemium games.

It is only a few console generations later, with the Xbox from Microsoft and its online platform Xbox Live, that DLC and MTX started to take the form known today. Reuters Business (2005) reported, upon the announcement of the Xbox 360, in 2005, the future of Microsoft's online store. That future would mainly interest first game publishers as this new platform would contain a new system supporting MTX that would potentially yield up to 5 Mio. USD revenue per game, as advertised by Microsoft. Before that, selling a digital item for an amount below 5 USD would result in barely any revenues, as the transaction fees would eat up most of it, as stated by Cam Ferroni, general manager of Microsoft’s Xbox Live online gaming service at the time. Microsoft partially bypassed this issue by selling digital points that would later be used by the players to purchase MTX on the platform (Reuters, 2005).

According to Williams (2017), the editor for the USGamer website, Bethesda Softworks was the first third-party game developer to embrace Microsoft’s (revolutionary) idea. In 2006, Bethesda introduced cosmetic MTX in their game *The Elder Scroll IV: Oblivion* that would

change the appearance of the horse's armor for 200 Microsoft points (approx. 2.5 USD). The news was not well received by the player base, but it did not worry Bethesda. It was only experimenting. On April 4th, 2006, the day after the release of the horse armor pack, the Vice President of public relations and marketing Pete Hines gave similar responses to the different inquiries from journalists and gaming blogs. Regarding the price of the MTX, Klepek (2006) reported for the web magazine 1UP:

> *"A theme costs 150 [Microsoft] points. The Kameo [the horse armor] thing was 200. We're trying to find the right spot that fits. [...] We're not going to make any knee-jerk decisions based on it [the horse armor] being available for five hours. We'll see what folks think and put out a few others we have planned and figure out where to go from there […] Some folks seem excited and are already using it, others don't want it. Maybe those folks will really want the Orrery, or the Wizard's Tower [two other DLCs]. We'll see when they come out and use that info to determine what we put out, how much, etc." - (Klepek, 2006)*

The reaction from Hines highlights the little knowledge the market had at that time regarding DLC. The year prior, content was released for free for *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, the predecessor of Oblivion. That game also benefited from DLC, with two expansion packs for 19.99 USD each. On that matter, Hines stated: "Different game, different approach to downloadable content and the size and scope of things we want to do, and what it takes to do them" (Klepek, 2006). Regardless of players' discontent or hesitation, Bethesda made good revenues from the DLC on top of the initial 60 USD already charged for the game.

During the same year, Sony attempted an experiment with the launch of a new volume in their *Gran Turismo* saga, that would be free to download and only rely on MTX (Gantayat, 2012). Every car and track had to be purchased independently for a few cents to a few dollars (Orry, 2006). However, the experiment was stopped, and that product never came to be (Gantayat, 2012). On Nintendo's side, they launched in 2006 the Wii Shop Channel, which also featured points like Xbox ones, called Wii Points, that were mainly used to purchase and download old games and emulation in full version (Nintendo, 2017). These different experiments in pricing strategies could be perceived as the stammering of DLC and MTX marketing.

1.3.3 The rise of microtransaction strategy

MTX and DLC started to become popular outside of the console business, especially with the mobile phone business expansion. To answer the demand for mobile gaming, the industrial standard Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) was released in 1999 with great success (Mäyrä & Alha, 2020). Games could be downloaded directly from the internet through the WAP. The phone technology was not yet optimal for entertainment until companies saw a potential market and decided to heavily invest in it. Nokia led the way with the release of the

N-Gage in 2003 (Nokia, 2003). It was followed four years later by Apple's first iPhone which would give access to the Appstore and the web through Safari (Apple, 2007). In a few years, the number of apps downloaded massively increased, free, and paid alike to reach two billion in 2009 and 15 billion in 2011 (Apple, 2009; Apple 2011).

The platform was mainly promoting paid apps. Unlike free apps, the paid application could also include an additional feature called “In-App Purchase” that would allow them to sell content, subscriptions, and digital services (Garner, 2009). As a result, developers started experimenting, just like Bethesda with its horse armor, in their marketing strategies, especially regarding the pricing. To create a product that would catch the consumers’ eyes, developers used to create an entirely free version of their app, often called “Lite version”, that would not include all the features, or restrict them in some ways. They were hoping that consumers would make the switch from the free app to the paid app.

Noticing this trend and the revenue potential it could have, Apple decided in 2009 to thin the line for consumers to make the switch, by allowing free apps to also integrate In-App Purchase (Garner, 2009). Meaning there was no need for Lite apps anymore, as the integrated paid barrier would be the distinction between the two products now being one. That decision from Apple was not unique. Microsoft kept going further with their strategy on Xbox Live, so did Sony and Nintendo, to a certain extent. The MTX and the free games were on the rise on their respective flagship consoles at the time, namely Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and the WII. However, the only platform that had a success like the App Store, was the web.

Facebook played a major role in scaling up the MTX business, thanks to its user base of close to a billion monthly users back in 2012 (Tankovska, 2021). It was possible to find multiple third-party games accessible from Facebook. It was an ideal place, especially for indie games, games that are made by a small developing studio or an independent, to get easy access to many potential customers. Some of the great successes from that era include *Pet Society* by Playfish or the infamous *Farmville* by Zynga. That latest game laid the true foundation for MTX as we know them today. They designed the game in a way to play with multiple psychological factors to drive MTX purchase (Willson and Leaver, 2015). The game itself was simple with barely any strategy or direct competitiveness. The game was simulating the management of a farm, where the user had to take care of plants and animals. Until Farmville, there was barely any example of MTX that involved something else than content or cosmetic.

The *Farmville* innovation was to design the game keeping in mind that if the player had an issue with the gameplay, the studio could also sell the solution to bypass that issue (Dalul, 2021). By doing so, Zynga could sell MTX that would help the players overcome a time barrier or any kind of difficulty. For example, instead of waiting for a crop to grow, the player could

purchase for a few cents, a digital item that would make the crop grow instantly, but only once. Inspired by the success of Farmville, many other games implemented such a process. For example, Facebook's successors to Farmville, *Candy Crush*, would sell, just like at the arcade, a fee for an extra attempt at cracking a specific level, but also power-ups making them easier (Dredge, 2012).

Some games have followed Candy Crush in the freemium business model like League of Legends and Fortnite, two of the most popular games in the world, which only relies on the revenues from cosmetic MTX. Some developers decided to only rely on paid advertising to keep their game free to play. Some games have embraced the paid method, for example, the FIFA saga or the Call of Duty saga. And in some rare cases, like World of Warcraft, games still involve a paid subscription. There are some subtleties that could further describe the gaming business model with more granularity, like Costa Toyama (2019) explained at the Research Workshop on Institutions and Organizations at São Paulo in 2019. But regardless of the business model of the games, the MTX seem to have jumped from being a business model itself, being at the core of the game pricing strategy, to becoming a potential additional revenue stream in any game. It is illustrated by the overwhelming presence of MTX in the top 30 games list which uses very different business models (Superdata, 2021).

Recently, gaming companies have adjusted the way they distribute MTX. Vávra (2020) is describing two of the most recent strategies for monetization. The first is a form of bundle-pricing strategy, under the form of "Season pass". Games are selling access to numerous in-game items that would only be unlocked when the player achieves a certain feat within a certain defined period or "Season", for example reaching a level or playing a certain amount of time. Such a strategy is driving revenue at the same time it sustains the active player base. The second is a "gambling" approach for players to acquire their desired item commonly known as "Loot Boxes". Within these boxes, there are numerous items but only a low probability to get the one the player wants. A situation that would encourage players to purchase more than if they would have had the option to buy their wanted item directly. Noticing the gambling aspect loot boxes includes, some lawmakers have acted which has slightly impacted that revenue strategy in 2020 (Vávra, 2020). Besides these two strategies, there are companies that are looking to further innovate their monetization process. For example, Roblox, which has just completed its IPO for 30 billion USD (estimated), is following Facebook's gaming footsteps in creating a whole universe that mixes social network, gaming, and customization that relies on MTX of IGPC later used for numerous in-game purchases (Nga, 2021).

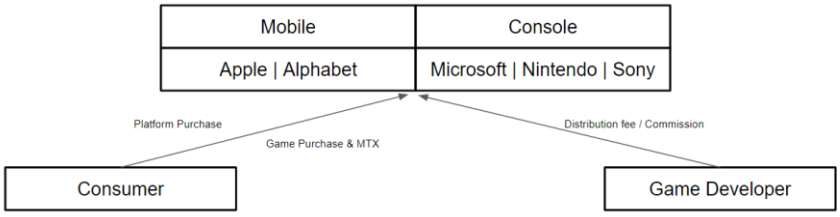
1.4 Industry Landscape

The video game industry has some specificities that make it slightly different from the rest of the consumer industry. It is important to understand these specificities to understand the behavior of the stakeholders.

The video game industry involves more than a consumer and a seller. Derdenger (2010) described the market in 2010 to be an oligopoly directed by the console owner. The market was shared between Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft. These three companies would collect 30% royalties on game developers that would create and sell games on their consoles (Marks, 2020). That model has not changed and neither has this triopoly. It might have further accentuated, as in 2021 Sony told Ryan Browne, a reporter for CNBC, that consoles were sold at a loss (Browne, 2021). This process can only be profitable if the commission taken on game distribution and MTX outweighs the loss on the hardware sale. At the end of 2020, the consoles available on the market are still provided by the same companies as in 2010 (Statista, 2021c). However, the game-changer for the video gaming structure was the emergence of computer gaming and mobile phone gaming.

While the structure remains quite similar, the number of platforms, and thus the number of companies involved has grown. The industry now distinguishes three separate markets within the industry. The first being the console, as described earlier, the second being the PC and the third being the mobile. In the case of mobile gaming, the entity involved as the interface between consumers and sellers is the company owning the app marketplace. The duopoly playing that role is made of Apple Inc. for the *iPhone* marketplace *iStore* and Alphabet Inc., Google parent company, for the android app store *Play Store*. This duopoly has locked the market and takes a standard 30% cut on every transaction for “Service fees”, down to 15% under certain conditions (Leswing, 2020; Google, 2021).

Figure 1 – Game distribution on consoles



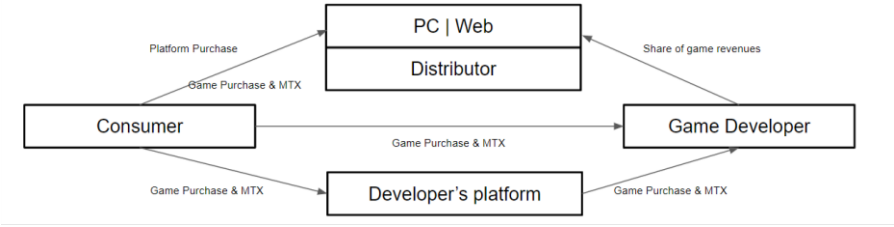
Source: Adapted from Derdenger (2010, p. 6)

The PC market structure is, in theory, very different from the mobile duopoly and console triopoly. The PC market is a competition, as the platform provider, Microsoft, and Apple, do

not charge a competitive fee for playing on their operative systems. Thus, on PC/Web, the access to video game providers can also be direct. AAA studios have their own download platform that showcases their game, allows sales, and provides a touchpoint with the users. For example, Activision Blizzard distributes their game through the battle.net app, Electronic Arts through Origin, or Ubisoft through Uplay. Smaller studio and indie developers only provide direct download of their game from their website. It is the case for Hi-Rez studio with *Paladin* or *Smite*, but also the Chinese behemoth Tencent, that offers his main game *League of Legends* on its respective website.

For developers that are looking for more visibility, digital distribution services such as Steam or GoG provide access to customers for a fee (Valve, 2021a). Additionally, some games are not to be downloaded but to be played within a platform. These web-based games are provided on large platforms such as Facebook and dedicated websites.

Figure 2 – Game distribution on PC



Source: Adapted from Derdenger (2010, p. 6)

While AAA studios, that already enjoy a large customer base and reputation, can choose to avoid distribution platforms, like Blizzard Activision, but others still chose to use them, like Ubisoft even though they own Uplay (Valve, 2021b). Choosing to use these platforms, knowing that they charge between 12% to 30% for distribution, must be worth it somehow (Marks, 2020). It shows the size and importance of the distribution platform. If smaller developers want to gain legitimacy and visibility, they barely have a choice. Even the alternative distribution through physical stores appears to be standardized with the 30% fee (Marks, 2020). However, that solution would not impact the MTX. As a result, the PC market tends to look very similar to the console and mobile one, with only a handful of distributors sharing the market.

It appears that the market is organized around a distribution oligopoly (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013). Joseph (2018) argues that video game studios match monopolistic competition: a context where a lot of firms are competing against each other, but each firm has some degree of market power (Sloman et al.,2016). Among the criteria required to define such a context, firms must have similar but differentiated products (Sloman et al., 2016). This

assumption is relatively intuitive as every video game is different in mechanics and gameplay but similar in genres, such as FPS or MOBA. Other criteria require companies to be profit-driven and have some control over their price, criteria that are matched for capitalistic companies such as the one involved in the video gaming market. Additional criteria require few barriers to enter or exit the market. The requirements to create a game are virtually nonexistent. Software such as *Buildbox* can help one create a game without any knowledge required and 3D engines are easily accessible (Buildbox, 2021; Epic Games, 2021). The last criteria involved having many consumers and sellers. While there might be only a dozen AAA studios, indie developers are numerous (Valve, 2021c).

This monopolistic competition behind games might be challenged by new competitors that can take the spotlight and a share of the market on a buzz. It was recently the case with the surge of *Among Us*, developed by a small 5-men indie company, that jumped from 2.4 million downloads to over 40 million in less than two months (Chapple, 2020). Joseph (2018) states that each consumer has a finite amount of time they can dedicate to video games per week, and thus need to choose which ones they will allocate their time to. Thus, large studios might lose market share to the benefit of smaller companies. Michael Curtis (2019), from consulting firm Ernst & Young, supports that statement when mentioning a “flood of new entrants”, which is already squeezing the gaming studio margins.

1.5 Problem statement

Noticing the past innovation in the monetization strategy for video games, the changes the business models have undergone, the legal framework adjustments, and the growth of the industry, it is safe to assume that there will be an advancement, soon, for video game monetization design (Frost, 2021; Levy 2021). An evolution that will probably exploit MTX further by a deeper understanding of gamer psychology and specific consumer behavior (Howsden, 2019).

For the past two decades, researchers have been specifically looking into game studies with projects such as the Games Studies Organization from Aarseth (2001). Many academicians and students have taken a specific interest in video game monetization and the factors that drive consumption. The analysis drawn on the older papers is less meaningful for understanding today’s gamers' behavior due to the many variables that have evolved beyond the scope of the research. Furthermore, the scientific literature that has recently approached the topic has come up with multiple explanations. Results that coincide with Kotler and Armstrong's (2018) theory on the factors influencing consumer behavior that “Our buying

decisions are affected by an incredibly complex combination of external and internal influences" which includes cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors.

Reports are mainly looking at what impacts the buying decision of MTX or digital content in general. The question of how that decision is processed remains abstract. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) have described a five-stage BDP model that illustrates the states the buyers are going through when considering a purchase. However, these stages might not fit completely within the MTX settings. In this model, the customer is purchasing products and services within a complex competition-based open economy.

However, MTX are happening in a slightly different context. That context looks like a closed economy where MTX are sold by a vendor who has a complete monopolistic position (Lehdonvirta and Hamari, 2010). Even more than a monopole, the vendor has designed the needs the players could have and controls many of the other environmental variables (Lehdonvirta and Hamari, 2010). Furthermore, MTX are offered once the buyer is already a consumer of the game. Meaning that some MTX could be described as captive-products or option products of the main game, an aspect that can potentially impact the purchase behavior (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). For example, the closed economy aspect could directly impact the research of alternatives for the buyer, or the need perceived could be artificially created by implementing a certain problem in the game.

1.6 Research question

Multiple studies have been focusing on game studies and more especially on monetization methods through the lenses of marketing, economics, or psychology (Bercu, 2016; Tomic 2019; Costa Toyam et al, 2019; Duverge, 2016; and others). The literature has described multiple models suggesting factors that could impact purchase from gamers (Lehdonvirta, 2009; Ansari, 2019; Yee 2007; Guo and Barnes 2007, and others). To dig a little deeper into consumer behavior, this research intends to analyze specifically the purchase decision process of gamers when facing MTX. The Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model, which has now become a marketing standard, establishes the guidelines applicable to every product. However, some of the inherent characteristics of MTX, such as the monopolistic aspect of the vendor or the MTX captive aspect, might push the MTX out of the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model. Some of the steps in that model may be skipped or shortened. The theory exposed might not fully be applicable to the MTX context. Therefore, the report will try to answer the following question:

> *"Does the specific buyer decision process of microtransactions fit within the Kotler and Armstrong Buyer Decision Process model?"*

Developers, just like fund managers, have opted for diversification and multiplication of their revenue stream to reduce risks. Drozdov, CEO and founder of the successful game Roblox, said in an interview with CNBC that Roblox was interested in how to accelerate and create a new monetization option for Roblox game developers (Levy, 2021). To back choices on revenue streams, such as the one Roblox is facing, a deep understanding of gamer purchase behavior is needed. Riot Games, publisher of the game League of Legends, is pushing the limits of that understanding, as well as the mechanism for suggesting MTX purchases. That studio is using data scientists, engineers, analysts, and artists that are working with artificial intelligence and data science tools to generate models for understanding MTX consumption and ultimately leverage that understanding for marketing and sales purposes (Howsden, 2019).

Therefore, the aim of the research is to gain deep knowledge on gamers' purchase decision process of MTX. Such knowledge could be leveraged for better game design. A better MTX design could increase the game enjoyability, by not taking the players out of the universe they are interacting with (Valderhaug, 2013), reduce payment annoyance (Svelch, 2017; Zhirkova & Saric, 2020), or just increase consumption (Lehdonvirta, 2009).

1.6.1 Fitness

As described above, the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model is well defined into the five steps. Each step has been individually theorized with defined actions and events that the consumers either do or incur. The model applies to every consumer market and shall thus be applicable to MTX (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Some people however sometimes do not conform with the norm and choose to act with a substantial difference (McLeod, 2016). Some products may also not obey the same rules as every other. For example, Giffen goods or Veblen goods violate the basic laws of offer and demand theories in economics (Masuda and Newman, 1981). The report is aiming at understanding if MTX are violating partially or totally some of the theories included in the model or if they correspond perfectly to them. The study is looking at the fitness of MTX with the model with a holistic approach. Highlighting single behaviors that stand out would not be considered as if MTX do not fit the model.

1.7 Delimitations

Micropayments are not only present in the gaming industry. It is possible to find them in many different digital industries that have adopted the Freemium business model (Kumer, 2014). However, MTX terminology is limited to the video gaming market. Therefore, this research will not investigate other industries such as music, news, or utility apps.

Furthermore, as the research focuses on human behavior, it is possible that repeating the research would yield different results (Ritter, 2015). Also, some of the qualitative data collected could require subjective interpretation (Stiles, 1993). Additionally, the data provided by the buyers can be subject to multiple biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Knowing that playing video games and especially purchasing MTX can be negatively perceived from the social point of view, the main bias might be the desirability one, the idea that a subject will “give socially desirable responses instead of choosing responses that are reflective of their true feelings” (Grimm, 2010). Regarding data, the research has only used the data publicly provided by video game developers and not internal data. Not having this internal data is of no significant importance, as the scope of this study focuses on consumer buying behavior.

2. State of the art

2.1 Key concepts

2.1.1 Buying behavior

The video game market is essentially a consumer market and therefore deals with final consumer behavior. Consumer market and buyer behavior have been theorized and studied extensively. Traditional theories of buyer behavior stipulate that buyer behavior is planned by his intention to act in a certain way, which itself is affected by how the buyer's attitude is shaped, based on different factors (Ajzen, 1991). The literature comes up with very different models that Jisana (2014) reviews. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) provide their model of consumer behavior. They mention that each consumer has a "Black Box", comprising its characteristics and decision process, that processes the environment and outputs the consumer response. The response includes buying attitudes and preferences, brand engagement, and relationships.

With regards to the factors affecting consumer behavior, Jisana (2014) and Kotler and Armstrong (2018) use the same model that distinguishes four categories: Cultural, Social, Personal, and Psychological.

Cultural factors are the most basic cause of wants and behavior. As every individual grows in a society that shapes its values, perceptions, wants, and behavior. Every group or society has a culture and thus cultural influence. Within a culture, there might contain smaller subcultures or groups with shared value systems (Kotler & Armstrong 2018). For example, as Williams et al. (2006) introduced and Shaw (2010) analyzed a gamer culture. However, this does not mean that every customer purchasing a game is part of that sub-culture.

Social factors function in the same way but at a different level according to Kotler and Armstrong (2018). It includes smaller groups, social networks, family, and social roles and status. One of the big factors here is the word-of-mouth influence, especially in the case of new product diffusion such as video game releases (Luan & Neslin, 2009). Other social factors to consider are the opinion leader that may be an influencer, or streamer in the case of video games or social networks.

Personal factors include the buyer's occupation, age and stage, economic situation, lifestyle, personality, and self-concept (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). When people change, get older, the goods and services they consume evolve. Williams et al. (2006) highlighted that, contrary to stereotypes, it is not the teenagers that are the most active consumers of video games but the

people in their thirties. Williams et al. (2008) keep breaking stereotypes in their analysis of gaming consumers with regards to customer gender, income, and motivation.

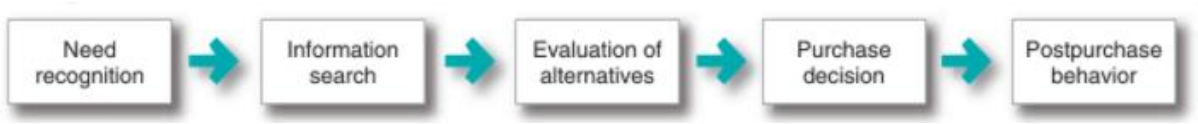
Lastly, in the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model, the psychological factors include motivation, perception, learning, and beliefs and attitude. Their motivation theories rely on the work of psychologists such as Maslow (1943) and other researchers like Solomon (2017). Maslow (1943) attempted to explain why people are driven by a particular need. He arranged the needs in a hierarchy from the most pressing to the least. It started with physiological, then safety, social, esteem, and finally self-actualization as the least pressing need. Maslow's theories are still relevant to understanding consumers, and gaming can answer social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Guo & Barnes, 2009; Fang et al. 2019; Hamari et al., 2020). Social needs are answered by many multiplayer games that are aiming to create interaction between players, either in a cooperative or competitive way or both. Character competency and progression are believed to capture esteem needs (Guo & Barnes, 2009). If the identification with the character played is sufficient, games could potentially answer some self-actualization needs (Turkay, 2016). Perception plays a big role in consumption, as Zhirkova and Saric (2020) highlighted when arguing about the perception of transaction in gaming while using IGPC.

In addition to the four factors described above, consumer's behavior is also impacted by the type of buying. Consumers behave differently when purchasing small items rather than expensive ones (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Consumer involvement and the significant difference between products complexify the buying behavior. In accordance with that statement, Thangasamy and Gautam Patikar (2014) Concluded that the more complex and expensive the purchase, the more involved the buyer deliberations and participants are.

2.1.2 Model from Kotler and Armstrong

There are many attempts to comprehensively describe the whole aspect of the buying process. Teo & Yong (2003) lists the one their creator deemed significant as the Nicosia model, the Howard–Sheth model, and the EBM model. These models are offering deep insights into consumer behavior. Some are deemed to explain the immense complexity of this phenomenon that the human mind otherwise could not entirely grasp (Teo & Yong, 2003). Some models are limited to the BDP itself, like the Kotler & Armstrong (2018), while others, such as R. D. Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, captures some intermediate processes like the need for search (Dickins, 2008). Most models have the same core, a five-stage purchase process, that is taken from the work of J.F. Engel, D.T. Kollat, and R.D. Blackwell in 1968 in New York (Teo and Yong, 2003). Those steps are represented as follows.

Figure 3 – Kotler and Armstrong Buyer Decision Process Model



Source: Kotler & Armstrong (2018, p.175)

Kotler and Armstrong (2018) explained that these steps happened succinctly and are not necessarily consciously achieved. Buyers may go through them rapidly or slowly depending on multiple factors such as the one described earlier. They further highlight that these steps can be skipped or taken in another order. They illustrate this with an example of the regular purchase of toothpaste, during which some customers would skip the information search and the evaluation of alternatives and go straight to the purchase decision once they realize the need. The model is however particularly relevant, as it shows all the considerations that happen when a buyer faces an unseen or complex purchase situation. Additionally, in the context of new products, the buyer is also affected by the adoption process: a mental process that emerges when first learning about the existence of a product until its adoption (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018).

