**Aalto University
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How women play mobile games:
Studying the consumer culture of mobile games among young adult females

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Abstract

Female players have interested researchers and industry professionals ever since the video games market started notably growing again after the mid-80s. Numerous studies motivated by the desire to