2.1.3 Conclusion

The aim of this first chapter has been to approach the key concepts of the research question. The buying behavior of consumers is an extremely complex process that is impacted by numerous factors (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). In the behavioral studies of consumers, an important aspect is the analysis that looks at how consumers take their purchase decision, which is called the buyer decision process. Kotler and Armstrong's (2018) BDP model is said to be applicable to every purchase. However, there might be an exception to the norm. Therefore, that chapter also defined what it means to deviate from the norm.

Each of the following chapters focuses on a different aspect of the BDP in the context of MTX. They give the theoretical basis of each stage with regards to buyer behavior only and then investigate the specific existing literature that can apply for MTX.

2.2 Need recognition

2.2.1 Theoretical basis

The need recognition is the very first step in any purchase. It can be understood as the identification of need or problem recognition (Khan, 2006). The need is often not the

purchased goods but what it represents. For example, people do not buy a train ticket but the possibility of transportation, people do not buy food, but a solution to hunger. For the same good, there can be many needs, but at least one is needed to kick off the purchase process (Khan, 2006).

The problem recognition comes either from internal or external stimuli (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Blackwell et al. (2006) develop the internal stimuli as a cycle happening in the consumer memory. The exposure can lead to attention, comprehension, acceptance, and even retention. At that point, it is anchored in the memory and can lead to internal stimuli. The external stimuli are any impulse outside of the consumer psyche, such as advertisement or social discussion, that will lead him into recognizing a need (Blackwell et al., 2006). It might be that consumers are not looking for an answer to their problem if it has not reached a certain tension threshold, or even that they are not yet aware of their problem. Marketers should know what kind of needs their product is an answer to. The marketing goal is not only to increase the gap between the actual and desired state but also to increase the tension level where need awareness is ensured (Khan, 2006).

Video games do not escape that theory. There are many needs that could lead to video game purchases. The first question might be why people play in general. Philosophers and scientists have asked that question and speculated for centuries (Johnson et al., 2015).

Amongst the relevant Current Theories of Play, California state university includes the work of Lewin on infantile dynamics, cathartic theory from Freud in 1908, psychoanalytic theory from Buhler and Anna Freud in 1937, and the cognitive theory from Piaget in 1962 (CSUN, 2021).

Williams et al. (2008) have taken research a step further in the direction of video gaming, as they attempted to understand who plays and why. In their work, they debunked the stereotypical gamer profile of isolated teenage males to conclude that both young and old, men and women play at a growing rate. Their explanation is tied to mainstream acceptance of video games, the internet becoming a larger share of everyone's life, and the social aspect rising from multiplayer games. The Entertainment Software Association (2019) published their statistics that support Williams et al. (2008) findings. According to ESA (2019), 65% of American adults play video games and the average age is 33 years old.

With regards to the "why" Williams et al. (2008) based their analysis on the model of Yee (2007). That model lists 10 factors that are pooled into three categories. They are illustrated in the table below.

Table 1 – Yee's categorization of motivation for playing

Achievement	*Social*	*Immersion*
Advancement Progress, Power, Accumulation, Status	**Socializing** Casual Chat, Helping Others, Making Friends	**Discovery** Exploration, Lore, Finding Hidden Things
Mechanics Numbers, Optimization, Templating, Analysis	**Relationship** Personal, Self-Disclosure, Find and Give Support	**Role-Playing** Story Line, Character History, Roles, Fantasy
Competition Challenging Others, Provocation, Domination	**Teamwork** Collaboration, Groups, Group Achievements	**Customization** Appearances, Accessories, Style, Color Schemes
		Escapism Relax, Escape from Real Life, Avoid Real-Life Problems

Source: Yee (2007, p. 773)

Yee (2007) used qualitative data from 3000 respondents of an open-ended survey to expand on the existing inventory of motivation items and found motivation components that he would classify into three groups: Achievement, social, and immersion. Achievement highlights the desire of the player to win, whether it is against the game itself or other players. Social motivation regroups the desire of players to form long-term meaningful relationships with others based on a common interest. Immersion supports the interest of gamers to fully embrace the digital universe, identify themselves with the character they play and interact with the story that they are now a part of (Yee, 2007). Condon (2011) reported a conversation with Dr. Przybylski on immersion in which he states that the players are not escaping from something but towards their ideals. If those 3 groups help understand the motivation of play in online games, then the results could potentially extend to the consumption of MTX, which are often part and parcel of the game.

Boyle et al. (2011) review additional theories that deal with the same "why" question. Boyle's work started highlighting the fact that the motives for playing games are under-researched. Based on generic motivational theory from Deci and Ryan (1985), research shows that the need for challenge and the freedom to act in a virtual environment was essential to game enjoyment, and so is the player's presence. Chou and Tsai (2007) found that games were used essentially to answer the need for entertainment, knowledge, and socialization but also to fill time, or to avoid boredom (Boyle et al., 2011). All games are not equal in terms of the needs they mainly address. Sports games answer priorly to gratification and identification (Kim and Ross, 2006), multiplayer games to socializing (Suznjevic and Matijasevic, 2010), and RPG to achievement and immersion (Klimmt et al.,2009). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, customers are not all looking to answer the same need. Eglesz et al. (2005) showed that 10-

14 children were more likely to play to answer a need for sensation seeking and emotional release.

Consumption of games and MTX is probably not the same, as Lehdonvirta (2005) concluded. Research that has been looking specifically at MTX has yielded additional findings. Some researchers have attempted to answer the same question as William et al. (2018) asked about video games but in focusing on MTX, namely who the consumers of MTX are, and why are they purchasing them. Among the consumers playing video games, Guo & Barnes (2009) found that 83% of gamers were purchasing MTX at least once in their life. More recent studies found that the share of gamers consuming MTX is largely varying between games (Statista, 2021a), but overall, only 5.8% of gamers do not purchase MTX at all (Qutee, 2018). One explanation behind that consumption might be given by Yoo (2015) who suggests that the enjoyment of playing a game can be increased through the purchase of in-game items.

2.2.2 MTX attributes

Lehdonvirta (2009) described the attributes of virtual items that are acting as purchase drivers. He lists three main attributes in his study: Functional, Hedonic, and Social. There are further detailed in the following table:

Table 2 – Lehdonvirta microtransactions consumption drivers

Functional attributes	Performance
	Functionality
Hedonic attributes	Visual appearance and sounds
	Background fiction
	Provenance
	Customizability
	Cultural references
	Branding
Social Attributes	Rarity

Source: adapted from Lehdonvirta (2009, p. 110)

Firstly, the functional attributes are represented by an increase in performance or provide new functions, convenience, or gameplay options, which depends on the context of each game (Lehdonvirta, 2009). Games almost always imply a challenge or a difficulty that must be addressed. The MTX can provide an advantage in facing that challenge. The rationale is that

a faster car is more valuable than a slow one in a racing game, a sharp sword better than a blunt one or a hint will help you solve a puzzle. Yoo (2015) insisted that the competency of a player over others holds a social aspect. An aspect that is strengthened if there is a notion of competition in the game (Vorderer et al., 2003). While the functional attributes might be the most visible drivers of real money, it has had mixed reactions from consumers. For games that imply multiplayer competition, paying real money to get an advantage is not welcomed (Alamguer, 2018). It might even decrease the player's status in his community and reduce his enjoyment (Evers et al., 2015). According to Qutee (2018), 22% of respondents clearly stated that they disliked the advantage one gets from real money, while 68 % highlighted that MTX are ok if it is cosmetic (as opposed to advantageous). At that point, it is worth mentioning that some players feel thrilled about having advantages for real money and are willing to spend enormous sums to be the best (Robertson, 2020). These players are called *Whales* and are sometimes at the heart of the monetization strategy. In some cases, 10% of gamers account for 90% of the game revenue (Slice, 2016).

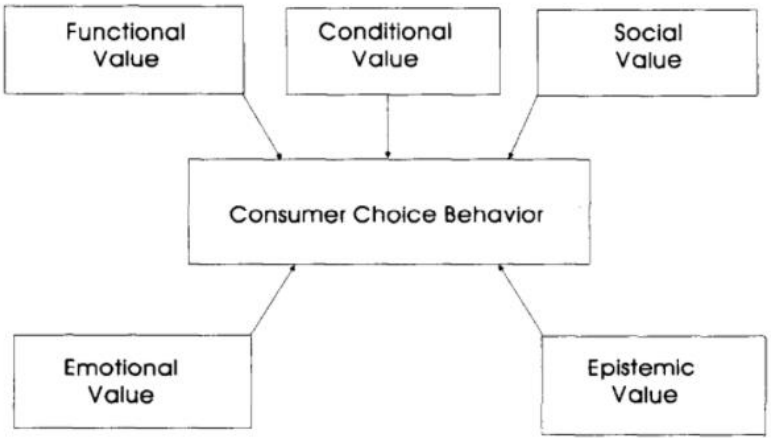
Secondly, the hedonic attributes play a major role in gamer identification and immersion (Valderhaug, 2013). Lehdonvirta (2009) stated that for the gamer to experience hedonistic pleasure from the MTX the aesthetic aspect must be sufficiently compelling. Wohn (2014) affirmed that the hedonic attributes are heavily related to social belonging and social influence, they affect the player's vanity, hence the terminology commonly used of *vanity items*. Turkay (2016) concluded in her research that customization is essential to identification and game enjoyment. Therefore, the additional customization offered by MTX is achieving the same goal.

Thirdly, the rarity aspect can also be directly tied to vanity. The more expensive an MTX is, the fewer people are willing to buy it according to basic offer and demand laws. Therefore, that specific in-game item will be scarcer. It can be the case, as Lehdonvirta (2009) exemplified, that a virtual item has low performance, functionality, and no aesthetic value, but players are willing to spend hundreds of dollars on it, just because it is rare. For example, owning the Scarab Lord in *World of Warcraft*, an item owned only by less than 0.01% of players that provide no additional performance nor valuable aesthetic, is valued at over 5000 Euros on the resale market (Safepoint, 2021).

2.2.3 Consumption value factors

Other research that has investigated the factors leading to the need for digital items has been based on the theory of consumption values from Sheth et al. (1991). Their model states that there are five factors that drive consumers. This model is represented as followed:

Figure 4 – Theory of Consumption Values



Source: Sheth et al. (1991, p. 159)

The Sheth et al. (1991) model relies on three axioms which stipulates that it can be a mix of multiple values; the values make differential contributions, and the consumption values are independent. Each of the values is an answer to one or multiple needs (Van Berlo & Liblik, 2016).

The functional value of MTX is the utility that is perceived to possess on in-game criteria salient to its physical or functional purposes (Van Berlo & Liblik, 2016). Ho and Wu (2012) concluded that the consumers were mostly driven by the functional qualities of virtual items. The needs answered by the functional value are the higher level of confidence, achievement, growth, and adequacy (Van Berlo & Liblik, 2016).

The conditional value is a variable value that an item has in a different set of circumstances. The common examples in MTX are the seasonal goods of winter festivities that players would likely try to acquire during the winter season but that makes less sense using them outside that period of the year. Attending a virtual event such as a wedding creates the social need of belonging and thus requires to virtually dress up (Ducheneaut et al., 2009). Specific circumstances create specific needs for the player.

The social value is “derived from the association with one or more distinctive social groups” (Sheth et al., 1991). The association can be positive or negative, as shown in Evers et al.'s (2015) analysis of the hidden costs of MTX which can decrease a player’s status in a social group. Yee (2007) agrees that social influence plays a role in MTX consumption, especially when players engage in MTX to socialize, build relationships, and improve teamwork. Ho and Wu (2012) and Wohn's (2014) results also support that statement. The social needs answered are often, but not only, the affiliation and group belonging (Maslow 1943).

The emotional value is obtained from any emotion, feelings, or affective states (Sheth et al. 1991). Guo and Barnes (2007) made the argument that there is a positive correlation between enjoyment and purchase intention of MTX. They further argued that purchasing MTX is solely a hedonic process, aiming for playfulness and enjoyment. It is in that aspect that marketers tend to play as they aim to appeal to the emotions of the consumers to create desire (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

The last value, the epistemic, is "derived from its capacity to provide novelty, arouse curiosity, and/or satisfy knowledge-seeking aspirations" (Sheth et al., 1991). New experiences and events provide epistemic value. In video games, it is often focused on creating adventures and original experiences for the players. On that subject, Hamari & Lehdonvirta (2010) mention that MTX are a unique content in games that offers the player the opportunity to experience new content. It is probably the immersive aspect of the game that mostly affects the epistemic value. The new content, such as game expansion, is mostly answering the need for thrill-seeking, discovery, and new experiences, which appeals to the epistemic value at first.

2.2.4 Game Design

The marketers aim at controlling as many variables in the environment as possible, to only leave the buyer's black box the unknown variable in the equation (Kotler and Armstrong., 2018). In that idea, MTX offer them a special advantage as they happen within a setting that marketers can play with, control, and which feeds them crucial data on the consumers. Hamari and Lehdonvirta (2010) wrote:

> *"When designing a virtual world, its rules and internal economy can be regarded as marketing activities concerned with creating the underlying needs and conditions for customers to become incentivised to buying virtual goods." (Hamari and Lehdonvirta, 2010, 17)*

Later, Lehdonvirta and Castronova (2014) would affirm that virtual economies are not a classic market where a buyer or a seller and prices emerge freely from their interaction. Publishers act as the sole supplier of money within that economy. It is a monopole that no one else can challenge (Lehdonvirta and Castronova, 2014).

According to textbook economics, the optimal theoretical market is the perfect competition where the optimal situation is guided by an invisible hand (Smith, 1759), which is not the case of virtual economies that are regulated and designed by the publisher, continues Lehdonvirta and Castronova (2014). In theory, efficiency could be easily achieved in a virtual world, but instead, the main objectives of game developers are to provide content, attract and retain players, and maximize revenues. Those objectives are easier to reach in an unfree market

even though these objectives might be to the detriment of the buyer's satisfaction (Mas-Colell et al., 1995).

Lehdonvirta and Castronova (2014) came up with different market designs that achieve different goals like a market structure for fun that optimize playfulness and enjoyment or the market structure for monetization that looks for revenue yield. With the market structure for monetization, the monopoly is the one that yields the highest revenue from a given set of content. Monopoly is thus the obvious choice. It can be an option at that point, to allow players to create a secondary market of these goods. It can be even profitable if that secondary market increases the main one rather than cannibalizes it which can be evaluated and affected by game design (Lehdonvirta and Castronova, 2014). Oh and Ryu (2007) suggested having a balance between the two markets and building synergies between them. Another option could also be to profit directly from the secondary market by playing the role of market maker, like in the example of the Steam platform that offers an exchange for the sale and purchase of in-game virtual goods, on which takes a five percent commission (Valve, 2021d).

Game design is not only about market structure, but it can also be about creating needs. Dalul (2021) stated with the example of *Farmville* that the game studio created a problem for games to which they also sold the solution. That process has been further exploited, especially in puzzle games. The puzzle games often offer hints or solutions to help the player pass a level on which he is stuck. If gamers engage in MTX to socialize, build relationships, and improve teamwork, as mentioned earlier by Yee (2007), Ho and Wu (2012), and Wohn (2014), then games can be designed to encourage socialization and teamwork to accentuate that aspect. It might also be the case that game design ties enjoyment with winning in a competition setting, which is the concept behind pay-to-win games. If the game design is accepted by the player base it can yield the highest return. It was the example of *Game of War*, a pay-to-win mobile game that had an average spending per player on MTX of 550 USD in the game's lifetime (Slice, 2016). Oh and Ryu (2007) suggest further advice for game design to drive revenues such as having cosmetic items permanent but functional items consumable and having specific events and communities MTX, which is supported by Ducheneaut et al. (2009) results. Additionally, game design is about creating an experience for the player, explains Ansari (2019). Ansari's research further claims that the more the designer understands, the more natural the MTX would feel to players thanks to better implementation and game design. Publishers can push MTX to their target audience if it is tailored correctly but it must never come at the cost of the game experience, which would ultimately hurt the game revenues (Ansari, 2019).

2.2.5 Conclusion

Need recognition happens at the start of the process and can come from internal or external sources (Blackwell et al., 2006). Yee's (2007) categorization of motivation for playing is the first model that can possibly apply to MTX. That model lists eleven needs applicable to the thematics of achievement, socialization, and immersion. Lehdonvirta's (2009) study has a similar aim as Yee's but looks specifically at MTX consumption drivers. The results are three major attributes: functional, hedonic, and social. Other theories, like the consumption valuation theory (Sheth et al., 1991) seem applicable to MTX as used in previous MTX studies. The chapter ends by highlighting that needs can be triggered artificially by intentional game design (Ansari, 2019; Lehdonvirta and Castronova, 2014).

2.3 Information

2.3.1 Theoretical basis

The second step in the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model is the information search. In that phase, the consumer may or may not search for information on the product. If the need is strong and there is an immediately available product that would almost certainly satiate that need, then there would probably be no information search. If it is not the case, the consumer may store that specific need in his memory for a later point or initiate his research promptly (Blackwell et al. 2006, Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Furthermore, the research is heavily impacted by the type of consumer product. A convenience product, that is often cheap, will require far less research than a specialty product that is often more expensive (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018).

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), consumers can obtain information from any of the personal (friends and family), commercial (advertising, salespeople, websites, display), public (Media, rating organization, online review), and experiential sources (examining and testing the product). They further highlight that traditionally, the bulk of the information is given and controlled by the marketers. The commercial source plays the role of informing while the personal source has the power to legitimize or evaluate products on behalf of the consumers. Thus, the most effective information source driving purchase tends to be personal. It is important to notice that personal contact has shifted towards digital contact. Sharing opinions, images, and experiences freely on social media has been increasingly popular (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). However, Moon (2004) argues that the decision to use online channels rather than offline discussions highly depends on the context of the purchase.

The purpose of information is to raise more awareness and knowledge on the products. The information search also helps to discover new products and brands or to drop others that do not fit the criteria. The information can however be stored in the consumer's memory for a later decision process (Blackwell et al., 2006).

Teo and Yeong's (2003) research contrasts the perceived benefits of search and perceived risks. They highlight a tradeoff between the benefit gathered from the information search, such as the money saved or better product found, with the relative cost of search, that includes time, money, effort spent in the frame of the search (Khan, 2006). The benefits of the search refer to the perceived benefits expected, including price reductions, obtaining the most desired model, and the additional satisfaction it would provide. As mentioned earlier, the information search is not a necessary step. The research is driven by how a consumer perceives the unreliability of his choice in a particular setting, his risk aversion, and the involvement in the product category. The risk factor, which is a very individual variable, is likely to impact the search decision, especially in the online frame. It relates to the odds that any loss can occur, for example in terms of quality, after-sale service, or simply non-delivery. Such risk perception can be tied to the reliability and credibility of the seller (Teo and Yeong, 2003).

2.3.2 In the context

As mentioned in the theoretical basis, the purpose of information search includes discovering new brands and products. However, MTX are happening in a closed environment that does not allow third-party sales (Lehdonvirta and Castronova, 2014). Therefore, the search for alternatives brands and products cannot take place. In certain game shops, especially the one selling cosmetics, there might be alternative products that consumers can look at and compare with one another, which is not the case of puzzle hints or game boost. This can also be the case that products are not sold in real currency but digital ones. The first purchase for the consumer shall be to acquire IGPC which can be dissociated from the ultimate desired product (Zhirkova and Saric, 2020). According to the agreed definition of MTX, the purchase of IGPC is the MTX, because it is a service for real money. The subsequent purchase of a product with the IGPC is not, as it does not involve real money anymore.

Regarding the source for information, the 2019 ESA's report relates that gamers are considering particular means when considering a purchase (Hardware, software, and accessories). YouTube had the best success by being voted useful by 39% of respondents, peer review 30%, professional reviews 29%, and streaming 20% (ESA, 2019). Additionally, Foster (2020) highlights that streaming influences purchase intention by being a credible and reliable source of information.

There seems however that no particular study is showing results for MTX specifically. As a matter of fact, there seems to be a gap in the literature on the subject. An explanation for that might be that the step is skipped for consuming such products. Indeed, MTX could be associated with convenience products due to their low price, convenient locations, and mass promotion. Therefore, needing low planning, comparison, or research (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). However, research has been looking at some factors that affect the information search (Bercu, 2016; Oh and Ryu, 2007; Chuang, 2015).

Bercu (2016) explores the link between engagement in a video game and MTX consumption. In his finding, he highlights that “engagement drives monetization” and that there is no game with low engagement that has high revenues (Bercu, 2016). Engagement with a brand goes through loyalty and deeper knowledge of the brand (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Therefore, a customer that is highly engaged with the brand is more likely to have deeper knowledge. Therefore, it can be deduced that information search can be tied with MTX consumption.

Oh and Ryu (2007) suggests with regards to information search that video games should not be giving specific details to the customers. Providing vague explanations of the performance of digital items, like approximate descriptive texts instead of exact numbers, can increase consumption (Oh and Ryu, 2007). That suggestion is contested by Chuang (2015) who applies the certain effect hypothesis to the video game MTX. He states that customers who face multiple options will choose the one with a certain outcome (Chuang, 2015).

2.3.3 Conclusion

Information search is a step that is crucial to make rational decisions but that can also be ignored by consumers if it is found to be irrelevant for customers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). The MTX are simple products by design with little information to gather. The absence of literature on the subject can be evidence supporting the idea that customers of MTX are skipping the information gathering step.

2.4 Alternatives

2.4.1 Theoretical basis for evaluation

In Kotler and Armstrong's (2018) theories, the evaluation for alternatives stages consists of the way consumers process information gathered in the previous phase to choose among alternative brands. A brand is defined as a name, term, sign, symbol, or design that identifies the products or services of one seller and differentiates them from those of competitors. Consumers do not use the same process in every situation and those are not always rational,

and logic-based. In some cases, consumers do careful calculations and sometimes little to no evaluation at all (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). On that point, literature does not provide a definitive answer. It is not clear if evaluation is skipped or not. Even in the case of routine purchase an impersonal attitude might be involved as Bettman (1982) studied.

Kotler and Armstrong (2018), continue stating that when evaluating the different options, consumers are focusing on various attributes. Buyers accord different values to each attribute. For example, the price might be more important for someone than performance or style, but it might be the other way around for someone else. Marketers are studying these attributes and ponder to market their products more efficiently to consumers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018).

2.4.2 In the context

It was established in the information search that consumers would not be able to find different brands due to the monopolistic aspect of the MTX in-game sales (Lehdonvirta and Hamari, 2010). As a result, the evaluation of alternatives cannot take place unless the game itself is opening its market to third-party developers to sell MTX in their game. Pricing strategies also have a role to play in this lack of alternatives, for example in the case of Loot-boxes that suppress alternatives. There might be the case that the game offers alternative ways to get a specific item, like playing a high amount of time or pay for it, but this is not an evaluation of alternatives as defined in this stage of the process (Guo and Barnes, 2007).

2.4.3 Conclusion

Like the information step, the research for alternative steps does not appear to enjoy specific literature. As Kotler and Armstrong (2018) stipulate, this step can also be ignored. The monopolistic aspect of the vendors allowing no other brands to compete in its closed economy might be at issue here (Lehdonvirta and Hamari, 2010).

2.5 Decision

2.5.1 Theoretical basis

In Kotler and Armstrong's (2018) theory, the result of the evaluation process is that the consumer has ranked the products and has formed a purchase intention. Generally, the consumer will buy the most preferred brand. However, factors can alter the jump from purchase intention to purchase decision. Among these factors, 2 main categories have emerged: The attitude of others and the unexpected situational factors. The social factors that have been known to affect the purchase process also affect this phase. For example, if

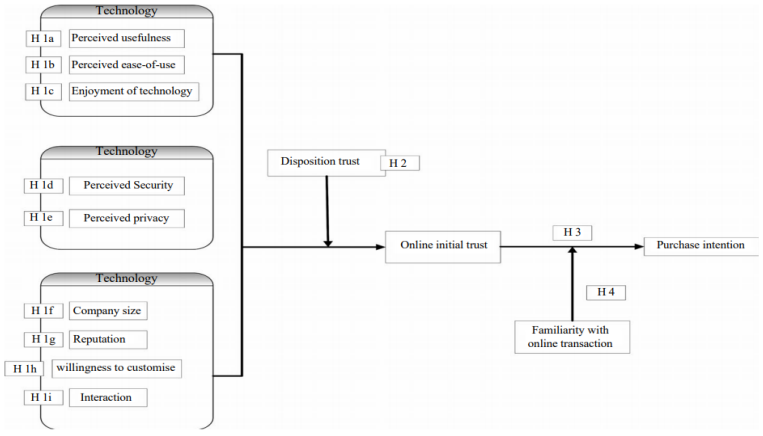
someone whom the consumer trusts advises him to take an option rather than another one, then the intent might change. Regarding unexpected factors, there is an immense range, proper to each consumer, that can unexpectedly change or interrupt the process. These factors can be personnel or global (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018).

2.5.2 Purchase

At that point, the consumer is weighing the information he has with the trust he has towards the seller. It is especially the case for digital stores. David et al. (1989) came up with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), based on an already existing model. In its model, they described that users have two core beliefs, the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, that will define their individual behavior towards a technology usage (David et al., 1989). That model has been used extensively in gaming and MTX studies (Guo and Xi, 2011; Guo and Barnes, 2007; Hsu and Lu, 2004; Rong et al, 2017) and e-commerce (Caetano, 2017).

Guo and Barnes (2007) however argued that the individual behavior in the TAM model cannot always define the behavioral intention. Pre-cognitive dissonance and external factors, like social or system quality, can alter the individual behavior. Regarding pre-cognitive dissonance, they highlight that even though a customer might dislike MTX or use virtual items, he might still engage with them to improve their digital persona competence (Guo and Barnes, 2007). On technological acceptance, Chen, and Barnes (2007) explore in-depth the initial trust given to an online seller. They found that multiple factors impact it. Among them, they list perceived usefulness, perceived security, perceived privacy, good reputation, and willingness to customize as such factors. They conclude by stating that “both initial trust and familiarity with online purchasing have a positive impact on the purchase intention”. (Chen and Barnes, 2007).

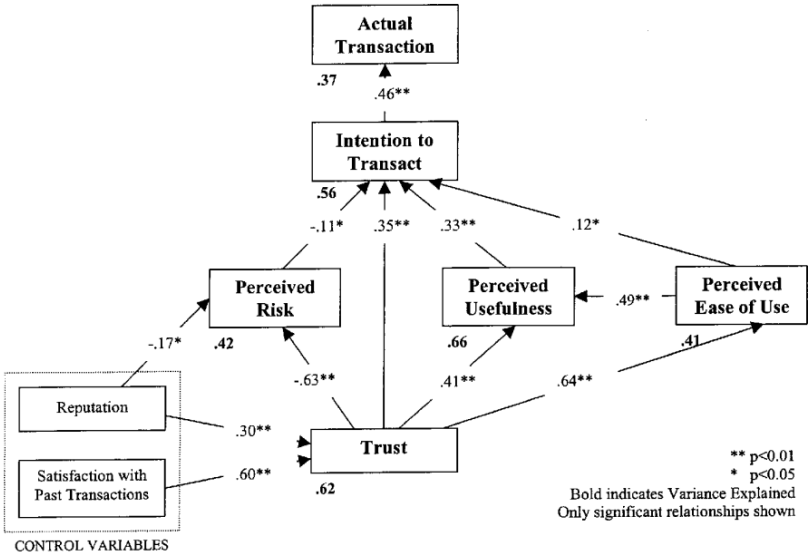
Figure 5 – Chen and Barnes Model



Source: Chen and Barnes (2007, p.26)

Pavlou (2003) also looked at the role of trust on the intent to transact in electronic commerce. For him, trust is a factor of reputation and satisfaction from previous transactions. In his studies, he calculated, using the Partial least squares regression (PLS) method, the trust contribution which explains 35% of the intention to transact. Other factors such as perceived risk (11%), perceived usefulness (33%), and perceived ease of use (12%) contribute to explain most of the intention to transact (Pavlou, 2003).

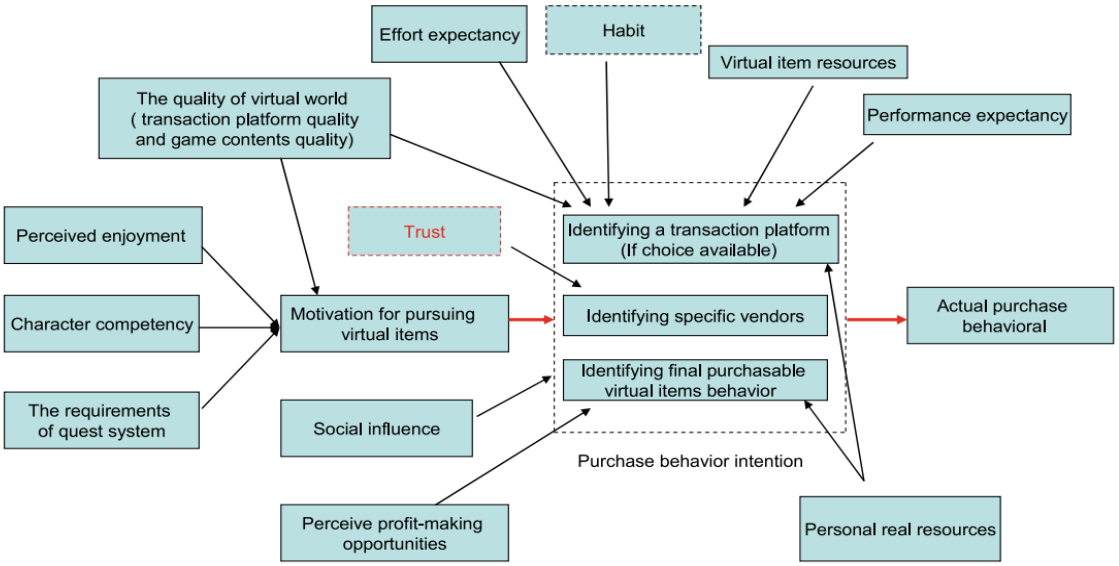
Figure 6 – Pavlou's Model



Source: Pavlou (2003, p.122)

Guo and Barnes (2007) came up with their model of consumer behavior for MTX. In which, they add additional criteria specific to the MTX purchase process. Specifically, regarding the intention, they investigated three themes as part of the intention pattern. The first theme explores the motivations for pursuing virtual items, whose results would be supported by Yee (2005) and later by Lehdonvirta (2009). The second theme focuses on understanding how players pick an appropriate channel to obtain the wanted virtual items. The third theme looks at how gamers are identifying specific vendors (if available) and which virtual item to purchase. They further illustrated the results, as shown below, with three categories: identifying a transaction platform, if there is any choice available, identifying specific vendors, and identifying final purchasable virtual items behavior (Guo and Barnes, 2007).

Figure 7 – Guo and Barnes Model



Source: Guo and Barnes (2007, p.92)

2.5.3 Price factor

As for every purchase, to be considered, there must be a willingness to buy which is linked to the spending power of the customer (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Artz and Kitcheos, (2016) add that for an MTX to be considered for purchase, it must be able to save time and money, which they call the perceived cost-effectiveness of the digital product in question. For example, they refer to Yoo (2015) who stated that an item that can help the player complete a task faster without exceeding the price equivalent will have a higher cost of effectiveness. (Artz and Kitcheos, 2016). Interestingly, even though one critical aspect that defines an MTX is the low price, there are, to the best of the author's knowledge, no studies that highlight the low price as one of the factors for driving consumption. However, basic economics theories of offer and demand would highlight that a product sold at a low price would attract a higher demand than an expensive one. Regarding price, ultimately MTX are only a question of perceived value for the money. It is worth mentioning at that point that video games use many marketing price strategies to impact price perception, such as bundle pricing, which includes the season pass model, price decoy, loot boxes but most of all, price illusion through digital currencies. Indeed, as Zhirkova and Saric (2020) explained, customers are more likely to spend money through digital currencies than local currencies. The main explanation for that effect resides in virtual currencies being a pain cushion when paying and are more immersive into the game flow. However, customers have a better understanding and recollection of their current balance in real currency than in virtual one (Zhirkova and Saric, 2020).

2.5.4 Conclusion

The purchase intent is transformed into a decision if no factors impact the intent in a major way (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). The final decision is a result of numerous factors. In that decision, Chen, and Barnes (2007) highlight the importance of trust in the vendor and technology. Artz and Kitcheos (2016) add that MTX purchase decision relates to the perceived cost-effectiveness of the desired product. The seller is attempting to bias the perceived value of MTX through various techniques such as using digital currencies or making the game harder on purpose to value MTX (Zhirkova and Saric, 2020; Dalul, 2021). The model from Guo and Barnes (2007) is adding factors specifically relevant to MTX, such as character competency, enjoyment, or virtual item resources.

2.6 Post-purchase

2.6.1 Theoretical basis

The purchase process does not end when the product is bought. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), after the purchase, the consumer will experience either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. They call that phase the post-purchase behavior. The satisfaction level lies within the gap between the consumer's expectations and the product's perceived performance when consumed. The larger the gap, the larger the satisfaction will be felt, negatively if the expectation outweighs the perceived performance or positively in the opposite case. Intuitively, that means that product marketing shall only reflect the performance that can be delivered. On the one hand, satisfaction is a key factor to drive customers to loyalty for the producer's product, which in turn encourages them to spread word of mouth and improve the global perception of the product. On the other hand, dissatisfied customers are also likely to spread word of mouth, but in a negative way, thus affecting the purchase process of other potential customers during their purchase decision process (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Satisfaction is also impacted by the entire purchase process as Tanner (1996) highlighted, for example, it can be that the way the seller sells impacts customer satisfaction.

2.6.2 Negative perception of microtransactions

According to multiple researchers and the global feeling while looking at gamer discussion, the largest part of the gaming community has a very negative attitude towards MTX. (Tomic, 2019; Almaguer, 2018; Svelch, 2017; Evers et al., 2015). Such an attitude could indicate a global dissatisfaction towards MTX. However, the share of people consuming MTX has been rising (Guo and Barnes, 2008; Qutee, 2018). This can only exist if a share of the market engages in MTX with cognitive dissonance.

An explanation behind that situation is proposed by King and Delfabbro (2018), Neely (2018), and Svelch (2017) who accused the gaming industry of selling predatory MTX. Processes, like loot box and season pass, have similar traits as gambling in which the consumer is engaged in a vicious circle that he cannot fight. This is reinforced by the monopolistic aspect of MTX and the IGPC systems (Zhirkova and Saric, 2020). However, Laurisjen (2013) disputes the fact that MTX are not impacting consumer satisfaction. In his conclusion, he stipulated that there “no support for the hypothesis that micro-transactions could be detrimental for the satisfaction of players”. The satisfaction is tied to whether the gamer wins or loses but not with the way it was done. In other words, winning by buying or with pure skill has no impact on satisfaction. Therefore, he concludes that MTX are not detrimental to the satisfaction of the consumer towards the game (Laurisjen, 2013).

2.6.3 Conclusion

The last step happens after the purchase and exists due to a gap between the consumer's expectations and the product's perceived performance, either positive (satisfaction) or negative (dissatisfaction) (Kottler and Armstrong, 2018). MTX seems to mainly generate dissatisfaction. At the same time, MTX's popularity is rising. The monopolistic position of the vendor could partially explain that paradoxical relation (Zhirkova and Saric, 2020).

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodological approach

The research problem is based on a human behavioral issue. This paper aims at gaining an in-depth understanding of the consumer behavior of MTX. For that purpose, to mainly explore the why of the consumer purchase process, qualitative research yields more granularity and knowledge, as quantitative research omits some aspects such as the motivation of the respondents (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). However, some of the data will be acquired through quantitative methods. Addressing both qualitative and quantitative together is a mixed methodology (Cresswell, 2015). This approach assumes the researcher will combine the statistical trends with personal experiences, which collectively provide a more global appreciation to the data than either of these methods taken separately (Cresswell, 2015). Mixed methods strength lies in the combination of the data type. The mixed methodology is pragmatic and helps answer the research question by allowing statistical and content analysis (Tashakkori and Newman, 2010). The research will rely mostly on primary data to reach its conclusion, by getting directly to consumers to understand their behavior and thoughts. Some secondary data offered by gaming companies and specialized companies will be used to corroborate or infirm the primary data.

The research has taken an inductive approach. It starts with an observation and then collects data to explore and gain more understanding. A pattern can emerge from the observations, which can lead to a theory (Dudovskiy, 2018). The inductive approach requires a substantial amount of data relevant to the topic of interest. For that purpose, qualitative methods are often better-suited thanks to their exploratory aspect (Dudovskiy, 2018). Therefore, with regards to the research design, the framework that will be used for this report will be exploratory research. The exploratory design is chosen for its flexibility and evolving approach. That design could capture the complexity of the issue the research is analyzing.

3.2 Research method

The primary data collection will consist of two different steps. The first will be a survey of both close-ended and open-ended questions. The goal is to measure multiple variables such as the criteria the gamer considers when deciding to purchase or not the MTX and the feelings he felt during that process, before and after. The structure of the questionnaire follows the five steps of the purchase decision process.

The objective is to reach a representative customer base of the video game industry. Those customers are exposed to various game genres and platforms to get a full representation of the market and thus reduce sampling bias (Panzeri et al, 2008). The survey was initially distributed online through social media channels and has reached further respondents thanks to word of mouth. The fundamental criteria to participate in the survey is to have played video games and been exposed at least once to MTX but not necessarily engaged with. Therefore, the survey will be posted on a gamer community network such as *Discord* forums. Consumers who have knowledge of a product but chose to not purchase are critical for the market understanding thanks to their different behavior (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). To capture this alternative behavior, the survey's first questions will funnel the respondents to two different versions. The first alternative for consumers of MTX accounts 39 questions assessing each of the five steps and a complete gamer profile. The second alternative consists of six questions deep-diving into the reasons for not purchasing MTX and a smaller customer profile.

The survey has been distributed both in English and French to be more largely accessible. This translation might increase the comprehension of the subject by the respondents, who would then answer more accurately.

The second step undertaken for primary data collection will be interviewing. This research is preferring in-depth individual interviews over focus groups to limit group bias and desirability bias due to the group effect (Larson, 2019). The author will hand-pick respondents to the survey based on their answers. The goal is to conduct a dozen of interviews with a representative sample of the respondents. The sample must be cross-gender, include different geographical locations and age groups. These in-depth interviews will follow a questioning line (Appendix 4) aiming at understanding unclear answers, developing further the shorter ones, comprehending possible contradictions, and investigating outlying answers. In other words, the interviews will be conversations, in which the researcher will be asking a pre-established line of open questioning and mostly be listening to the participants. The objective is to extract much insight into the participant's thought process during his purchasing MTX. As the primary research will be conducted during the COVID-19 restricting period, face-to-face interviews might be difficult to organize. However, as many gamers are digital savvy, conducting interviews online will be easily achievable and, thanks to their experience in digital communication, not too damageable to the interview quality.

For anonymity purposes, all respondent’s names or pseudonyms will be replaced by their respondents' ID. The latter will be automatically assigned upon survey completion.

3.3 Methods of analysis

To analyze the data that will be collected in the survey and the interviews, the report will be using multiple methods. For the quantitative aspect, statistical analysis will be preferred (Derek and Warren, 2020). For the qualitative aspect, the report will favor thematic analysis (Depetris-Chauvin, 2020). The interview recording will be transcribed in writing with fidelity. Then, if needed, both interviews transcript and survey responses will be translated from their original language into English.

Regarding quantitative data, they might be non-standardized and thus require processing to obtain the desired state for analysis (Depetris-Chauvin, 2020). The ideas expressed by the respondents will be categorized by the themes and then organized by semantic groups. The most recurrent and relevant themes, opinions, statements will be highlighted for further analysis. It is only after the key themes got pointed up that the connection between theory and data would be established.

To safeguard quality during the study, the participants will be encouraged to be honest and transparent. For that same purpose, the interviews will be a follow-up to the survey aiming at clarifying ambiguous answers and reducing vagueness. Furthermore, for the survey and line of questioning write-up, the author will attempt to ask the questions as neutrality as possible, in order not to influence the results obtained and with the most accuracy.

4. Results

All the results and related graphs below are originating from the primary research done within the scope of this report by the author unless specified otherwise. The data are issued from the survey and the interviews. The final sample of research consists of 711 respondents worldwide who completed the survey entirely. There were 617 (87%) respondents who were consumers of MTX and thus picked the first version of the survey. Such results are in accordance with (Guo & Barnes, 2009). There were 80 (11%) respondents who were gamers but not consumers of MTX and thus answered the second version of the survey. Finally, the author had to discard 14 (2%) forms for not having any awareness of gaming or providing incoherent answers. Those answers could otherwise negatively affect the results. Among the population size of 2.7 billion, 697 respondents represent a satisfying sample size for a confidence level of 95% with less than a 5% error margin (Glenn, 1992). A third of the respondents answered in French. The French surveys' answers have been translated with fidelity and merged with the rest of the data in English.

Among the surveyees, 290 people have left their contact details for interviewing purposes. The author has contacted 14 people based on their answers and profile. Ultimately, 8 interviews have been possible. These interviews have been then used for analyzing the survey data of other similar respondents. The interviews have been transcribed with fidelity and available in appendix 6. The French interviews were not translated unless quoted directly in the report.

To reduce the impact of the model boundaries on the respondents, which could have introduced an additional bias, the survey was only divided into pre-purchase events, the purchase decision, and the post-purchase reasoning. Even though the answers could be assigned back into Kotler and Armstrong's (2018) BDP model, the results presentation structure will reflect the primary research structure.

4.1 Profile

Most respondents being male is in accordance with US data from Statista (2020a) and slightly above the 2017 report from Newzoo (Newzoo, 2017). Proportionally, women seem to be more willing to purchase MTX than men. Indeed, the ratio of men/women switched from 68%/28% for consumers to 75%/23% for non-consumers.

Table 3 – Gender distribution

Gender	Consumer		Not Consumer		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Man	419	68%	60	75%	479	69%
Woman	175	28%	18	23%	193	28%
Nobinary	23	4%	2	3%	25	4%

The age distribution is showing less insight about the under 18 years old, with only 4% of surveyees, than other researchers did, for example, Statista (2020a) has 21%. For the young category, the non-consumer percentage (8%) is twice the one from consumers (4%). A possible explanation for this difference lies within the access to payment methods, which are required to be 18 years old at least or even 21 depending on the countries, or the revenue and spending power of these consumers (White, 2020). The trend of fewer consumers among younger people expands in the 18-34 years old group who possess smaller spending power than their elders. The other age categories are in range with previous findings. The absence of non-consumer in the boomer age group, 57 and above, is worth highlighting, even though the low number of respondents might not be sufficient to draw any conclusion with reasonable accuracy.

Table 4 – Age distribution

Age	Consumer		Not Consumer		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
under 18 years old	23	4%	6	8%	29	4%
24-39 years old	339	55%	40	50%	379	54%
18 - 24 years old	180	29%	27	34%	207	30%
40 - 56 years old	57	9%	7	9%	64	9%
Over 57 years old	18	3%	0	0%	18	3%

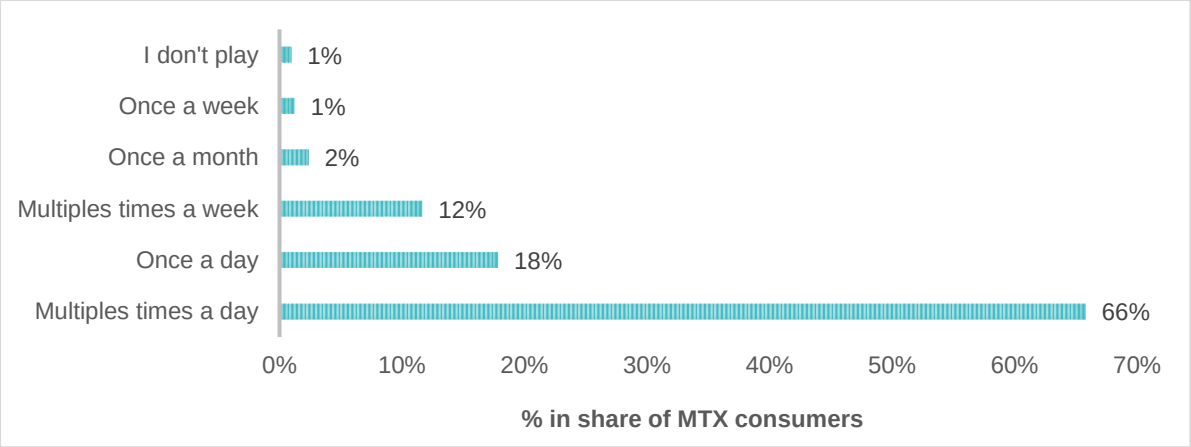
The origin distribution is fairly skewed towards the European and North American markets. Together, the regions of South America, Oceania, and Asia do only account for 6% of the responses. There was no respondent from Africa. The underrepresentation of Asia can affect the results, as Asia represents a huge market for video games. In terms of global games market revenue, Asia accounts for half of the market share (Wijman, 2020). Overall, consumer and non-consumers distribution are relatively similar. The gap perceived for South America, Oceania, and Asia is noticeable, but the little number of respondents renders the results not representative of the overall market.

Table 5 – Origin distribution

Origin	Consumer		Not Consumer		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Europe	386	63%	52	65%	438	63%
North America	190	31%	22	28%	212	30%
South America	18	3%	5	6%	23	3%
Oceania	15	2%	0	0%	15	2%
Asia	8	1%	1	0%	9	1%
Africa	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

Overall, the respondents are showing to be gamers for the largest majority (98%). This is not representative of the actual population, but rather the selection criteria to participate in the survey. However, the first question with regards to the frequency of play already tells a story, that the results would lean towards frequent gamers. Furthermore, the respondents' awareness of MTX, corroborates viable data with a fair understanding of the concepts at hand.

Figure 8 – Frequency of playing



MTX consumers have been asked to provide more insight with regard to their gaming activity. Most of the answers are pointing towards a profile of heavily invested gamers who play daily and over 30 hours a week, defining themselves as true gamers, which play multiplayer games on gaming consoles or PC. This profile seems largely different from the data gathered by Statista (2020a), where most players are only spending two to seven hours a week and only 10% are spending over 20 hours a week playing video games.

Figure 9 – Weekly playtime

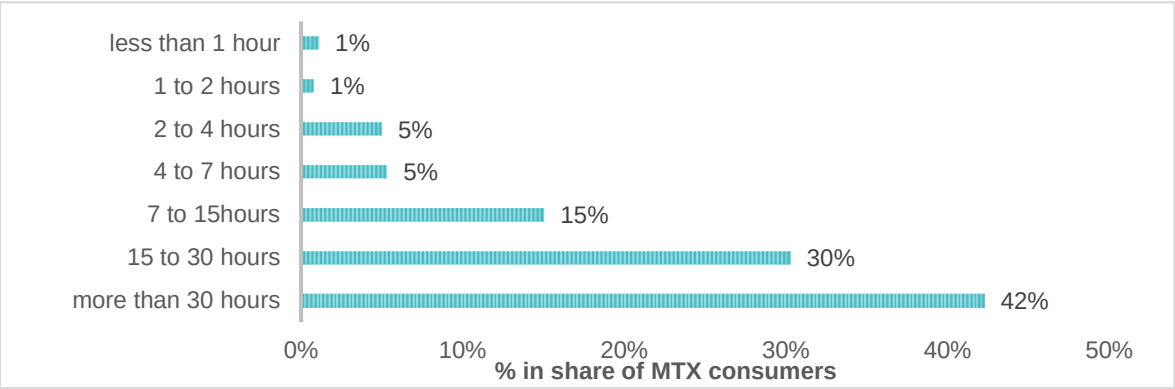
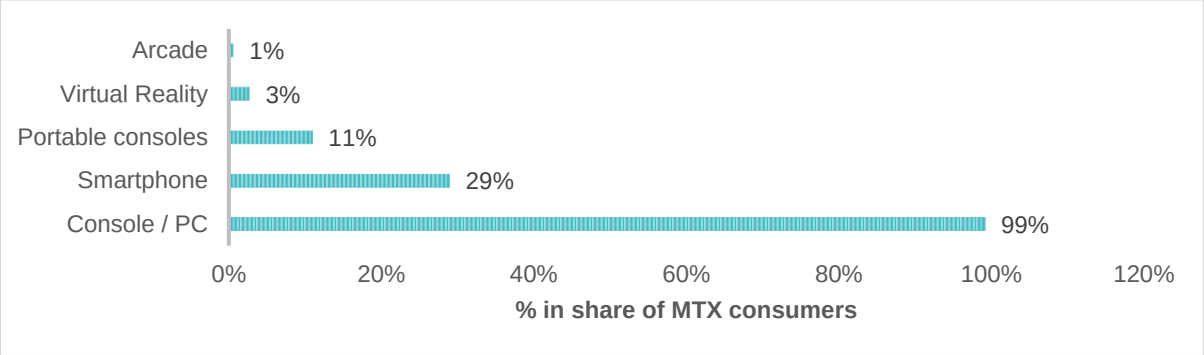


Figure 10 – Gaming support distribution



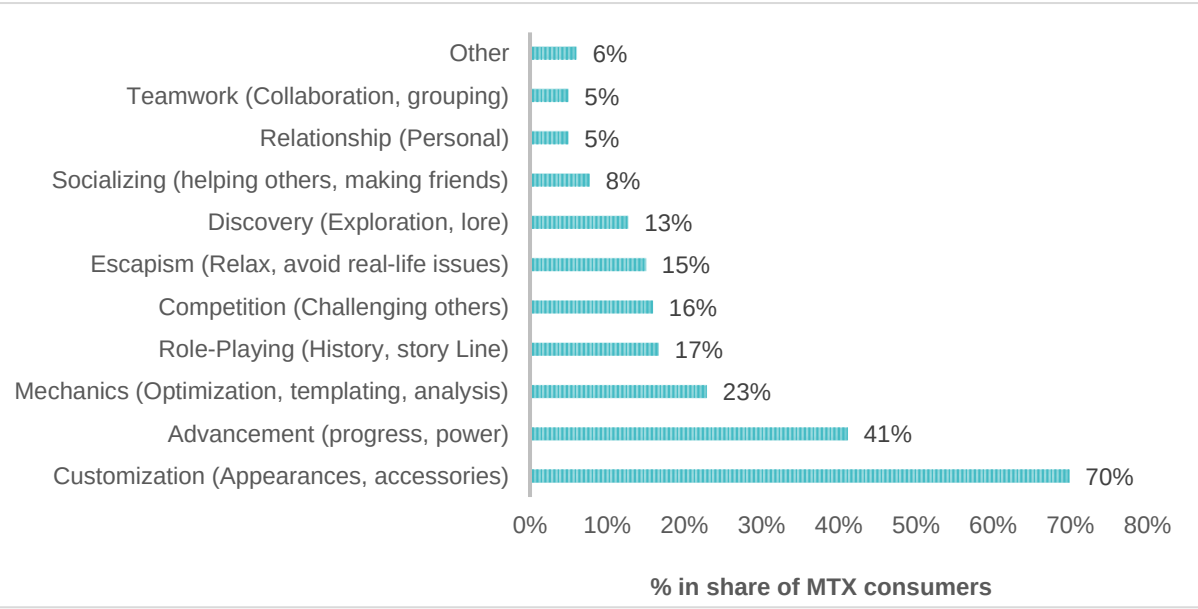
4.1.1 Profiling

Following these profile results, the survey can propose some profile examples based on segmenting variable (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Based on a demographic variable such as age, one on the customer profile are the segment of the younger group who plays more competitively. The 18-39 years old seems to be spending more on MTX than other groups due to the competitive aspect and the higher involvement they have towards the brand. Another customer profile captures the older generation, 39 and above, who plays marginally more on smartphone than consoles. Their spending originates less from competition and more from advancement and escapism. Their game genre is more likely to be about puzzling and done in solo. Lastly, the youngest generation, 18 and below, seems to be more motivated by customization and engage more with the social and multiplayer aspect of games. However, no further generalization can be done on these results. This segment appears to go in random directions on other criteria. Also, a geographic segmentation is probably possible, especially as players are pooled on regional dedicated servers to play, and thus are marketed together, as they are believed to have different behavior (Wijman, 2020). However, the little number of results outside occidental countries, does not allow to confidently draw conclusions.

4.2 Pre-purchase

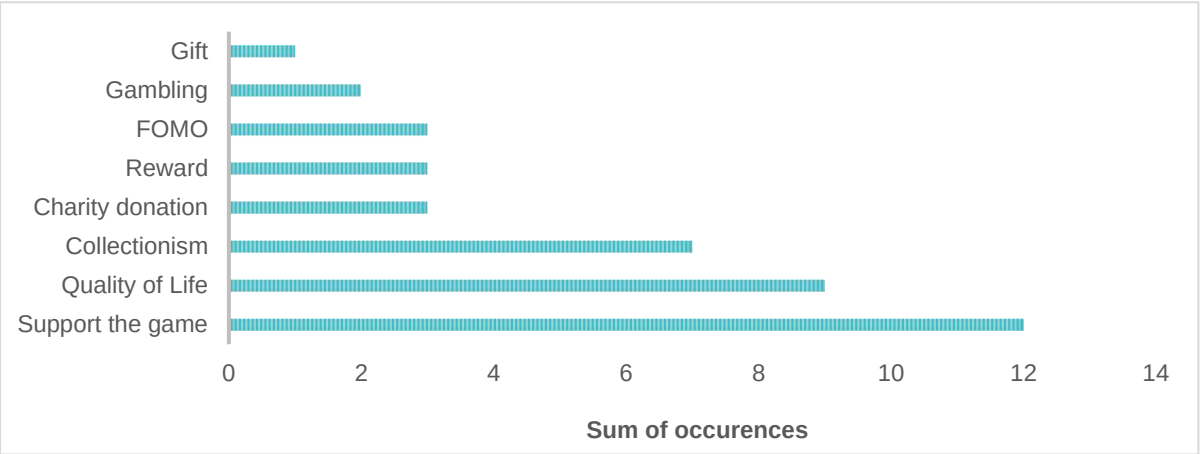
Assessing the consumption's driver of MTX was based on Yee's (2007) model. Most of the answers fit within his model with only 6% of alternative answers that do not belong in any categories. The largest driver appears to be the willingness to customize the game experience (70%). Such results are in line with Valderhaug (2013) and Turkey (2016). The second driver regards Advancement (41%). The willingness to win at all costs and the satisfaction it does procure appears to be driving consumption (Laurisjen, 2013). The social aspects, either teamwork, relationship, or socializing, are together at the bottom of the need driver.

Figure 11 – Need driver for Microtransaction purchase



Among the responses that do not fit within Yee's (2007) model, twelve answers relate to an idea of supporting the game or the game development. The other interesting description given by nine respondents concerns the quality of life. Such a description could fit within the idea of advancement, as one stronger character renders the game easier, but the quality of life is about getting more pleasure out of the game by erasing some of the unwanted aspects. Collection and completion appear to also be driving consumption. The idea of finishing the game to its full extent can be satisfying. The completion satisfaction might be coupled with the fear of missing out (FOMO), which drives people to buy limited MTX, either in time or quantity, to fully complete the game.

Figure 12 – Need driver "Other" breakdown



Besides the internal needs coming from the consumers, the game's design also plays a role as an external need generator. MTX marketing techniques are sometimes taking advantage of their monopolistic situation. Two third of the consumers (67%) are starting to have been suggested an MTX at a time in their game when they could need it the most. Furthermore, 57% of the customers are expressing themselves to feel pressured or forced into purchasing MTX. Game design is often hiding some of their content behind a paywall. However, less than half of the customers (42%) are conceding to that pressure and only 31% are accepting to spend more money to progress further into their game. Those results seem to indicate that the predatory methods employed by some gaming studios are not welcomed by the players and might make them abandon the game (Almaguer, 2018).

Figure 13 – Feeling pressure to purchase

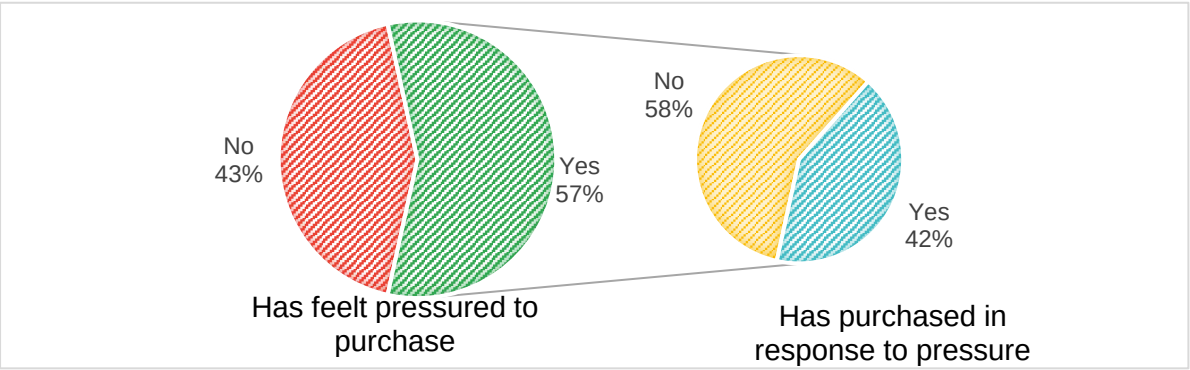
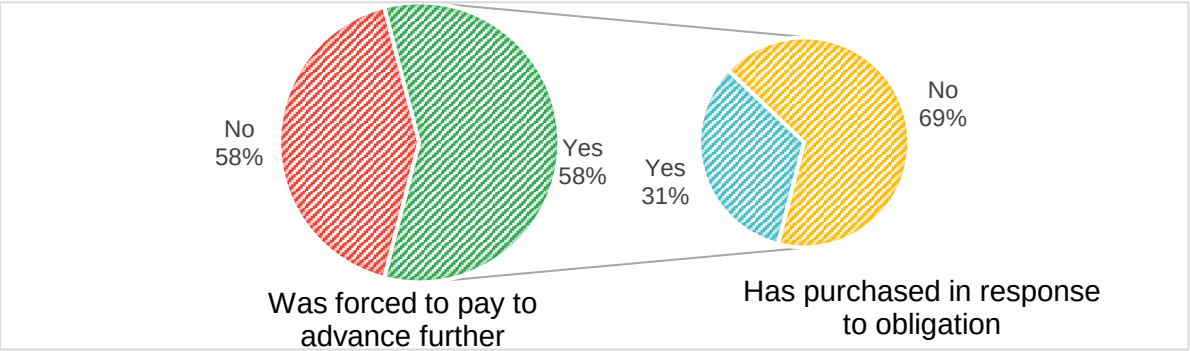


Figure 14 – Obligation to purchase to advance



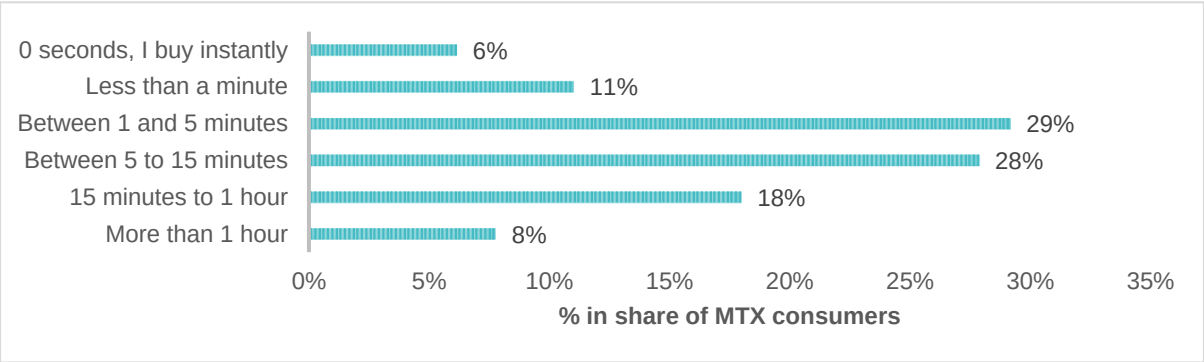
With regards to the quest for information ahead of the purchase intent, the customers are not especially inclined to gather more information than the one on display in the game shop. 31% affirm to not need any other information at all, than the one provided on the game shop. While at the other end of the spectrum, 21% affirm that they need a lot of complementary information to make a purchase decision. The need driver for the product does not seem to impact the information needed. All drivers are having the same distribution when it comes to information required. No driver comes out as an outlier.

Table 6 – Information required (in addition to the game shop) per need driver

% in share of MTX consumers	I don't any complementary information (1)	I need little complementary information (2)	I need some complementary information (3)	I need many complementary information (4)	I need a lot of complementary information (5)
Customization (Appearances, accessories)	32%	17%	19%	21%	11%
Advancement (progress, power)	32%	16%	18%	21%	12%
Mechanics (Optimization, templating, analysis)	32%	17%	18%	20%	13%
Role-Playing (History, story Line)	23%	16%	22%	25%	15%
Competition (Challenging others)	32%	23%	18%	16%	10%
Escapism (Relax, avoid real-life issues)	30%	16%	20%	23%	10%
Discovery (Exploration, lore)	26%	21%	14%	25%	13%
Socializing (helping others, making friends)	33%	14%	24%	16%	14%
Relationship (Personal)	27%	15%	21%	15%	21%
Teamwork (Collaboration, grouping)	42%	12%	9%	18%	18%
Grand Total	**30%**	**17%**	**19%**	**21%**	**13%**

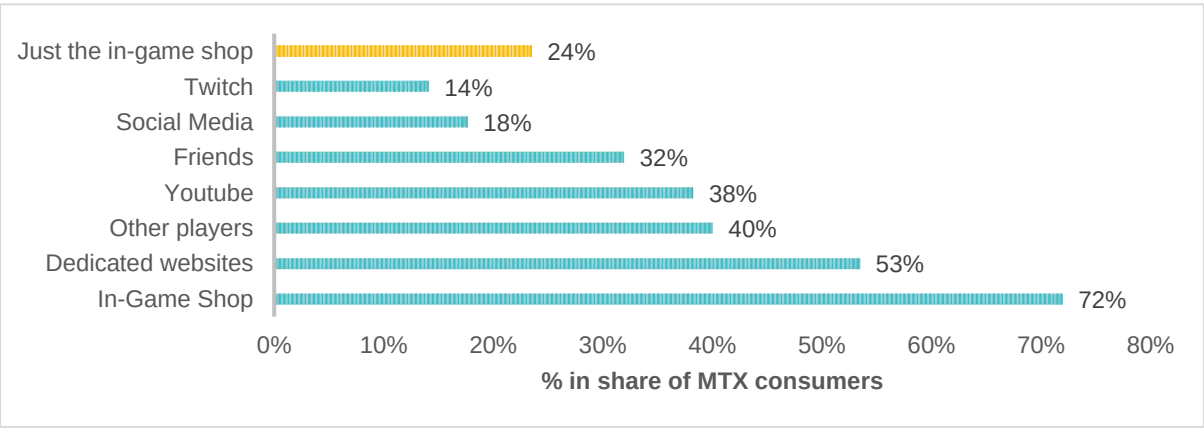
A linear correlation exists between the amount of information needed and the time spent researching. Most of the consumers (57%) are spending between 1- and 15-minutes researching information on the product they have an interest in. Such short research indicates a short process. However, only 17% are spending less than a minute for that step of the process, which indicates a fair amount of impulsive purchases.

Figure 15 – Time spent searching information



The ESA (2019) sources of information for gaming seem to match the ones used for MTX. No answers have been suggested that do not fit within the one already listed. The In-game shop is obviously the first point of information (96%), as every consumer must go through that monopolistic platform at some point. 24% are using it as the only source of information. That statistic is partially contradictory with the result above, where respondents mentioned at 30% to “not need any other information” than the one on the game shop. Among the incoherent answers, the complementary source appears to be Friends and YouTube. Dedicated websites grasp second place by being voted 53%. In ESA’s (2019) report, YouTube was the most important source of information by being used 39% of the time, which is in accordance with the results. The social sources such as friends, players, or social media were not mentioned at all in the ESA’s report, but still, impact customer’s information research substantially.

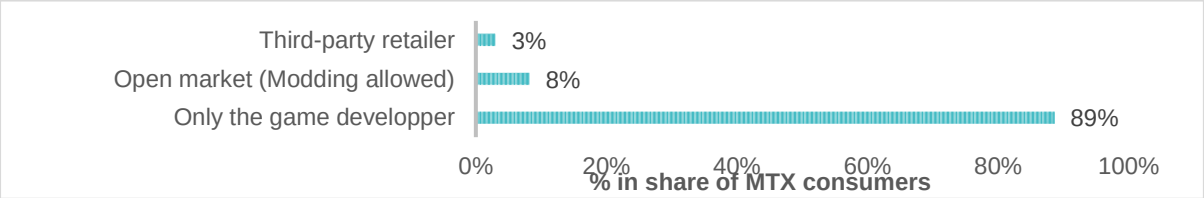
Figure 16 – Information sources



The report has mentioned the existence of a monopolistic position by game studios as a seller of MTX in their game. That position would exclude any alternative brands for the consumer. Most of the respondents of the survey (89%), who played various games, have described their game as having a monopole on MTX. Among the rest of the answers (8%) are playing

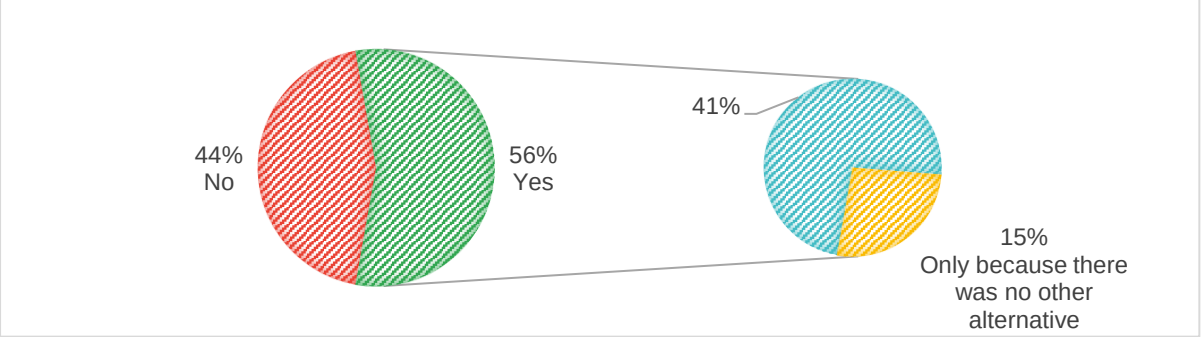
moddable games which often replace MTX, and only 3% have games where the game developer does not assume a monopoly and allows third parties to sell MTX in their game.

Figure 17 – Provider of microtransaction



One of the consequences of that monopolistic position is the predatory methods that studios have been using. For example, digital products are hidden behind a paywall (see. figures 13-14) or hiding products behind a random function within a Lootbox. 56% of surveyees admit having purchased a loot box to get one product that was hidden behind a random function. Among them, 15% stated that it was only because no other alternative was given. Such results highlight the luxury given by the monopolistic position, which allows games studios to not sell the product directly but forces the consumers into purchasing a bundle in which there are no guarantees of getting the wanted product (Neely, 2018; King, 2018).

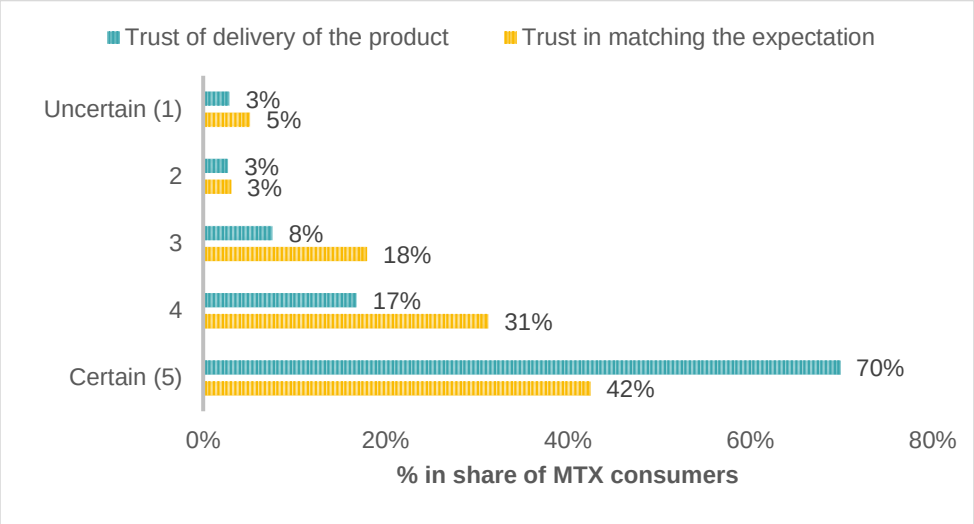
Figure 18 – Purchase share of Lootboxes



4.3 Purchase decision

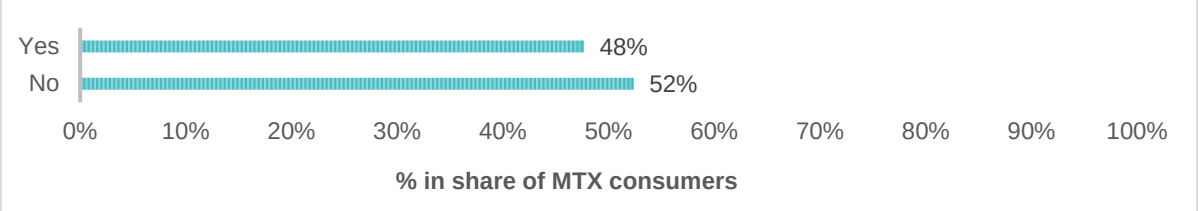
Essential for decision taking in a digital context, customers need to trust the seller to deliver the goods. With regards to the acceptance of technology and trust towards the platform where the sales happen, the consumers appear to have a high level of trust towards in-game shops. 70% have an absolute trust that the product will be delivered to them and only 6% are doubtful towards the delivery of the product. The consumers are showing a good amount of trust for the product to match their expectations but slightly under the delivery part. The average grade falls from 4.5 for the delivery to 4.0 for the expectation in quality.

Figure 19 – Trust towards online-seller



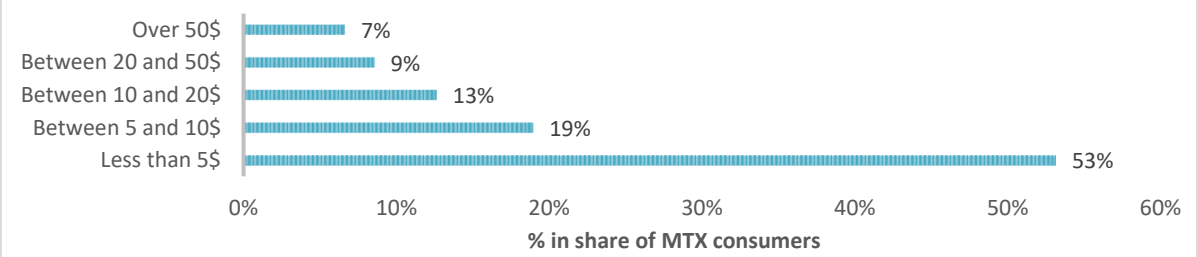
While transforming the purchase intent into the actual purchase decision, respondents are almost equally divided between the ones being advised for the actual decision (48%) and the ones deciding on their own (52%).

Figure 20 – Purchase decision based on third-party advice



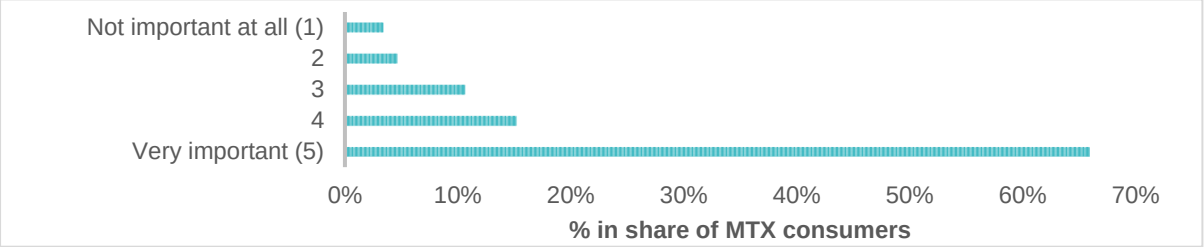
The price of the product is a key factor for decision-making. Consumers have a dedicated budget to allocate to MTX. Most of the respondents (53%) are spending less than five USD per month on MTX. The question's answer suggestion did not allow for too much granularity. Within that share of the responses, some people may not be purchasing MTX every month. The same goes for the high spenders (7%) whose answers lack some details. Some of these high spenders may be whales who spend thousands of dollars every month.

Figure 21 – Monthly spending on microtransactions



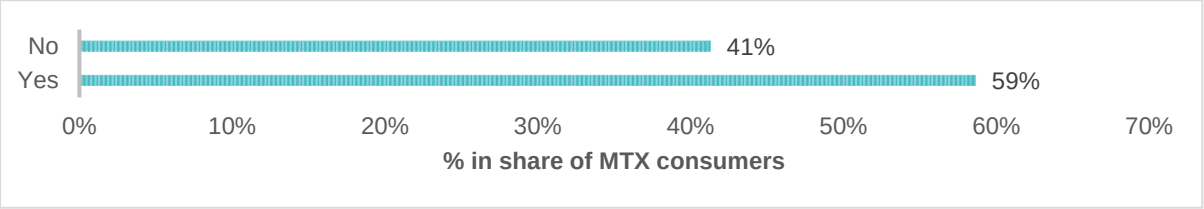
With regards to the price of a single MTX, consumers seem to be very sensitive. Most respondents (66%) stated that price is a very important factor in their decision. Only 3% answered being indifferent to price and 5% not very sensitive to it. Combined, they might reflect the 8% of the people who spend above 50 USD per month. The answer distribution underlines the importance of low prices for MTX.

Figure 22 – Price perception importance



The definition of MTX implies a sale of digital products for real money. However, games sometimes offer MTX only as a shortcut, as the digital product can also be acquired through gameplay. While deciding to purchase an MTX, 59% attest to having weighted the number of hours to either earn money to pay for it or to play for obtaining the digital product through other methods. 41% are not going through that process. That number might highlight the importance of low prices of MTX that would not trigger logical thinking but rather hasty decisions.

Figure 23 – Using calculation between potential methods of acquisition



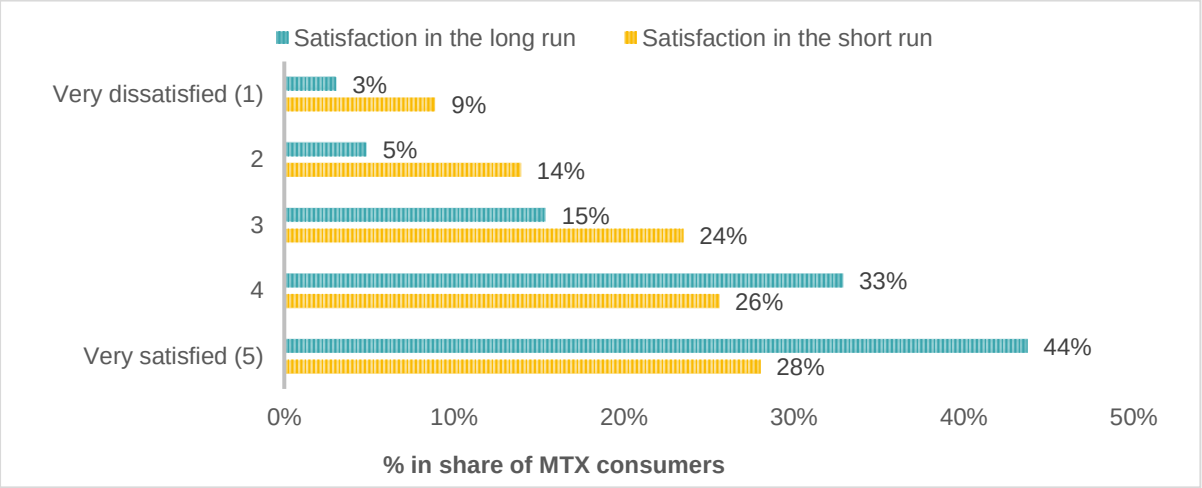
4.4 Post-purchase

After making the decision to purchase, consumers experience different feelings. Among them, the feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. On a scale of one (not satisfied at all) to five (very satisfied), 77% answered over the average, with 44% scoring their satisfaction in the short term five out of five and 33% scoring it four out five. Only 8% stated dissatisfaction right after the purchase.

In the longer term, the feeling of satisfaction evolved negatively and positively. The feelings are getting more neutral. The excitement diminishes and the bitterness fades away. The very

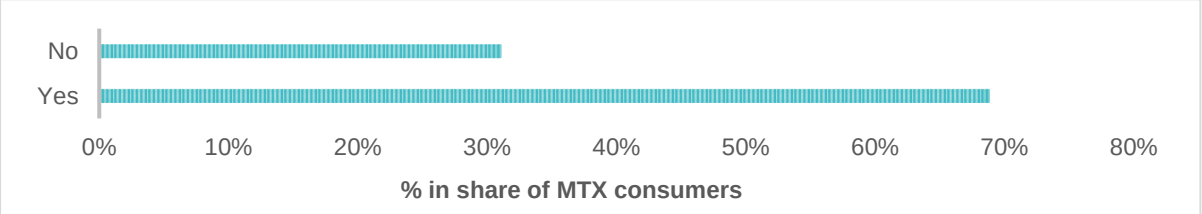
satisfied share tumbled from 44% to 28% and at the same time, the not satisfied share rose from 3% to 9%. Overall, the feelings are becoming more neutral in the long run.

Figure 24 – Satisfaction post-purchase



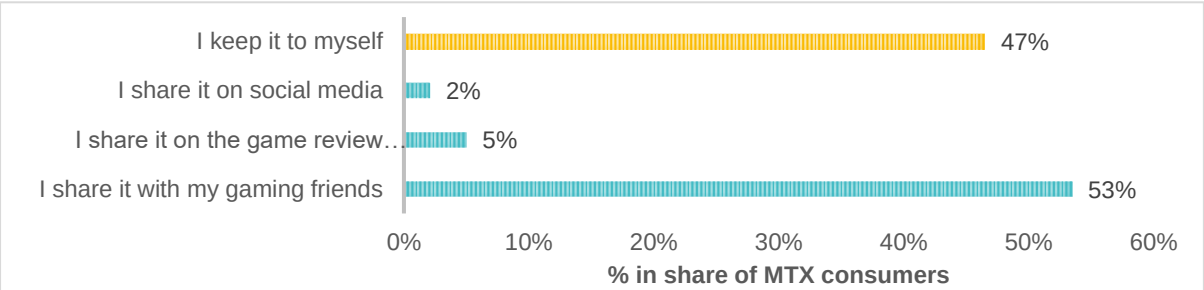
More than neutralizing the joy of the purchase, over two-thirds of the consumers (69%) stated to have experienced regret towards a purchased MTX. This huge number is difficult to apprehend from a consumer behavior point of view. It could highlight the power that the game developers hold over consumers or the rash decision aspect mentioned earlier.

Figure 25 – Felt regretful in regard to a microtransaction purchased



Over half of the consumers (53%) of MTX share their feedback with their gaming friends. These results are in line with Yee's (2007) and Wohn's (2014) research, that MTX have a social component. Very few respondents (7%) share their feedback beyond their gaming friends, and those who do, also share it with their gaming friends in the first place. The other half (47%) do not communicate their feedback to anyone.

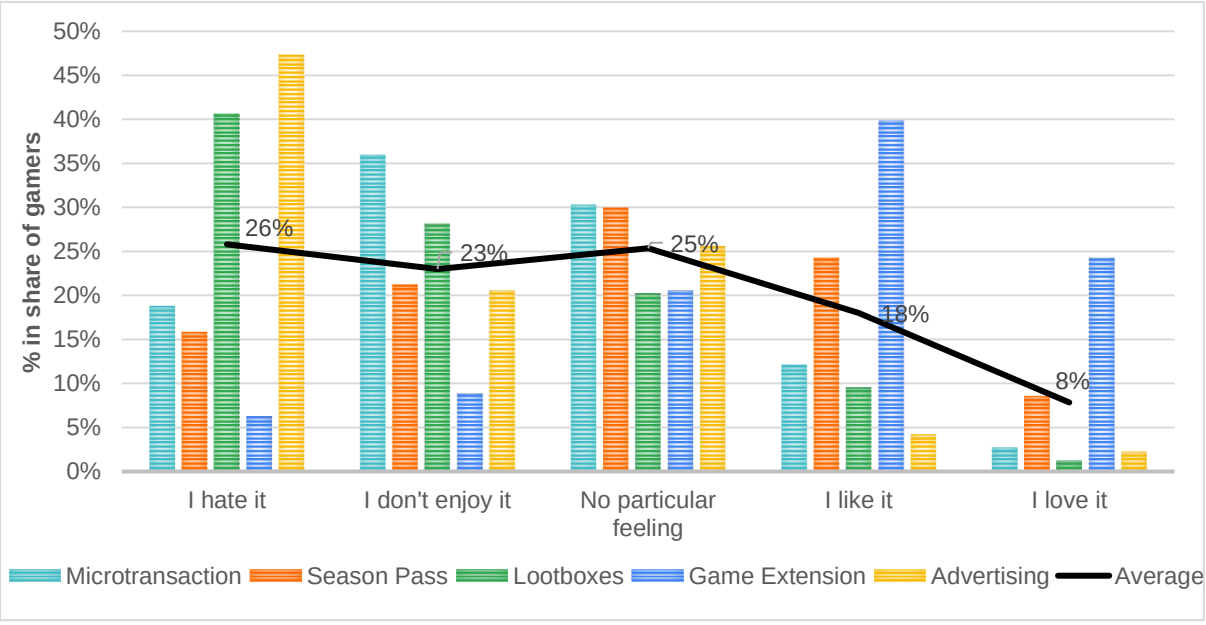
Figure 26 – Word of mouth intention



The gamers' appreciation of the different revenue methods is described in the two graphs below. The surveyees have been asked to rate each method from hate to love. Overall, the methods of additional revenue streams spark more negative feelings than positive ones. On average, 50% of respondents do not enjoy the additional revenue stream and 25% have no feelings. Only a few respondents (7%) love these methods.

Unlike all the other methods, the Game extension stands out by scoring more towards appreciation with 40% liking it and 24% loving it. On the other side of the spectrum, Lootboxes and Advertising scored respectively 41% and 47% of "hate". MTX received negative appreciation ratings with 19% hating them, 36% not enjoying them, 30% not having any feeling, and only 15% positive appreciation. Season pass gathers a more neutral answer distribution as it is composed of many different products with almost as many positive appreciations (33%) as negative ones (37%).

Figure 27 – Appreciation of gamers towards game monetization techniques



4.5 Non-consumers

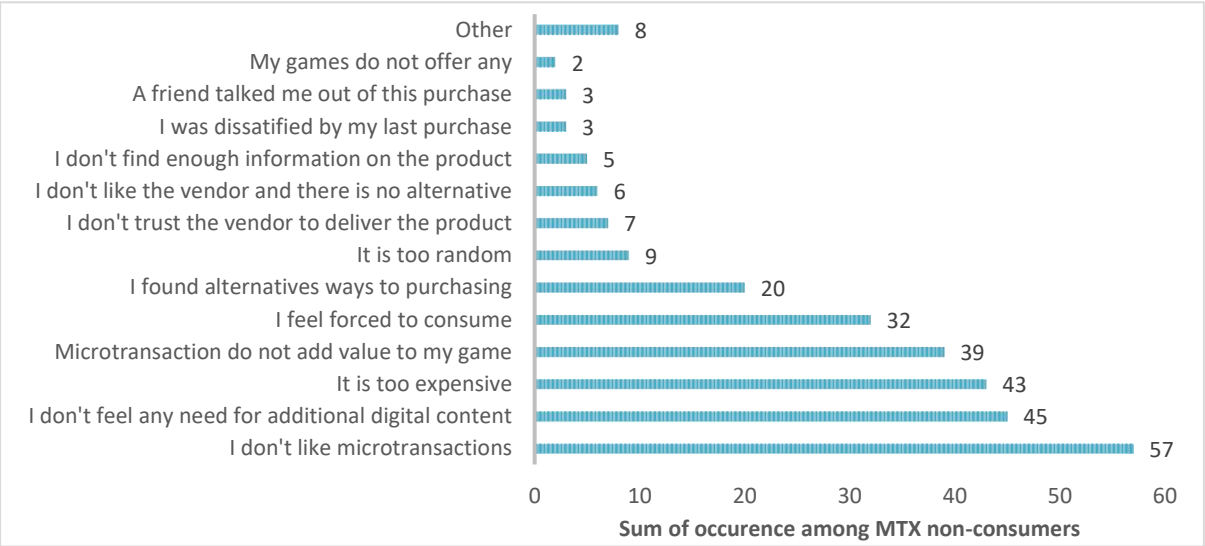
The following results concern the 80 (11%) respondents that are gamers but not consumers of MTX, or not anymore, and thus answered the second version of the survey. These respondents are aware of MTX as a purchasable product within their game, might have even purchased it once, but chose not to engage now with MTX for various reasons.

The first reason (57 occurrences) appears to be a dislike of the very concept of MTX. Some of these respondents mentioned that having to pay for a game and its extension is enough. The game should be complete and not scrap for more money. Others are against the shortcut aspect and the advantages provided by MTX, like Alamguer (2018) explained. The second reason (45 occurrences) and fourth (39 occurrences) are connected to the absence of need. These players do not feel that the MTX adds anything to the game, it is no additional value for them. They are insensitive to any of the needs mentioned in the first survey. For them, their game experience is enjoyable and complete without additional MTX.

There are 43 occurrences that relate to the price aspect. MTX can be overpriced, or their value does not correspond with the price asked. Such a gap between value and price is possible in a monopolistic market. A relevant share of the respondents (32 occurrences) highlighted the predatory aspect of game studios by mentioning that they are not consuming MTX because they felt forced to purchase. Among the responses, only a few relate to the lack of information or the lack of alternatives. Even fewer can be tied to the post-purchase behavior of the consumers.

Only two occurrences are mentioning games that do not offer MTX. These occurrences are in line with the expectation that most games do offer MTX. Some answers among “others” were not expected, such as the mention of MTX being too addictive and thus those consumers wanted to stay away from them. Someone also mentioned that he had no way of purchasing MTX, which supports the results of table 4. Finally, some expected comments mention the difference between cosmetics and other MTX, stating for example that “Microtransactions revolving around solely cosmetics are okay” (Respondent 573, appendix 4).

Figure 28 – Reasons for not purchasing microtransactions



4.6 Interviews

Among the 14 people that have been contacted, 8 people have participated in the interview. All of them are MTX consumers. Their profiles are listed below:

Table 7 – Interviewees' profile

ID	Genre identification	Age Group	Geographical region	Weekly playtime	Self identification	Main Plateforme	Game playstyle
4	Man	24-39 years old	Europe	more than 30 hours	true gamer	Consoles / PC	Multiplayer online
11	Man	24-39 years old	Europe	15 to 30 hours	true gamer	Consoles / PC	Multiplayer online
13	Man	18 - 24 years old	Europe	less than 1 hour	casual player	Consoles / PC	Multiplayer online
16	Woman	18 - 24 years old	Europe	7 to 15hours	true gamer	Smartphone	Solo
157	Woman	24-39 years old	Europe	7 to 15hours	casual player	Smartphone	Multiplayer online
178	Man	18 - 24 years old	Europe	2 to 4 hours	casual player	Smartphone	Solo
246	Man	24-39 years old	North America	more than 30 hours	true gamer	Console / PC	Multiplayer online
248	Man	24-39 years old	North America	more than 30 hours	true gamer	Console / PC	Multiplayer online

There were no interviews conducted with people over 39 years old or below 18 years old, nor with people living out of occidental regions, nor pro-gamer or streamer, as no respondents were willing and available. However, the profiles are capturing widely different with regards to the other profile's criteria. Furthermore, their games of predilection were widely different. They include *World of Warcraft*, *League of Legends*, *Hearthstone*, *Minecraft*, *Polytopia*, *Rocket League*, *Halo,* and others. Respondents 16, 157, 178, and 248 are actives in pay-to-win games, while the others are not exposed to such mechanisms.

Respondents 4, 13, and 16 are among the share of those stating to be satisfied and like purchasing MTX. They explained that they like the idea of having something extra from the game that not all customers have. They all share a common point of view, that the MTX they like are the ones who do not impact the game in a negative way, namely pay-to-win MTX.

Additionally, it seems that these respondents agree that the MTX have a good value, which means the cost is inferior to the perceived benefits (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Among the other interviewees, who dislike MTX, some still find that they have a good value, such as interviewee 11. Among the people not finding values in MTX, such as Interviewee 246, he explained that there is a major gap between cost-based and value-based pricing. The massive scale and ease of distribution lower the unitary costs, which is not reflect on prices.

Furthermore, all respondents are sharing dissatisfaction towards MTX that shows the balance of competition between payers and non-payers. On that matter, interviewees 16, 157, 178, and 248, who are actively playing games with such mechanisms, have accepted the “rules” and reluctantly spent the required amount to keep playing their game. Only interviewee 16 stopped paying at some point, while the others keep accepting the coercion. Interviewee 16 stated that MTX are the equivalent of riding first class, it is optional, but you must accept all the implications. They others justify the behavior by a high involvement in the game or low absolute cost impact on their personal finances.

On the matter of low impact on personal finance, interviewee 11 shared that spending a few euros for a game that he played for thousands of hours, is fine as there are no activities that one could do for the same price per hour. However, such a statement contradicts his budget of 20 to 50 USD per month as stated in the survey. He also stated suffering from a small addiction which would explain the decorrelation.

Lastly, while explaining their thought process while purchasing MTX, they often cite an external stimulus from the game to advertise a new MTX. Most explain some form of research, which could become quite extensive as interviewees 4 and 11 demonstrated or non-existent for interviewees 13 and 246. No one stated a long hesitation for purchasing, but rather a sort of obvious logical straightforward process. Only interviewees 13 and 157 have mentioned being advised on their decision by someone. Interestingly, interviewee 13 was only purchasing MTX as gifts and never for himself.

5. Discussion

To answer the research question of this report, the discussion will mainly aim at evaluating whether the buyer purchase behavior of gamers fits within the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) theoretical model. To assess the fitness of the behavior within the theoretical framework, each step will be individually evaluated. The analysis of each of the steps can conclude if, within that stage, the standard behavior expressed by the results of the primary research, corresponds to the theoretical description or not. In the event where results and theory do not perfectly match, the report will attempt to give a detailed description of the identified gap.

5.1 Individual steps analysis

5.1.1 Need recognition

Before entering the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model analysis, it would be interesting to understand what impacts gamers behavior, namely the “why” question of consumer behavior. Van Berlo and Liblik (2016) approached this exact question with regards to purchasing virtual items, which is like MTX. They concluded that the main motivation behind their behavior is the will to belong to a social group and personal self-expression. They also draw an analysis based on Sheth et al. (1991) model (Van Berlo and Liblik, 2016). Lehdonvirta, Wiska and Johansson (2009) work came to the same conclusion about the sociological perspective (Lehdonvirta and Hamari, 2010). Other work, such as Guo and Barnes (2007) or Nojima (2007) address the psychological perspective, highlighting the high immersion of gamers within the games. On top of these internal drivers, Lehdonvirta and Hamari (2009) and Oh and Ryu (2007) addresses the role of game design on consumer behavior. They list over a dozen marketing techniques spotted in game design developed to influence consumer behavior such as pricing techniques, segmentation, differentiation or planned obsolescence (Lehdonvirta and Hamari, 2010; Oh and Ryu, 2007). Neither the survey nor the interviews help answer this “why” question in a conclusive manner as too many factors, namely cultural, social, personal and psychological ones, can impact the consumer behavior (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018).

The Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model clearly stipulate that the process is initiated by internal or external stimuli, which generate a need recognition in the consumer’s mind. The gap between the actual state and the desired one will be satisfied by the need fulfillment. Theories of play seem to agree that playing can satisfy a large range of needs (CSUN, 2021). Yee’s (2007) research proposed ten needs satisfied by playing video games. The needs suggested by Yee have been used from drafting the survey question C.1, which aimed at capturing the need drivers of MTX purchase.

The result of the primary research seems to extend Yee’s (2007) need drivers for game purchase to MTX purchase context. Almost all the answers for need drivers fit within one of his categories. A few answers did not fit anywhere, such as completion for completing a game to its full extent, collecting all the possible content, or willing to support the game developer to insure the game development or survival. The completion need is within the scope of Lehdonvirta's (2009) work and Consumption Values theories of Sheth (1991). The supportive aspect, which goes beyond the value of the purchased product, does not fit in any model described in the literature review. It can also be the case that supporting the game, or its

development, is only a side-benefit to the MTX purchase and not the need that initiates the purchase process. Indeed, no respondent mentioned support as their only answer, but always with at least one other need driver within the suggested answer sheet. To this analysis, this evaluation is not essential as these outlying factors are still needs under Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model.

For the MTX purchase decision behavior to deviate from the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model, the initiation of the purchase process must either be independent of internal or external stimuli or be a response to something else than a need recognition. Proving that the source is neither internal nor external is very unlikely, as internality and externality are the only two binary possibilities for a stimulus on human behavior without venturing into advanced philosophical debates. The answers to question C.1 (Figure 11) of the survey coupled with the interpretation of every interviewee on question four (Appendixes 5-6) focus on respondents' view on their need drivers, appear to validate the idea that the purchase of MTX is initiated by a need recognition. The great majority of answers fit in Yee's (2005) need model, as described above. At that point, it seems that the MTX purchase process fits within Kotler and Armstrong's (2018) BDP model.

However, the report finds the results from questions C.2 to C.4.2 to provide an interesting point that needs further exploration. The idea that a share of the respondents (24%) conceded to the pressure of purchase and 19% purchased MTX because doing so was the only way to advance further in the game seems to indicate that the purchases were maybe not made from need but independent to the consumers' will (Figures 13-14). These percentages might even be higher, as surveying cannot erase the social desirability bias (Grimm, 2010). It can be argued that, if some players decided to leave the game rather than conceded to the game's blackmail, then it proves the consumers are still initiating a purchase to satisfy the need, for example learning more of the game's lore, keep getting entertained, increasing the involvement, or strengthening a community belonging. Gaming studios might also be using predatory marketing methods by taking advantage of the high involvement of some players (and sometimes addiction) to strong-arm them into spending money to breach artificial paywalls (King & Delfabbro, 2018). That reasoning raises the question of the strength of the external stimuli, whether the stimuli are leaving the process in the hands of the consumer, or if the external environment is overtaking the consumer's behavior. That second option would arguably contradict the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model as the purchase behavior process is not generated from the consumer's need recognition but rather a definitive obligation.

In conclusion, the first step of the buyer decision process of MTX fits within the framework of the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model for most purchases. Still, the report highlights the effort of the gaming studios to have a strong external impact on the first step to minimize consumers' decision flexibility, which is sometimes ethically disputable and debatably deviate from the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model.

5.1.2 Information search

In the literature review, the report has stated that the second step in the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model, namely the Information Search, is optional. There is no necessity for the buyer to look for information in every scenario. Impulsive purchases and convenience products do require less to no information prior to forming a purchase decision. Teo and Yeong (2003) highlight the tradeoff between time, money, and effort spent on researching information, called the relative cost of search, with the perceived benefits expected. In this tradeoff, Teo and Yeong also call attention to the influence of risk aversion towards the reliability of the seller (Teo and Yeong, 2003). MTX are simple by design. They require little information to be evaluated. Lehdonvirta and Castronova (2014) accentuate the simplicity of the product by mentioning the monopolistic presence of the seller. Furthermore, the lack of alternative brands available to consumers or the lack of alternative products strengthens the irrelevance of understanding the depth of an MTX if there are no other choices available (Lehdonvirta and Castronova, 2014).

For products that have alternatives, consumers are turning to various information sources, such as dedicated websites, streamers, videos, professional reviews, or peers (ESA, 2019). The results of the survey correspond to the possibilities listed by ESA (2019) (Figure15). On top of ESA’s suggestion, the results show the importance of the vendor’s platform, most often the in-game shop. Indeed, 96% of respondents use the game shop, at least to some extent, for their information research process.

By definition, MTX happens when real currency is traded for digital products or services. In the case where the ultimate product is purchased by intermediary IGPC that must be purchased first, the information search still plays a role. No data has been collected to enquire whether consumers do research on the purchase of IGPC if the end goal is another product. One can argue that the consumer will do research on the IGPC, to be understood by the consumer as the payment method for purchasing anything on the game shop. The information search is believed to be way shorter if the definition strictly considers the purchase of IGPC to be the MTX. However, as understood from interviewees 4 and 11, the research is done on the ultimate product prior to the purchase of IGPC (Appendix 6.5-6.6). Therefore, even though the transaction of IGPC for digital products is not the MTX in question, the research conducted on

the final product applies to the purchase of the preceding MTX, and they cannot be dissociated.

The result from the primary research shows that over a quarter (30%) of the consumers do not go through that step (Table 6). The ones who do, the majority spend between one and fifteen minutes doing so. This indicates a thorough process for a low amount of money to spend. Following Teo and Yeong's (2003) reasoning, the cost of search must be low or the perceived benefits high for consumers to be that invested in their research. Interviewee 246 clearly mentioned that “[...] the (game) shop you only have a drawing, and it’s not exactly how it looks in the game. You know it’s like false advertising[...]” (Appendix 6.2). His statement stresses the importance of trust and reliability of the seller, and the relevance of additional research from sources other than the monopolistic seller.

To sum up, for the second step of the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model, no deviation can exist as the entire step is defined as optional (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). The average behavior of MTX consumers fits within the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model. For the share, that is skipping the step, is also fitting to the model.

5.1.3 Evaluation of alternatives

The Evaluation of Alternatives steps is, like the previous one, subject to being skipped (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). The process of evaluation implies that consumers focus on different attributes of a product and compare it, according to subjective criteria, to chosen alternatives. In the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model, alternatives are defined as alternative brands to the product. For MTX, as explained in the literature review, there can be no alternatives brands to an MTX. The reason behind such a statement is the monopolistic aspect of the game studio as the sole developer of MTX (Lehdonvirta and Hamari, 2010). Results show that consumers are facing monopoles in 89% of the transactions (Figure 17). The minor occurrence (8%) of the open market game cannot be compared with, due to the open-source aspect that requires goods to be free. A respondent who mentioned the existence of a competitive market with a third party commented that DLC were sold on third-party platforms (Appendix 6.6). However, they were still developed by the game studio. Another one specified that the game currencies, purchasable through gameplay could be found on illegal game sites, regarding game policy (Appendix 6.9). Such black market sites are shut down quickly. Furthermore, they do not grant access to IGPC but rather act as a substitute seller of IGC. These situations do not break the MTX monopoly of the game developer.

In the case where the consumer must first purchase game currencies to access the purchase opportunity of the desired product or service, the definition of MTX, which happens when real

money is traded, excludes the existence of alternative brands. The only MTX is the purchase of IGPC. For games that offer various MTX that are alternatives one to another, the customer might go through an evaluation of alternatives. However, as the seller is identical, the money flow would go to the same entity. Such evaluations do not qualify either under the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) description in the scope of the BDP model, which must involve different brands.

In conclusion, it can be argued that consumers are ranking only one brand out of one, and therefore, that behavior would be in the scope of the third step of the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model. However, this step could be seen as just skipped.

5.1.4 Purchase decision

In Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model, the purchase decision step will be to buy the preferred brand based on the previous step. Should there be no brands to rank, as concluded in the previous paragraph, the consumer will have formed a purchase intention towards the only brand. Between the purchase intention and the decision comes the attitudes of others and unexpected situational factors (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Additionally, Chen and Barnes (2007) highlighted the importance of trust (towards the seller and selling platform) and familiarity with online transactions in the context of online sales. Guo and Barnes (2007) further explained the role of social influence, trust, and performance expectancy in the case of MTX purchases.

The research of this thesis reported that the large majority (87%) of consumers trust the game shops to deliver the goods (Figure 19). A less important majority (73%) also trust the goods to match the expectations (Figure 19). With regards to the social influence, half of the purchase decisions (48%) received direct advising from a third party (Figure 20). Furthermore, all the interviewees positively answered when asked whether other people have an influence on their MTX consumption, even in the case of solo-played video games (Appendixes 6). For example, interviewees 178 and 248 mentioned the necessity to be at the same level as the benchmark to compete, interviewees 13, 16, 157, and 246 highlighted a will to fit in a community and sharing with friends, interviewee 11 and 248 further explained their wish to be as cool as the others or to impress non-consumers because owning a cosmetic item is synonym to being good, or at least appear like it.

Consumers will decide to purchase goods and services that have value for them. In that regard, some respondents are associating value with cosmetic aesthetic (in case of cosmetic MTX) or by necessity to compete (Appendixes 6.1-6.3). An interviewee stated that for an MTX to be valuable:

"There must be microtransactions that are sophisticated. Small mobile games that have very basic one, it's not worth it. Whereas the one for PC games that are really polished or has amazing graphics, I find it normal to spend money on it."[1] *- Interviewee 16 (2021)*

While another interviewee stated that for her it was a question of rentability and longevity. She further developed that:

"[...] Because the price has to come into play and whether I will really use it. Or if I really need it. Because if I buy something and end up not using it at all, it's really not worth it. So, I will gladly buy something that has value for me, which means that I know I will need it or I will at least use it. [...]"[2] *Interviewee 157 (2021)*

Furthermore, regarding the price factor, Artz and Kitcheos (2016) theorized the necessity for an MTX to have a perceived cost-effectiveness to be valuable in the eyes of the consumer. The primary research addressed the question of price and budget. Two-third of the respondents (66%) are stating the very high importance of the price for them (Figure 22). Such data could indicate an important price-elasticity. In addition, half of the consumers (53%) are spending less than 5 USD per month on MTX (Figure 21). This low average indicates the importance of a low unitary price for MTX. However, what consumers are stating might be inaccurate due to social desirability bias and underestimating IGPC conversion rate to real currency (Grimm, 2010; Zhirkova and Saric 2020). Furthermore, as Interviewee 11 explained, he is charging money on his gaming account for later purchases. (Appendix 6.5). IGPC, which is the real MTX per definition, might be decorrelated from the consumer conscious spending on a specific in-game product with that purchased IGPC (Zhirkova and Saric, 2020).

Concerning the fitness of the buyer purchase behavior of MTX with the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model, results have confirmed the impact of the attitude of others on purchase decisions. Unexpected situational factors, such as the game's servers shutting down, also exists in the case of MTX purchases. Some concerns remain around the concept of decision. Whether some consumers are purchasing MTX through a decision or an obligation can be argued. Consumers who purchase MTX out of obligation to continue playing their game, or suffer from addiction, might not qualify as having made a purchase decision.

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[1] Translated by the Author from French: *"Il faut des microtransaction qui soit un peu plus travaillée. Les petits jeux mobiles qui ont des toutes simples, c'est vraiment pas utile. Tandis que pour des trucs sur PC qui sont vraiment aboutis ou qui ont de magnifiques graphiques, je trouve que c'est normal de dépenser pour ça."*

[2] Translated by the Author from French: *"Oui, de longévité et de prix. Oui, parce qu'il y a forcément le prix qui rentre en jeu. Et si je l'utilise vraiment. Ou que j'en ai vraiment l'utilité. Parce que si j'achète un truc et qu'au final je ne m'en sers pas du tout, ce n'est pas très intéressant. Donc je vais plus volontiers acheter quelque chose qui a de la valeur pour moi dont je sais que je vais avoir besoin ou que je vais vraiment utiliser."*

Furthermore, if the satisfaction of players is linked to the outcome of the game, either winning or losing, as Laurisjen (2013) concluded and that MTX are necessary (in certain games) to have a chance in a competitive setting (Interviewee 178 and 248), then the consumption of MTX is directly correlated to the game enjoyment. Games are made to procure entertainment and enjoyment. Therefore, consuming MTX is a requirement to get the essence of the game. Such reasoning could support the conclusion that some MTX purchases are not a decision anymore as soon as the consumer has decided to play that game. More broadly, that reasoning is equivalent to answering whether the consumer of a captive product is still deciding when purchasing the variable part of a captive product if his only alternative is quitting using the main product. However, the necessity of MTX to compete is only valid for the pay-to-win business model, which is not the standard of games.

In conclusion, the average buyer decision process of MTX fits within the scope of Kotler and Armstrong's (2018) BDP model regarding the actual purchase decision step. Nevertheless, some arguments could be made to highlight some situations in which consumers are not making decisions but are purchasing MTX without consideration.

5.1.5 Postpurchase behavior

The last step in the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model addresses the behavior of the consumer taking place after the purchase. The satisfaction level lies within the gap between the consumer's expectations and the product’s perceived performance when consumed.

Only 15% of respondents are stating positive appreciation towards MTX as a revenue method (Figure 27). These results are in line with the reviewed literature dealing with the global negative attitude of consumers towards MTX.

However, regarding satisfaction of the purchase, the consumers stated a great satisfaction in the short term and a more neutral appreciation in the long term (Figure 23). Yet, two-thirds (69%) of the surveyed affirmed having regrets towards their MTX consumption (Figure 25). The opposition of dislike of the MTX and their approval through consumption seems to indicate the presence of cognitive dissonance. When this paradox was pointed out to interviewees, their answers were quite similarly structured.

Firstly, they were not conscious of the cognitive dissonance, which for MTX purchase represents the contradiction between the willingness to purchase or reiterate a purchase, MTX while disliking the concept, being dissatisfied or regretful from a previous similar purchase. Secondly, they stated to only dislike the MTX that were either abusive, predatory, unfair, or essential to play the game. The dislike towards MTX would come from the abuses and their overwhelming presence. Thirdly, for those who purchase the MTX they dislike, it is because it

is a prerequisite to play the game competitively (Appendix 6.1-6.3) or the purchase in response to an addiction (Appendix 6.5). Interviewee 246 provided an interesting explanation for the dislike when talking about the absence of correlation between the development cost of an MTX and the total revenue of the said transaction (Appendix 6.2).

> *"There is a good example with the new Halo that will be released soon, and they teased that you will have to pay 5 bucks for each color that you want to have. Which is completely crazy because that feature was already in Halo 1 in like 2000 or so and it was free. [...] It's not like they were earning that money fairly or by hard work. They just slide the color to the right or left on their software. That's about it. For me, I don't wanna pay for something that has no value. If you add up all of the revenue from one skin, there is no way it matches the development budget. It's unfair. "-Interviewee 246 (2021)*

Furthermore, respondents also liked to justify why they were purchasing MTX, not only for their personal gain but also (or rather) to support the game development. It is a way of giving back and not only freeriding the game (Interviewee 13, 16, 157, 178, 246, 248).

In conclusion, in opposition to the hypothesis that consumers are not satisfied with MTX purchase, results are showing satisfaction during the postpurchase behavior. The negative feelings towards MTX, do not from the dissatisfaction of the product but rather the illegitimacy of the said transactions, overpricing of value-based compared to cost-based, and the pressure to purchase coming from the game studio and the other players.

For that last step, the theory does not impose specific criteria that can be argued about. Therefore, the report can only conclude that the specific buyer purchase behavior corresponds to the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model for this last step. Yet, the report highlights the paradox between the large dislike of the revenue mechanism and the satisfaction of the purchases.

5.2 Assessment of the complete model

Assembling each steps' analysis together provides the model representation below, in which the fitness of the average behavior with the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model has been highlighted, together with some of the notable deviations.

Figure 29 – Buyer Purchase Process of microtransaction evaluation

The primary research results find that the average buyer purchase behavior specific to MTX corresponds to the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model. The monopolistic position of the game studio is not disturbing how the consumer purchases for the majority. Yet, as expected in a monopoly situation, a lower consumer's welfare and sovereignty and higher prices are characteristics found in the MTX market (Mas-Colell et al., 1995). The pricing strategies used, between optional and captive product pricing, are made unchallengeable in this monopolistic setting. Such strategies further accentuate the consumer's discontent.

The share of consumers who could be described as deviating from the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model is relevant enough to be perceived. The consumer's free will is narrowed as soon as they have made the decision to play a specific game. Once in, players must play by the rules of the game creator. At least a fifth of consumers are not purchasing MTX out of their own will but due to the game environment settings. A bit less than a fight of the players is skipping the information and a third is only using the information provided by the seller without further evaluation. The entire alternative step is biased and thus skipped due to the absence of competition. The decision is skewed and may be done without proper consideration. Lastly, after the purchase, most of the customers are experiencing cognitive dissonance.

5.3 Implication

As reflected by the primary research, having 69% of the players stating a regret towards the purchase of MTX is quite unimaginable from a marketing point of view, as customer satisfaction is a focus according to modern marketing theories (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018; Khan, 2006). This score comes at a particular shock when compared to the gaming studios position, such as Andrew Wilson, EA CEO stating to CNBC:

> *"They (the players) can invest time or invest money, it's completely up to them. But what we have seen in other franchises, is that when players play a game for 2 or 3 years at a time, they are more than willing to pay a little bit extra to extend and enhance that experience, because there is tremendous value for them and it keeps them and their friends in a world they love"-Boorstin, 2017*

The primary results contradict the idea players are willing to purchase as well as the value found in MTX. It seems that to explain the gap, the main explanation lies within the balance of power between customers and sellers in a monopoly setting. It could also be that as consumption is rising, one obvious explanation would be that consumers are liking the MTX. Yet, this sounds naïve considering the predatory mechanism used by gaming studios coupled with the apparent lack of ethical standards among the industry (Svelch, 2017; King, 2018).

In the middle of the trial on the class-action lawsuit against PlayStation for unlawful monopoly regarding the sales on their digital platform, other actors of the industry might want to get ready if such a lawsuit would be directed against them one day (California Northern District Court, 2021). From a consumer protection point of view, the evidence that the BDP is shortened by the lack of alternatives could potentially be an argument for a change in the legal framework or an increase in consumer protection.

The social and psychological factors, that are known to impact consumer behavior, play a major role in the MTX consumption context, especially due to the competitive aspect (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018; Vorderer, 2003). One could argue that it is only internet-induced marketing, but it raises the question of which factors impacting consumer behavior is the most pressing. The scope of research should now be enlarged by going back to the broader consumer behavior model and evaluate which factors are negatively impacting customer BDP.

Finally, although personalization of the experience is so important to gamers, newer titles such as *Ghost of Tsushima* or *Doom: Eternal,* have been hugely successful and profitable without MTX (Nelson, 2021, Statista, 2021c). Therefore, it is possible to imagine games where the developers do not have the monopoly on MTX, but rather offer the chance of third parties to customize the game experience in line with consumers' expectations and priced accordingly. Developers would take a fee but not have any development cost, consumers might get additional value and third-party modders could be rewarded for their work unlike in open-source games. Open market to competition could increase overall welfare.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the thesis

The purpose of this research was to give insights into the way consumers behave throughout the purchase process of MTX. The research question was stated as an evaluation of the specific behavior of gamers purchasing MTX compared with the theoretical basis established by Kotler and Armstrong (2018). It was formulated as follow:

> *Does the specific buyer decision process of microtransactions fit within the Kotler and Armstrong standard BDP model?*

The average behavior of consumers of MTX follows the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model. The broadness and the flexibility of that model cover most of the behavior of the consumers, for example by stating that skipping a step is possible, which is the case for the evaluation of alternatives step. Therefore, the report concludes that for researchers in the field

it is safe to use the Kotler and Armstrong (2018) BDP model and subsequent results for their respective research.

In addition, the report has found, by considering the whole process, that there is much evidence of unbalance in the power between buyer and seller. Such unbalance is perceived in the behavior of a marginal share of consumers. These buyers have a purchase process that is expedited, by skipping or shortening more than one of the fundamental steps, and by being potentially subject to other steps to heavy influence and even coercion. These are negative aspects, for the consumers, inherent to the monopolistic situation, illustrated by the great share of consumers who purchase products they dislike. That statement is raising ethical and legal concerns that could directly impact the game studios.

6.2 Limitation & further research

One of the limitations of this paper is the sampling. The broad scope of the definition of games and gamers concerns a population size of over 2.7 billion. Therefore, a greater sample would have been more representative. Furthermore, the sample did get a satisfying representation of the Asian, African, and South American markets. The Asian market is a particularly important share of the global MTX market consumption, and the Asian consumer's behavior is potentially different from the Eastern one, therefore the results might have been different. Further research should be conducted with a focus on the Asian market and if possible, on the other regions that were not captured here, to get the full sample.

The report has decided to work with a holistic approach of MTX. It has been done to capture the average behavior. Yet, this does not provide much granularity on the underlying factors that could be explaining the results more thoroughly. Further research could be measuring the influence factors such as the game business model or the characteristics of the MTX on consumer behavior. Researchers could conduct a field experience on a couple of different games to assess the possible different behaviors, for example with a pay-to-win game, which tends to use more captive-product pricing, and a free-to-play game, which uses more optional-product pricing, to assess how different the buyer purchase process might be. Researchers could also be looking at the cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors affecting consumer behavior in the MTX purchase context.

Finally, this research has been conducted focusing on consumer behavior by using primary data coming from the consumers themselves. Such data are probably subject to biases, such as social desirability bias, or unconscious behaviors. The suggestion for further research is to analyze unbiased data on the MTX purchases process, coming from the game developer's

side. Possibly ultimately comparing that analysis with the qualitative consumer's behavior to isolate and explain an existing gap. Understanding that gap would be key for game marketing and sales and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, research can investigate the feasibility and the consequences on the different stakeholders of a game where MTX are sold in an open-market competition-based economy.

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Appendix 1: Survey questions (Sorting part)

Bachelor Thesis

As part of a Bachelor Thesis study on Consumer Behavior, the researcher wishes your help to further understand some of the aspects of consumers behavior towards in-game purchases (in apps, pc games, consoles games, etc.) The approximate survey length is of 8 minutes. All data collected are strictly used within the framework of this research. Thank you kindly for your participation!

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Question L.1 - Language

I would prefer to answer in English.

Je préfère répondre en Français

Definitions

Microtransactions: In-game purchase of any virtual items, extra game content or currencies that are sold for real world currency.

Video game: Gaming does not only concern games with controllers and dedicated machines but also web-based games, smartphone game applications and other casual gaming activity.

Question S.1 Have you played a video game recently? (games on smartphone, console, arcades, or PC)

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Question S.2 How often do you play?

- ❑ I don't play
- ❑ Once a month
- ❑ Once a week
- ❑ Multiples times a week
- ❑ Once a day
- ❑ Multiples times a day

Question S.3 Have you ever purchased a microtransaction (Items, content or currency)?

- ❑ Yes *Skip to question line A*
- ❑ No, by choice *Skip to question line B*
- ❑ No, I never encountered a microtransaction *Skip to "End of Survey"*

Appendix 2: Survey questions line A (Consumer)

Question C.1 - What aspect motivates you to engage with microtransactions?

- ❑ Advancement (progress, power)
- ❑ Mechanics (Optimization, templating, analysis)
- ❑ Competition (Challenging others)
- ❑ Socializing (helping others, making friends)
- ❑ Relationship (Personal)
- ❑ Teamwork (Collaboration, grouping)
- ❑ Discovery (Exploration, lore)
- ❑ Role-Playing (History, story Line)
- ❑ Customization (Appearances, accessories)
- ❑ Escapism (Relax, avoid real-life issues)
- ❑ Other: _____

Question C.2 - Did your game ever suggest you a microtransaction when you could need it?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Question C.3.1 - Have you ever felt pressured into purchasing microtransactions?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Question C.3.2 - If yes, did you purchase it?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Question C.4.1 - Have you ever faced a situation where spending real money was the only way to advance in your game?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Question C.4.2 - If yes, did you purchase it?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Question C.5 - Is the information about the microtransaction on the game shop sufficient or do you require more information before considering the purchase?

Rate 1 (I don't need more information) - 5 (I need complementary information)

- ❑ 1
- ❑ 2
- ❑ 3
- ❑ 4
- ❑ 5

Question C.8 - What resources do you use for gathering information about your microtransaction?

- ❑ Just the in-game shop
- ❑ Youtube
- ❑ Twitch
- ❑ Social Media
- ❑ Dedicated websites
- ❑ Friends
- ❑ Other players
- ❑ Other: _____

Question C.9 - How long do you spend searching for information?

- ❑ 0 seconds, I buy instantly.

- ❑ Less than a minute
- ❑ Between 1 and 5 minutes
- ❑ Between 5 to 15 minutes
- ❑ 15 minutes to 1 hour
- ❑ More than 1 hour

Question C.10 - Is there multiple sellers of microtransactions in your most-played game?

- ❑ Only the game developer
- ❑ Third-party retailer
- ❑ Open market (Modding allowed)

Question C.11 - Have you ever purchased lootboxes (random bundle of virtual items) or a bundle just to acquire one specific virtual item?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No
- ❑ Only because there was no other alternative

Question C.12 - Has anyone advised you on your decision to (or not to) purchase a microtransaction?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Question C.13 - How confident were you that the shop would deliver you the product/service purchased?

Rate 1 (Uncertain) - 5 (Certain)

- ❑ 1
- ❑ 2
- ❑ 3
- ❑ 4

- ❑ 5

Question C.14 - How confident were you that the product/service would match your expectation?

Rate 1 (Uncertain) - 5 (Certain)

- ❑ 1
- ❑ 2
- ❑ 3
- ❑ 4
- ❑ 5

Question C.15 - How much are you spending on microtransactions per month?

- ❑ Less than 5$
- ❑ Between 5 and 10$
- ❑ Between 10 and 20$
- ❑ Between 20 and 50$
- ❑ Over 50$

Question C.16 - How important is the price of the microtransaction for you?

Rate 1 (Not important at all) - 5 (Very important)

- ❑ 1
- ❑ 2
- ❑ 3
- ❑ 4
- ❑ 5

Question C.17 - Have you engaged in any calculation to estimate the worth of the microtransaction (in terms of hours to play or work)?

- ❑ Yes

- ❑ No

Question C.18 - How satisfied were you with your last microtransaction purchase at first?

Rate 1 (Not satisfied at all) - 5 (Very satisfied)

- ❑ 1
- ❑ 2
- ❑ 3
- ❑ 4
- ❑ 5

Question C.19 - How satisfied were you with your last microtransaction purchase in the long run?

Rate 1 (Not satisfied at all) - 5 (Very satisfied)

- ❑ 1
- ❑ 2
- ❑ 3
- ❑ 4
- ❑ 5

Question C.20 - Do you share your appreciation level with others?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Question C.21 - Have you ever regretted purchasing a virtual item? (Tick all that apply.)

- ❑ No, I keep it to myself
- ❑ I share it with my gaming friends
- ❑ I share it on social media
- ❑ I share it on the game review system

Question C.22 - Please state your appreciation level towards these games revenues methods

Mark only one oval per row.

	I hate it	I don't enjoy it	No particular feeling	I like it	I love it
Microtransaction	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Season Pass	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Lootboxes	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Game extension (DLC)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Advertising	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Question C.23 - I am

- ❑ Man
- ❑ Woman
- ❑ Other: _____

Question C.24 - I am

- ❑ under 18 years old
- ❑ 18 - 24 years old
- ❑ 24-39 years old
- ❑ 40 - 56 years old
- ❑ Over 57 years old

Question C.25 - I live in

- ❑ Europe
- ❑ North America
- ❑ South America
- ❑ Asia
- ❑ Oceania

- ❑ Africa

Question C.26 - I play (per week)

- ❑ less than 1 hour
- ❑ 1 to 2 hours
- ❑ 2 to 4 hours
- ❑ 4 to 7 hours
- ❑ 7 to 15hours
- ❑ 15 to 30 hours
- ❑ more than 30 hours

Question C.27 - I would define myself as a

- ❑ casual player
- ❑ true gamer
- ❑ competitive gamer
- ❑ professional gamer or streamer

Question C.28 - I mostly play on

- ❑ Smartphone
- ❑ Portable consoles
- ❑ Console / PC
- ❑ Arcade
- ❑ Virtual Reality
- ❑ Other: _____

Question C.29 - I mostly play

- ❑ Solo
- ❑ Cooperative

- ❑ Multiplayer online

Question C.30 - I mostly play the following game genre

- ❑ Action / MOBA
- ❑ Shooter
- ❑ Role-playing
- ❑ Sport / racing
- ❑ Adventure
- ❑ Fighting
- ❑ Strategy / Puzzle
- ❑ Other: _____

Question F.1 - Please provide an email or discord tag **if you are willing** to participate in a short interview (approx. **10** min) to further explain your thoughts.

- ❑ Contact: _____

Appendix 3: Survey non-consumer

Question N.1 - Ticks everything that applies

- ❑ I don't like microtransactions
- ❑ I don't feel any need for additional digital content
- ❑ I don't find enough information on the product
- ❑ I don't like the vendor and there is no alternative
- ❑ I don't trust the vendor to deliver the product
- ❑ I feel forced to consume
- ❑ A friend talked me out of this purchase
- ❑ It is too expensive
- ❑ I was dissatisfied by my last purchase
- ❑ It is too random
- ❑ My games do not offer any
- ❑ Microtransaction do not add value to my game
- ❑ I found alternatives ways to purchasing
- ❑ Other: _____

Question N.2 - Any other comments with regards to microtransactions or video games ?

_____

Question N.3 - I am

- ❑ Man
- ❑ Woman
- ❑ Other: _____

Question N.4 - I am

- ❑ under 18 years old

- ❑ 18 - 24 years old
- ❑ 24-39 years old
- ❑ 40 - 56 years old
- ❑ Over 57 years old

Question N.5 - I live in

- ❑ Europe
- ❑ North America
- ❑ South America
- ❑ Asia
- ❑ Oceania
- ❑ Africa

Question F.1 - Please provide an email or discord tag **if you are willing** to participate in a short interview (approx. **10** min) to further explain your thoughts.

- ❑ Contact: _____

Appendix 4: Additional comments from surveyee

- ❑ Too addictive
- ❑ I have no means of purchasing microtransactions
- ❑ Too addictive
- ❑ Microtransactions revolving around solely cosmetics are okay
- ❑ If you don’t pay attention to what you are spending, beware of your credit card bill
- ❑ I am spending time on a game to play, for fun, not to go fast through the content.
- ❑ Microtransaction are pure shit
- ❑ I am going with the assumption that a game must be developed with full content at the release (eventually some extension that I am ready to pay for). Whether it’s a pay to win, which I find awful, which only favors the riches, or whether it’s pure cosmetic, in which case you are nothing but a cow to be milked. I take part in none of them.
- ❑ One’s related to character strength/progress should be illegal.
- ❑ Honestly if I had enough disposable income to the point where it really wouldn’t matter, I see myself almost certainly buying them, as I have no principles against buying them (though I do dislike their existence) and most of them are pretty cool (as I’m sure they’re designed to be).
- ❑ Release a full game from the beginning like we used to.
- ❑ Today companies rush games because the execs think they can fix issues with patches (and they can) and fill in the missing content with paid downloads which I will never buy or let my kids buy. Make a quality game from the start. "
- ❑ They bad
- ❑ I don't like microtransaction, if the game offers any kind of bonus to progress fast or skip content, i just don't play
- ❑ I think free to play online games (mostly competitive ones) that have skins (nothing to boost power or experience) as microtransactions are the only acceptable option, if you must have microtransactions.
- ❑ I don't like microtransactions, and they leave a negative impact on my view of a game.

- In general i dont like Microtransaction in games that i have already paid the game for.
- There bad
- I'd rather pay up front or a monthly fee then pay micro transactions. I have a negative emotional response to micro transactions as we all know they are placed there to make money
- I don't mind microtransactions as long as they do not give advantage over the game and the content of it can be purchased by a longer grind of in-game currency.
- They are sometimes anoying and feel very pushed, they also make the game feel unplayable sometimes.
- They dilute my sense of ownership and control of a product I feel I already purchased.
- The games I play include options to buy the items with either real money or in-game effort. They don't have any loot boxes with random items.
- Never seen the need to spend that much money on cosmetic items that don't make the game more enjoyable.
- I don't want to spend my money on in-game currency.
- When games cost $60+ and then they sell season passes each year for another 40+ micro trans are just ridiculous

Appendix 5: Interview guidelines

0. What games do you play?

Warm-up Question, easing the interviewees.

1. In that game, how does MTX appear?

Opening, Context of the purchase, Item purchased

2. Can you tell me what you usually do when you see a MTX that you want to buy?

Conscious buyer behavior journey

3. What do you consider when you are about to purchase the MTX?

Evaluation criteria, Decision process,

4. You mentioned the importance for you of “cite need(s)”, what does it mean for you?

Developing the need driver(s)

5. In your opinion, what roles do other people play on your MTX consumption?

Importance of the other

A) You mentioned that you have been dissatisfied by MTX, that you don’t exactly like them, you even regretted it, how do you explain that you are still purchasing them?

Evaluating cognitive dissonance, Reaction to irrational behavior

B) You mentioned that you like microtransactions, which is kind of rare, can you explain what makes you like them, what value do they have to your eyes?

Exploring the positive value of MTX

The introduction and outro will not be transcribed. During these parts, the author explained how the interview is going to take place, how long it is going to take, and what the subject is about. The interviewees are encouraged to be open and sincere, as they are reminded that the entire interview is entirely for academic purpose and any name would be anonymized. Furthermore, the author asked permission to record the interview.

Appendix 6: Interview transcripts

6.1 Interviewee 248 (Male, US, 24-39) - 26th April 2021

Author: So, just to warm up, can you tell me what games do you play the most ?

Interviewee: At the moment, I mostly play hearthstone, the card game

Author: I see, and what kind of microtransaction is there in hearthstone ?

Interviewee: Well, you can buy cards … like pack of five random cards, and like many of them like in bundle. You have also card back and different hero. And you have also a battle pass and you can also pay for entering the arena.

Author: Hmm, I see. Can you tell me what you usually do when you see one a these products and you want to purchase them ?

Interviewee: Well, euh, when it's like a pre-sale before there is a new season, I look up on the web if it is worth it, but mostly I purchase it because I know that I'll play that game a lot. And for the rest, if I see that I play a lot of arena and battleground, I will purchase the battle pass. But first I make sure the extra rewards are cool.

Author: Ok, then, more precisely. When you know the product you want to purchase, like you have made up your mind. What do you consider at that moment? What comes to your mind?

Interviewee: Honestly, my first thought is that people will judge me for that. Like you know, will they know that I am wasting money on this and what will they say and also, I am praying to get all the good cards that I want.

Author: I understand that very well. In your opinion, does other people play a role on your consumption ?

Interviewee: Well, I know what they would think like I said before if they knew I was wasting 60 bucks each season, like you know. But in fact, I don't care. I still do cause well, it's the only game I play so it's fine. But, the other players certainly do have an influence on what I need to purchase. Cause, if nobody was purchasing cards, I wouldn't have to in order to compete with them. So yes.

Author: I see what you mean here, thanks. I see that you mentioned in the questionnaire that you like customization in microtransaction, what does it mean for you ?

Interviewee: When you see a player that uses the basic skin, he's kinda lame… only newbie does that. I prefer to look nice and not like a noob.

Author: That’s understandable. So, this would be my last question and maybe the toughest to answer. You actually mentioned that you have been dissatisfied after purchasing a microtransaction and that you don’t like them, you even regretted it, how do you explain that you are still purchasing them ?

Interviewee: eu..., good question … [silence] well I feel bad wasting money on cards that will only be useful for a bit and then i’ll just dez them you know ? Like but for when I buy them and use them, well it’s useful. It’s just that after a season, you can just throw them away and it feels bad putting that much money on stuff that you know won't last, you will destroy it. But, yeah, I will still buy them because it’s kinda how it works if you wanna play during that season and not lagging behind. You just have to, well I believe. Plus you know, it’s the only way this game is making money, so people like me are keeping the developers active, otherwise that game would be dead as

Author: Well, thank you for all the answers. It is very useful for me.

6.2 Interviewee 246 - Male, US, 24-39, 26th April 2021

Author: Ok, so let's start slowly. What game do you play ?

Interviewee: Euh, I play WoW, Lol, Hearthstone, Apex, Tft, Halo. And euh, I don't have like one I play the most… it's just that I prefer to play the one where my friends are playing at the moment

Author: Ok, so let's focus on one of this game, maybe LoL. How would you describe the microtransactions there, what sort is there ?

Interviewee: Bah, it means that, it's a bit of a mess. But each champ has skins, you also have emotes and banner tag, you know the one that displays your progress. You have also the possibility to buy the champ if you don't have the blue essence for, and runes. And then, there is also the the tft part, where you have eggs and explosion skins. Plus you have battlepass, but I don't purchase them.

Author: Ok, that sounds like a lot. Hmm, I see. Can you enlighten about what you do when you see one of these products and you want to purchase them ?

Interviewee: Hmm, if you want, euh, when I play a champ a lot, like said Tahm Kench, I look what skins exists, cause I am tired to see that frog. And in the shop you only have a drawing, and it's not exactly how it looks in the game … you know like false advertising… So I look up on youtube, there is a channel that shows every skins as a short video where you see the skin and spell and recall etc. So if I like it I buy it.

Author: it's pretty clear, thanks. And I, I see that you mentioned in the questionnaire that you like customization in microtransaction, what does it mean for you ? Like in your example here ?

Interviewee: yes, well, it's like yeah, well it's cool. I like to have the opportunity to look a bit different, like I like the skins that have unique funny animation, that makes weird sounds like you know ? I don't want like my character to look like too badass, and too strong, or like a cliche. I prefer when you have like a birthday hat and a balloon sword. It makes the champ more fun to play and it annoys the others.

Author: ahah ok, fair enough. So you assume there is a "other people" component in your purchase, true? Can you tell me what importance it has for you ?

Interviewee: Hmm, I play only with my friends, I don't like to play solo like I said before. But, yes, I think that you can say that the more my friends play a game the more I will spend on it?

Maybe. I don't know…. But, one thing is for sure, I don't spent any cents on a game that I play alone. Doesn't make any sense

Author: I understand that very well. That's almost over, I just have one final question for you. You mentioned in the survey that you didn't like microtransaction, but yet you keep buying them. How do you explain that paradox ?

Interviewee: Well it's not like, euh Well, I mean. I don't like the way that companies are milking us. Especially when you have some cosmetics that are so basic, like just a change of color, that takes them exactly one click in their software and yet they sold them for 5 bucks. There is a good example with the new Halo that will be released soon, and they teased that you will have to pay 5 bucks for each colour that you want to have. Which is completely crazy because that feature was already in Halo 1 in like 2000 or so and it was free. Why the f* should I pay for something that has been free for 20 f*ing years. It's not like they were earning that money fairly or by hard work. They just slide the colour to the right or left on their software..that's about it. For me I don't wanna pay for something that has no value. If you add up all of the revenue from one skin, there is no way it matches the development budget. It's unfair.

Author: I see and I share your point of view. But that explains why you don't like them, I think, but what about, how do you explain that you keep spending money on it.

Interviewee: Honestly I don't know. I know I shouldn't spend money on it… but you know when you play a game a lot, you want to be invested in it, have the best looking champ and flex a bit with it. You are quickly getting tired of always looking at the same vanilla character. So just a few dollars for a change of scenery … it's kinda worth it. Plus if nobody was spending money, the game would be dead for a while, you need to support the devs.

Author: Well, thank you for all the information. It helps me a lot ! So if you don't have any further comments, the interview is now over.

6.3 Interviewee 178, Male, EU, (18-24), 27th April 2021

Author: Just to warm up, can you tell me what games you play ?

Interviewee: Currently I play a lot on mobile phone. It's a game called polytopia. I think that I spent at least one hour a day on that. I also play Ps4. I used to play Minecraft, StarWars BattleFront and sometimes Fifa with friends

Author: Ok, Thank you for sharing that. So maybe, let's focus on the game you played the most, the Polytopia one. Can you tell me what kind of microtransaction do you find in that game ?

Interviewee: In that game, you can purchase new tribes. So basically, you have 4 of them when you start the game and then, there is a store where you can unlock 15 of them, being one franc for each.

Author: Ok, this is the kind of microtransaction that you typically purchase. So these extra tribe for new gameplay.

Interviewee: Yes exactly.

Author: I see that you mentioned in the survey that the reason why you purchased microtransaction it has to do with advancement and new features and competition. Can you maybe develop a bit more on this idea of advancement and competition, what does it mean for you ?

Interviewee: First of all, in this precise case the new tribes have different features. So you unlock new possibilities to play the game, that's already something very interesting cause you can explore new strategies for instance. And then, the multiplayer version, so online or with friends. Those tribes are actually more powerful. So if you go online you can see that most of the players are playing with purchased squads.

Author: So there is the idea of competition and other players. Do you think that there is an impact from other people on your consumption and the reason why you consume ?

Interviewee: Yes, I think so. I may account for 60% of my decisions cause I also play on that game on the solo mode as well. I don't mind spending money to have more experience on my own. But when I play with friend or online, it gives me an edge to have different opportunities, different tribes to experience with.

Author: Hm, that's understandable. Maybe the toughest question and my final one. I really want you to think about it because you mentioned a couple times in the survey that you don't

exactly like microtransactions, to be exact you hated it, if I quote you and you don't enjoy bundle service. But yet you are still purchasing them and spending money on it. So you have this paradox between not liking them but still purchasing them. So in your opinion, what really drives you to overcome this paradox ?

Interviewee: I think I am used to the traditional way of video games. I am used to that format of purchasing a game upfront and then be able to play for free. That's why I am not that a fan of microtransactions because they comes as a trap to the player because you are in the game and you want to experience different things and you have to pay for them. But then, if we are speaking about a game that I play a lot and that enjoy playing , I think that I am ready to plan for a budget for that precise game. The example here of polytopia is that this game is for free. And then I see that I spend a lot of time on that games. So I think that that game deserve to be supported on one side and then, every hobby as soon as you are putting time and effort on something then it's worth it to invest in that game.

Author: That's totally understandable. Maybe, what I totally grasp in your answer here is what role does your dislike of microtransaction play in your consumption ? Because here an understanding of an investment when you are playing a lot and you want to reward the game and to support the developers. But where does this hate come into play ?

Interviewee: It comes, as I said, from the feeling of being trapped in a game and I think that Polytopia here is an example of a game that I pay for, and among all the games that I have in my mobile phone I only purchase twice, I mean microtransaction in two games. Most of the cases seeing to achieve progress, or getting an edge or competing you have to pay most of the time makes me leave the game and not actually pay for that. Most of the cases, when I see microtransaction, I feel kind of betrayed, and makes me leave the game. If I see that I can win the game or compete without paying for it, and that the game is not that important to me. Then I am leaving the game. For instance, with Clash of Clans, that I use to play when I was younger. At the beginning it was ok. Everybody was a the same level, except if you play more you get more. But then when seeing people who were spending hundreds of francs or dollars in the game and you see you cannot compete anymore, and if the game is not that important for me, I leave it. And that's why I did with this game.

Author: So for you, a microtransaction should be fair, the game you stayed balanced with equal chance of playing and winning

Interviewee: yes exactly.

6.4 Interviewee 13, Male, EU, (19-24), 27th April 2021

Author: Ok, So I just started the recording, just like I said. So let's get started with a warm-up question. What games do you usually play?

Interviewee: I am a casual gamer, so I don't play a lot of games and neither on a lot of platforms. The game I play the most, or I used to play the most is League of Legends. I started when I was 13. The first real game that I play on a pc was Minecraft when I was around 12. And during my childhood I used to play Pokémon on the Nintendo devices. And otherwise, during my teenage years I used to play Star Wars the Old republic, the MMORPG. And I have never played mobile games.

Author: Ok. What games do you feel the most at ease to talk about, with regards to microtransaction. Is it more League of Legends or SWTOR ?

Interviewee: Definitely more League of Legends.

Author: Ok ! So let's focus on LoL. Can you tell me in that game, how do you perceive Microtransaction, what exists in you opinion in that game, how do they appear for you ?

Interviewee: Well, when I started. It was mostly skins. I think it was the only in game purchase you could do via Riot Points. You had to purchase riot points first with real money., And then with the RP you could buy skins. And not it's possible to buy the boxes and so yes I think they develop their marketplace if I can say. They went from basic skins to a whole comprehensive bunch of items like icons, tags, summoner icons and other stuff that I can't remember cause I didn't play the game for ages

Author: That's okay. Can you tell me, cause you mentioned some of them, how does it usually go when you see of the microtransaction, one of these skins and you say "I want to purchase it" how does it go in your mind ?

Interviewee: Firstly, I wan to say that I never bought anything on League of Legends by myself. I never played that game in solo queue, which is by yourself. I always was logged in with friends. Usually, when you have to wait in the lobby for a game. We talked about the game, about the novelties, the skins, the champions, and we started to get hyped by the novelties and that's when we said "ok, let's buy something". And what League of Legends did is you could gift skins or champions to your friends and I think it's where I spent my money, well most of it. It's mostly on friend's gift rather that my own account

Author: So, in you opinion the main component is the other player, or friends that you play with. It is really what drives your consumption of mtx

Interviewee: I think it's like if you are in a pub with friends and you most likely offer a beer to your friends. And I think this is the same way in League of Legends. You are in your lobby with your friends, waiting for a game. And Ok i am gonna buy you the new skin or a gift you don't know in the end. And I think this is the reason I spent money on League of Legends, it's on the other. For me it's like a funny game.

Author: It sounds very generous of you. First time I am hearing that, but very interesting nonetheless. I have further questions in regards to your answers. You mentioned that you have a positive feeling towards microtransactions but yet you mentioned that you feel pressured by the game to purchase, you felt forced even sometimes. So can you enlighten me, how can you like a product that you felt forced to consume?

Interviewee: I think that I answered this question while thinking about Star Wars the Old Republic. Because this game is constructed as a pay-to-win, like if you want to enjoy fully and go through the history then you have to pay. These games are very costly for the developers, so they need a lot of revenues which can be subscription or microtransaction on a virtual marketplace. The thing is, if you play with regular players they all spend a lot of money on it, and you as a casual you can't really go any further if you don't pay. So there is this mixed feeling between enjoying the game and the obligation to pay. So I think it depends a lot on the game. Like League of Legends that you can fully enjoy without spending any money on it, which is the case. I used to spend money for fun with friends and it depends on the game. That's why I have a mixed feeling.

Author: So if we stick to League of Legends, in that you fairly like microtransaction, if I get this right ?

Interviewee: Yes it's only a bonus. It won't change your experience, your true game experience. It will only adds up satisfaction and fun.

Author: So What is the real value for you of a cosmetic skin ?

Interviewee: That's the whole strategy of League of Legends. Esthetic

Author: Yes, but for you. What is the value that you gain from purchasing one of these cosmetics? Is it more about the character that you play or is it more about the feeling that you have in gifting that digital item to someone.

Interviewee: You know, it's all about the experience. For my part I only play a few characters out of hundreds. And buying a skin allows you to still play the same character but with a different design. So it's like if you drive a nice car but you change the car sometimes. So it's more of an esthetic I think

Author: So for you, purchasing the items for a few dollars it's changing your game experience ?

Interviewee: It's adding up new different alternatives

Author: Ok that makes sense. Thank you. I think it covers pretty much everything that I wanted to ask. Maybe one last question. When you are about to purchase. Like when you are writing you credit card on the game shop, what crosses your mind at that point ? What kind of feeling do you experience ? It is like straight forward ? Like it's registered now I am buying. Do you have second thoughts, hesitation, do you consider new stuff, looking for information, are you talking with people. What's going on when you are on the edge of purchasing something.

Interviewee: I think there is only very few information searching. It's very straight forward. Like you want something and it's where League of Legends is very strong. It's very easy to get riot points. You really need your credit cards, or you just registered it once. Or you pay with paypal. It's very easy and fast. That's why I don't second thoughts, cause it's very straight forward. But it's very ephemeral. Like you have satisfaction for one game like 10 mins and you are like "oh I just spent 20 bucks on League of Legends, why did I do that ?" But then you start again because it's where League of Legends is strong. It's like they push you to intensive purchasing

Author: But yet you are happy with it ?

Interviewee: Yeah

6.5 Interviewee 11, Male, EU, (25-39), 29th April 2021

Author: On va commencer assez doucement on va dire, petite question pour s'échauffer; à quels jeux est-ce que tu joues ?

Interviewee: A Rocket League, majoritairement. Tu t'attends à beaucoup de précisions sur la question ?

Author: Non, j'aimerais savoir quel est le jeu sur lequel tu es le plus à l'aise pour répondre à des questions sur les microtransactions, pour continuer sur les questions qui ont été posées dans le questionnaire.

Interviewee: Alors à Rocket League, et de très loin.

Author: De très loin ? D'accord. Et donc dans ce jeu, dans ce Rocket League, parce que je ne connais pas bien. Est-ce que tu arrives à m'expliquer quel type ya de microtransactions, comment est-ce qu'elles transparaissent en jeu, comment est-ce qu'elles apparaissent dans Rocket League ?

Interviewee: Alors il faut savoir que Rocket League, il a quelques années maintenant, je dirais 5-6 ans, 4-5 ans par là autour. Et initialement c'était un jeu qui était vendu au prix d'un jeu bon marché, entre 30 et 40 francs. Et il a été racheté par Epic Games et désormais il est gratuit. Donc depuis le free to play, ils ont mis beaucoup plus l'accent sur les microtransactions. Et puis maintenant, dans le jeu, comment les microtransactions elles se traduisent… Tu peux acheter des tokens, la monnaie du jeu avec de l'argent réel qui passe par Steam. Du coup tu mets de l'argent sur Steam, tu charges tes tokens sur ton jeu et grace à ses tokens tu peux acheter de la customization de voiture, uniquement des apparences

Author: Et donc toutes les microtransactions sont faites avec ses tokens, de cette monnaie aden jeu ?

Interviewee: Exactement

Author: D'accord. Est-ce que tu arrives à me dire, parce que tu as répondu dans le questionnaire comme quoi tu en consommais, comment ça se passe quand tu vois un produit qui te plait, quels processus tu as par rapport à ça. Depuis que tu te dis "Ok ya ce produit qui existe" jusqu'à que tu l'aies acheter. Comment ça se passe

Interviewee: Par exemple, je me log sur le jeu. Je vois qu'il y a un nouveau partenariat Rocket League avec là en l'occurrence Nascar. Alors il y a toutes les voitures de Nascar ont été importées dans le jeu. Et on peut du coup l'acheter en monnaie du jeu. J'hésite un peu à les prendre. Pis mon processus d'achat, là dans cet exemple c'est pas encore fait. Mais je risque

de le faire. Et je risque de charger un peu plus d'argent que nécessaire pour la voiture parce que par tranche de 10 balles tu as des réductions. Donc si je prends pour 30 balle de token, bah je vais avoir 20% de réductions … enfin c'est des fausses actions quoi. Personne n'est leurre mais on se fait tous avoir quand même. Mais oui, la plupart du temps je fais ça. J'achète un peu plus de token que ce que j'ai besoin et ensuite j'achète les objets en jeu dont j'ai envie.

Author: D'accord. Est-ce que tu arrives à m'indiquer, parce que là tu parles d'un nouveau partenariat, quelque chose de nouveau donc tu as pas beaucoup d'informations, donc quels sont les éléments qui te font décider si tu vas acheter ou pas acheter un skin, ou une autre microtransaction, genre un battle pass. C'est quoi tes critères d'évaluations ?

Interviewee: Ça dépend beaucoup du jeu. La si on parle de Rocket League, je vais avoir plus de peine à résister à la micro transaction du fait que j'ai genre 4000 heures sur ce jeu. Donc je me dis "C'est quoi 20 balle sur un jeu que je joue autant?". Surtout dis moi qu'est-ce que tu peux faire pour 20 Francs pendant 4000 heures ? et les autres critères, t'as genre là le partenariat Nascar, bah je trouve que c'est un peu cool la Nascar même si je suis pas vraiment. Alors par exemple si ya un partenariat avec un marque de voiture que je trouve cool, genre j'avais acheter la McLaren. C'est l'effet "cool" de l'item que je peux acheter. C'est pas du tout corréler avec des statistiques que ça pourrait donner c'est purement esthétique. Et puis l'image que ça renvoie. En l'occurrence c'est beaucoup des marques qui font des skins, donc c'est l'image que renvoie la marque. En l'occurence là, Nascar ou que sais-je Ferrari

Author: Tu mentionnes également, si je reprends le questionnaire auquel tu as répondu, dans les aspects qui te motivent à acheter. Il y a l'aspect de personnalisation, comme on a bien compris dans ce que tu viens d'expliquer mais tu as aussi mentionner l'aspect compétitif. Est-ce que tu arrives à me dire quelques mots la dessus ? En quoi pour toi, une microtransaction répond à un besoin de compétition ?

Interviewee: Alors là, c'est plus dans le sens compétitif quand tu joues en ligne t'as envie d'avoir l'air cool. Quand tu joues à un jeu compétitif même si l'objet en question ne vas pas te donner un avantage sur ton adversaire bah il va au moins te donner l'air plus cool que ton adversaire (rire). Alors pour moi c'est un petit jeu psychologique. Je pense que ça a un petit impact quand même.

Author: Donc selon toi, il y a un impact des autres joueurs. Est-ce que tu penses que la perception d'autrui, tes amis ou tes adversaires, est-ce que tu penses que ça influence ta consommation ?

Interviewee: Euh oui énormément. Si en jouant au jeu et que je vois qu'il y a beaucoup de monde qui ont des skins trop stylés et que ces gens sont trop cool. Alors je vais être plus enclin à me fondre dans la masse et faire comme tout le monde et acheter des skins un peu cool.

Author: Très bien, on arrive bientôt à la fin. J'ai une dernière question qui risque d'être la plus difficile. Tu peux réfléchir un peu avant de répondre. Tu mentionnes que ta position par rapport aux microtransactions c'est que tu ne les apprécies pas, comme la majorité des communautés, mais tu continues à les acheter, à dépenser de l'argent. Donc ya un vrai paradoxe entre la non-satisfaction du produit et le regret d'avoir acheter, tu regrettes de dépenser de l'argent, ou tu n'aimes pas le concept mais pourtant tu continues à acheter. Comment est-ce que toi tu résous ce paradoxe?

Interviewee: Très bonne question ça. Ouai la je pense qu'on est plus dans la dissonance cognitive que dans le paradoxe.

Author: Oui tout à fait, je voulais pas utiliser de terme technique. Mais oui si tu veux, une potentielle dissonance cognitive entre l'intention d'achat et l'achat actuel. Et donc comment est-ce que toi tu résous ça ?

Interviewee: Euh ouai, pourquoi je fais ça… Après j'ai fait une réflexion sur moi-même, ya une ou deux années, aussi en arrêtant League of Legends. Je me suis demandé, mais est-ce que ça vaut vraiment la peine de continuer à dépenser de l'argent dans des trucs qui ne me rendent pas heureux. Et j'ai quand même baissé ma consommation de microtransactions pour essayer de résoudre un peu mon dilemme (rire), pour baisser le niveau de dissonance cognitive. Et pourquoi malgré ça je continue à le faire, malgré que je pense que c'est pas bien ? Ouai je pense, que j'ai une petite addiction quand même. Le besoin d'acheter un petit truc et le fait que c'est dans le mot, c'est des microtransactions. Alors est-ce que ça a un impact financier sur ta vie ? pas vraiment. Mis bout à bout, si tu fais le calcul sur 10 ans, tu partirais certainement en vacances 2 fois. Mais ouai, je pense que c'est une petite addiction qui n'a pas vraiment de conséquences pour moi. Donc j'essaye pas de le résoudre complètement. Mais j'essaye juste d'en être conscient et de pas trop non plus consommer.

Author: Est-ce que tu aimerais rajouter un dernier commentaire ?

Interviewee: Euh non pas vraiment. Je pense que les microtransactions c'est de la merde et que c'est difficle de pas y céder.

6.6 Interviewee 4, Male, EU, (25-39), 29th April 2021

Author: On va commencer en douceur par une question d'échauffement, est-ce que tu peux m'expliquer à quels jeux tu joues ?

Interviewee: La liste complète ?!

Author: Non, plutôt les jeux sur lesquels tu serais à même de répondre à des questions relatives aux microtransactions

Interviewee: World of Warcraft, League of Legends, hmm, Hearthstone et puis est-ce que sur Stream il y a beaucoup de microtransactions ? Non, je pense que League of Legends, World of Warcraft et Hearthstone, et Heroes of the Storm c'est déjà pas mal comme jeux ou j'ai pas mal claqué de tune dans des microtransactions

Author: Est-ce qu'on peut en choisir un en particulier peut-être ?

Interviewee: On peut faire sur League of Legends. Je pense c'est le plus

Author: Dans le contexte de LoL est-ce que tu peux me dire comment tu perçois les microtransactions, qu'est-ce qui existe dans LoL qui pour toi sont des microtransactions ?

Interviewee:`Tout ce qui est sur League of Legends c'est tout plus cosmetic plus que gameplay. Comment je le perçois c'est tout du cosmétique. C'est tout par rapport au fait d'avoir plus de skins sur les perso. Ya pas vraiment d'amélioration de gameplay. Il y avait eu à une époque, et je crois que j'avais payé pour ça à une époque. Ca permettait d'avoir de l'expérience plus facilement pour pouvoir atteindre le niveau max plus facilement ou bien d'avoir la monnaie du jeu plus facilement. Disons que c'était vraiment au début avant d'arriver niveau 30. Depuis que j'ai été niveau max sur le jeu, ça n'a plus qu'été du cosmétique.

Author: Ok et donc j'imagine que tu as acheté certains de ses objets cosmétique également, et pas seulement les boosts. Est-ce que tu peux m'expliquer le processus que tu as lorsque tu découvres un nouveau produit ?

Interviewee: Du type ? recherche d'information etc ?

Author: Par exemple le dernier skin que tu as acheté, comment t'es venu l'idée de l'acheter et quelles sont les étapes qu'il y a eu jusqu'à que tu l'aies acheter ?

Interviewee: Alors je pense que le dernier skin que j'ai acheté ça doit être Galaxy Slayer Zed, un skin d'un personnage avec un chroma. Donc en plus d'avoir un skin différent sur le perso, tu peux avoir des couleurs différentes sur ce skin du perso. Et c'est parce que j'ai vu l'art du skin, je l'ai trouvé assez stylé. Et ensuite j'ai cherché sur youtube, parce qu'il y a une chaîne

qui fait une sorte de reveal discovery des skins. Du coup j'ai regardé en entier les compétences comment elles étaient et le skin du perso. Ensuite j'ai regardé un streamer de League of Legends, qui un est des meilleur joueurs koréen de ce perso et qui jouait justement avec un Chroma de ce skin là. Parce que je trouvais qu'il était assez stylé et que c'est ma couleur préférée. Rouge.

Author: Ca fait sens. Et du coup dans cet achat la en particulier, ou même en général, quels critères tu utilises pour distinguer entre un skin que tu vas acheter et un que tu ne vas pas acheter ? Sur LoL, il y en a des milliers, pourquoi un plutôt qu'un autre ? C'est quoi tes critères d'évaluation.

Interviewee: Avant tout c'est vraiment basé sur le champion. Donc avant de penser si je vais l'acheter ou pas, je regarde le champion que c'est. Si je le joue beaucoup ou pas. Parce que je vais acheter des skins sur des personnages que je vais jamais jouer. Donc d'abord je regarde le perso évidemment. Ensuite ça se base beaucoup sur l'artwork du skin. Donc si j'en vois un qui ne m'inspire pas déjà de base sur l'artwork, je ne vais pas aller chercher plus d'information dessus. C'est-à-dire chercher des screenshot in-game ou regarder des vidéos. Donc c'est vraiment en priorité sur l'artwork. Regarder si le style me convient et ensuite je fais de la recherche par vidéo ou par stream pour voir si ça convient. Donc je dirais champion en premier et ensuite ce qui me plait le plus.

Author: Est-ce que parmi les aspects que tu as mentionné dans le questionnaire sur la motivation, bon tu as déjà parlé de personnalisation et de cosmétique, je pense qu'on l'a couvert ici. Mais tu as aussi mentionné une question de puissance et d'avancement. Est-ce que tu arrives à me dire quelques mots la dessus ?

Interviewee: C'est-à-dire que je pensais plus à des DLC sur Hearthstone ou The Witcher. Parce qu'avancement, t'as l'impression qu'en achetant des DLC, t'as de la campagne en plus. Donc t'as encore de quoi continuer. C'est pas comme si tu avais une fin à la carrière parce que ça te rajoute des épisodes en plus. Je pense que c'est pour ça que j'ai pensé à avancement. Par contre puissance, je ne sais pas. Ça peut être une idée de pay-to-win, peut-être avec Hearthstone. Ou peut-être d'avoir de l'or sur World of Warcraft. Il y a la possibilité de mettre de l'argent réel pour avoir de l'argent en jeu. Certains passent des heures à essayer de faire de l'argent en jeu, et bah toi t'as la possibilité de récupérer de l'or assez facilement en payant. Ça ne s'applique pas sur LoL mais à d'autres jeux auxquels j'ai joué.

Author: Toujours par rapport à ces facteurs d'influence. Est-ce que tu penses que les autres ont un impact sur toi ? Ou l'impact que toi tu as sur les autres ? Est-ce que l'environnement

multijoueur, la compétition, etc. est-ce que tout ça, ça à un impact sur ta consommation à ton avis ?

Interviewee: Oui, de sûr. Déjà avec l'exemple que j'ai donné tout à l'heure avec le skin de zed. Et bien c'est clairement en voyant quelqu'un jouer le skin que ça m'a donné envie. Et pour mon influence sur les autres, oui j'ai déjà discuté avec des potes et puis conseillé un DLC sur un jeu parce que j'y avais joué par exemple. Mais oui c'est sûr qu'il y a une influence des autres sur moi et de moi sur les autres pour l'achat de microtransactions.

Author: Dis moi, dans le survey tu as répondu à la question "Dans votre jeu le plus joué, existe-il plusieurs vendeurs de microtransactions ?" par "Il existe des revendeurs tiers". T'arrives à me dire à quel jeu tu pensais ?

Interviewee: Je pensais à Witcher 3. Les extensions sont aussi vendues par Instant Gaming aussi. Je ne sais pas si c'est ça que tu posais comme question.

Author: Je vois où tu veux en venir. On va arriver à la dernière question. Toi tu as mentionné dans le questionnaire que les microtransactions c'est plutôt un type de produit que tu appréciais. Quel est pour toi la vraie valeur, en quoi est-ce que ça te satisfait d'acheter une microtransaction.

Interviewee: Ca dépend toujours le type de microtransaction. J'ai répondu oui, parce que quand je penses aux microtransactions et aux DLC, c'est vrai que les cas positifs comme Witcher ou Widelands ou ça donnait la possibilité d'avancer dans la campagne. Donc c'est pour ça. Mais y a aussi des mauvais côtés aux DLC, c'est-à-dire de devoir payer pour avoir du contenu en plus. Comme la dernière sortie de World of Warcraft, la nouvelle extension ou tu dois payer pour avoir un personnage presque niveau max. C'est un point faible que je trouve pas très intéressant. Mais les microtransactions ne me dérange pas plus que ça, tant que le prix est convenable, pas excessif. Et que la valeur du produit est suffisante à excellente. En règle générale quand j'ai acheté des DLC, ils m'ont toujours satisfait donc j'ai pas trop de soucis avec ça.

Author: Et si on regarde plutôt du côté des cosmétiques et pur microtransaction?,

Interviewee: Ouai, les cosmétiques c'est pas que ça rajoute du temps de jeu, mais c'est vrai que j'ai toujours bien aimé. C'est peut-être mon côté collectionneur. Parce que j'ai toujours aimé faire des collections en vrai. Donc peut-être que d'avoir une idée d'avoir tous les skins sur un personnage ou tous les chromas sur un certain skin, ça m'intéresse. En plus d'avoir un personnage qui est différent des autres grâce au skin, qui peut être encore différent grâce au chroma du skin de base. En plus de l'aspect collection et accomplissement, c'est pour ça que

j’aime bien aussi les DLC. Typiquement, j’ai toujours cherché à avoir tous les succès sur un jeu vidéo. Ben peut-être que je considère les pièces esthétiques et cosmétiques de la même façon, c'est-à -dire de tous les avoirs. Tous les collectionner. Exactement comme les pokémons.

6.7 Interviewee 16, Female, EU, (18-24), 2nd May 2021

Author: Première question c'est: "A quels jeux est-ce que tu joues?"

Interviewee: Alors je joue à plusieurs jeux parce que plusieurs plateforme tout simplement. Mais sur PC je joue à The Witcher, sur Switch je joue à Zelda et puis j'ai encore la Wii U ou j'ai également d'autres jeux. Mais c'est plutôt varié.

Author: Et parmis ces jeux, c'est sur lequel que tu serais le plus à-même de répondre à des questions sur les microtransactions?

Interviewee: Disons que sur la Switch ya pas trop de microtransactions. Du coup c'est plus des jeux sur téléphone.

Author: Quel est la dernière Microtransaction que tu aurais effectué ?

Interviewee: Je pense que la dernière c'est peut-être sur Overwatch peut-être ? Ou sinon c'est des vieux jeux sur téléphone.

Author: Comme par exemple ?

Interviewee: Il y avait un truc avec des dragons. C'était un jeu ou tu devais construire ta ville, un peu comme ces jeux construis ta ferme. Mais tu devais mixer des oeufs de dragons entre eux et si t'avais pas assez de temps, tu pouvais acheter des gemmes et voir le dragon que ça faisait.

Author: Si on prends cet exemple, comment est-ce que ça se présente un achat pour toi. Depuis le moment ou t'apprends son existence jusqu'au moment ou tu achètes effectivement. Comment ça se passe, combien de temps ça prends etc.

Interviewee: Généralement c'est assez rapide, parce que dans tous mes jeux c'est genre "ah tu veux faire ça plus vite" ou "ah tu veux plus d'argent" et après il te propose un pack. Et dans ce pack il y a par exemple 6 gemmes pour 1 franc. Et dès le moment ou ça pop, tu t'intéresse et tu dis ok, je veux aller plus vite etc. jusqu'à que t'achètes, c'est très rapide.

Author: Pour toi, quels sont les critères d'achat pour une microtransaction. Entre une que tu déciderais qui a de la valeur pour toi et une autre non. Comment est-ce que tu évalues oui ou non?

Interviewee: Une microtransaction pour moi qui a pas de valeur, c'est acheter un truc juste pour ce que c'est, comme typiquement les golds. Je trouve ça un peu dommage. Tandis que des trucs comme un special skin par exemple un spécial Halloween ou spécial événement.

J’ai tendance à me dire que c’est spécial et que j’ai quelque chose en plus que ce que j’achète, du coup ça en vaut la peine.

Author: Très bien. Est-ce que pour toi les autres joueurs, ton réseau, tes amis, influencent ta consommation?

Interviewee: Oui clairement. Si t’es plusieurs à jouer sur le même jeu, et qu’il y en a un qui justement qui dit “ah bah j’ai acheté ça et j’ai avancé, j’ai 15 niveau de plus que toi” T’as tendance à te dire, “Lui il l’a fait, ça a l’air pas trop mal, il a l’air content” et de plus tu as pas envie de rester à la traîne, si t’es plusieurs. T’as tendance à être vite influencé pour gagner des niveaux aussi rapidement que eux l’ont peut-être fait.

Author: OK. Tu as mentionné dans le questionnaire les raisons qui te motivent à acheter, notamment l’avance comme tu viens de l’expliquer. Mais tu as aussi mentionné la personnalisation, en quoi c’est quelque chose qui te motive à acheter

Interviewee: Typiquement la personnalisation, j’imagine qu’on parle surtout de skins et ce qui te pousse à acheter c’est que tu trouves un truc joli et que tu peux pas avoir gratuitement ou en jeu, ou bien que tu peux le gagner dans des lootboxes, mais t’as pas envie d’attendre ou d’avoir plein de trucs à côtés, ou ça te demanderais pas mal d’heure de jeu. Mais t’as envie d’être esthétique quand tu joues. T’es relativement assez fier quand tu as un personnage qui te plait. Donc quitte à mettre de l’argent dedans, la personnalisation devrait être le critère numéro un. Style skin sur Fortnite qui fait un carton à chaque fois.

Author: Et pour toi en quoi ça te concerne plus particulièrement ?

Interviewee: Par exemple sur Overwatch, je crois que c’est la seule fois où j'ai acheté. J’aimais un skin qui était absolument magnifique, et qu’il fallait payer… Et bien j’ai payé

Author: D’accord ! Dernière question, tu as mentionné dans le questionnaire qu’en général tu appréciais les microtransactions, en tant que concept, est-ce correct ?

Interviewee: Oui, après apprécier c’est peut-être pas le bon mot. Mais je trouve que c’est tout à fait normal d’avoir des microtransactions sur un certain jeu, peut-être pas tous. C’est comme dans la vie de tous les jours. Tu prends le train, tu as le choix d’aller en deuxième classe ou en première. Et pour moi, les microtransactions c’est la première classe. C’est aussi comme un achat de shopping, t’es content de l’avoir acheter, t’as une vraie satisfaction de l’achat.

Author: Original, je comprends ta métaphore. J’aimerais juste relancer sur un aspect du questionnaire. Tu y mentionnes que tu t’es déjà sentie forcée d’acheter mais tu apprécies

quand même le concept même des microtransactions, ce qui est peut-être un peu paradoxal, qu'est-ce que tu en penses ?

Interviewee: Disons que ça dépend de quel jeux. J'ai pas dit que tous les jeux devait le faire. Mais certain je trouve ça tout à fait normal. Je veux dire que s'ils travaillent sur le jeu, et bien c'est aussi une de leur source de revenu. Mais certains jeux, ils te poussent clairement à la consommation. Mais c'est trop forcé. Typiquement le jeu des dragons. Ou on te fais ressentir que tu dois attendre, mais on te dit "t'inquiètes pas, tu peux acheter". Je trouve que c'est un peu forcé. Parce que t'es entre deux et tu dis, j'attends mais quand tu deviens un peu plus actif dans le jeu t'en as marre d'attendre et tu dis, j'ai pas envie d'acheter, pas envie de mettre de l'argent si je peux juste attendre. Mais en même temps, on te répète quand "tu as plus que 2h à attendre, mais t'inquiètes pas tu peux acheter la transaction" et c'est un peu pousser. Alors qu'acheter un skin ou une arme sur un jeu, tu ne te sens pas pousser. C'est juste que t'en as envie et que l'esthétique te plait.

Author: Donc quel est la valeur d'une microtransaction par rapport à une autre quel que soit leur type ?

Interviewee: Il faut des microtransaction qui soit un peu plus travaillée. Les petits jeux mobiles qui ont des toutes simples, c'est vraiment pas utile. Tandis que pour des trucs sur PC qui sont vraiment aboutis ou qui ont de magnifiques graphiques, je trouve que c'est normal de dépenser pour ça.

Author: Et ça c'est indépendant du prix de vente du jeu de base ?

Interviewee: Oui, enfin c'est aussi un peu lié à ça, si t'as payé un jeu 80 euros, t'as plus envie de rajouter de l'argent. Mais un jeu Switch, c'est pas trop cher et d'acheter encore quelques petits trucs pour un jeu qui te plait, je trouve que c'est supporté les développeurs.

Author: Donc si je résume. Pour que ce soit légitime, il faut que ce soit un jeu abouti et bien développé.

Interviewee: et qui te plaise surtout. Que t'as envie de soutenir

6.8 Interviewee 157, Female, EU, (24-39), 2nd May 2021

Author: Alors première question, à quel jeu est-ce que tu joues ?

Interviewee: Hearthstone, à Skyrim, The Witcher, Shadow of Mordor and War, après ça fait longtemps que je n'ai pas fait d'autres jeux.

Author: Et parmi ces jeux, lequel serais-tu le plus à même de répondre à des questions sur les microtransactions.

Interviewee: Hearthstone je crois. Parce que tous les autres je les ai achetés et c'était tout.

Author: Ok donc concentrons-nous juste sur Hearthstone pour les prochaines questions.Peux-tu m'expliquer comment est-ce que tu perçois les microtransactions dans Hearthstone ?

Interviewee: T'as les paquets de cartes à acheter, t'as des extensions, les pass tavernes et duels et les arènes.

Author: Parmi les produits que tu as décrits, comment est-ce que ça se passe quand tu veux acheter quelque chose ? Par exemple, si tu dois me décrire la dernière fois que tu as fait un achat sur Hearthstone, comment t'es venu à l'idée d'acheter un produit, qu'est-ce que tu as pensé jusqu'à ce que tu aies en effet acheté le produit ?

Interviewee: La dernière fois que j'ai acheté c'était avec des golds en jeu, est-ce que ça compte ?

Author: Non, ça ne rentre pas dans la définition. C'est vraiment une idée d'échange d'euros contre une prestation.

Interviewee: Alors j'ai acheté une extension. Parce que mon copain m'a dit qu'elle était trop cool. Donc j'ai regardé l'extension, ce qui était proposé. Et j'avais l'envie de faire des vraies parties compétitives. De refaire un peu mon pool de cartes et d'avoir des decks un peu sympa. Plus l'aventure, qui est quand même cool.

Author: Et quand tu te vois confronté à un produit que tu veux acheter. Quels sont les critères que tu utilises pour décider si tu vas acheter ou pas ?

Interviewee: La rentabilité.

Author: C'est-à-dire ?

Interviewee: Si j'achète un paquet de cartes, je peux l'utiliser pendant 2 ans. Je vais l'acheter sans trop réfléchir. Ça sera plus rentable qu'un paquet utile que pour 2 semaines.

Author: Donc c'est une question de longévité ?

Interviewee: Oui, de longévité et de prix. Oui, parce qu'il y a forcément le prix qui rentre en jeu. Et si je l'utilise vraiment. Ou que j'en ai vraiment l'utilité. Parce que si j'achète un truc et qu'au final je ne m'en sers pas du tout, ce n'est pas très intéressant. Donc je vais plus volontiers acheter quelque chose qui a de la valeur pour moi dont je sais que je vais avoir besoin ou que je vais vraiment utiliser. Avoir un paquet carte dans lequel je suis sûr qu'il y a une carte légendaire, je vais avoir plus l'envie de l'acheter qu'un paquet classique.

Author: Ok. Tu as répondu dans le questionnaire au sujet des motivations d'achat. Tu parles de mécaniques de jeu, comme tu viens de l'expliquer, et comme autre facteur, tu mentionnes l'aide au développeur. A quel point c'est important pour toi ?

Interviewee: Alors ça marche moins bien sur Hearthstone. Mais par exemple, j'ai fait pas mal de jeux mobiles gratuits. Mais que j'ai acheté parce que je les trouvais vraiment bien foutu, et hyper cool. Ce n'était pas des jeux où on voit des pubs tous les jours. Ça avait vraiment l'air d'être des tout petits développeurs et je trouvais important de plus soutenir les développeurs. Parce que c'est de la qualité ce qu'il développait. Même si avec leur version gratuite, j'avais largement assez pour m'amuser, je trouvais intéressant de l'acheter pour juste le soutenir.

Author: Mais tu dis que ça ne marche pas du tout dans le cadre de Hearthstone, pourquoi ?

Interviewee: Bah pas trop, j'ai pas l'impression qu'ils ont besoin qu'on les soutiennent. (rire) Ils ne ressemblent pas du tout à un petit développeur avec un jeu original et sympa. Ils ne crèvent pas la faim.

Author: Autres facteurs, c'est la question des autres joueurs, de tes adversaires, de tes amis, etc. Est-ce que toi personnellement ça t'impacte l'influence que les autres ont sur le jeu ou sur toi.

Interviewee: Ouai bah typiquement, j'ai plus tendance à acheter un jeu ou une extension si je sais que mon copain achète la même chose et qu'on peut jouer ensemble au même niveau. Mais les autres joueurs n'ont pas d'influence sur moi, comme par exemple s'ils ont une tenue plus stylée que moi… bah ça m'est égal. C'est plus le but de jouer avec quelqu'un qui a la même extension ou le même jeu. C'est plus les amis

Author: Dernière question alors, un peu plus compliquée. En référence à ce que tu as répondu que tu "détestes". Mais malgré tout, tu continues à en acheter dans certains cas. Comment tu expliques que tu détestes ça mais que tu achètes ? Comment est-ce que tu résous ce paradoxe ?

Interviewee: Ya des moments ou elles me gênent moins que d'autres. Une microtransaction que je suis obligé d'acheter pour continuer le jeu ou pour être meilleur. Je déteste ça, et là

j’achète pas. Je vais acheter un truc qui va me faire plaisir et où je ne me sens pas forcé. Et le problème c’est que dans la majorité des jeux, les microtransactions sont hyper forcées.

Author: Si je résume, les microtransactions que toi tu achètes, celles-là tu ne les détestes pas mais tu les apprécies ?

Interviewee: Ouai c’est plus le format de la microtransaction plus que le concept en soi. C’est plus le fait que , typiquement Raid Shadow Legends, tu avances un peu dans le jeu c’est cool et boum d’un coup t'avance plus du tout si t’achètes rien. Et du coup c’est pas intéressant du tout et ça m’énerve vraiment. Je préfère un jeu qu’on va te faire payer 60 euros ou même 80 mais ou j’ai un jeu complet. Plutôt qu’un jeu qu’on va me vendre comme un jeu gratuit mais qui en fait ne l’est pas du tout, parce que si tu veux avancer dans le jeu t’es obligé de payer.

Author: Tu trouves que c’est pas honnête ou équitable comme processus?

Interviewee: Ouai, je comprends très bien qu’ils ont besoin d’argent mais je trouve pas très honnête et pas très intéressant parce que ça te bloque dans l’avancée du jeu et c’est trop dommage je trouve par rapport au temps investi.

6.9 Interviewee 14, Male, EU, (24-39), 16th May 2021

This short "interview" of a single question was needed as Interviewee 14 was the one of the two-respondent mentioning "Third party" at survey question C.10 and left their contact details.

Author: Yo petite question pour ma thèse. Tu as répondu à la question "Dans votre jeu le plus joué, existe-il plusieurs vendeurs de microtransactions?" par "Il existe des revendeurs tiers". Est-ce que tu peux m'expliquer à quel cas tu faisais allusion ?

Respondent: Salut! Sur Dofus y a des sites de ventes de Kama illégal. Comme les vendeurs d'or sur Wow. Je pense que j'ai voulu parler de cela.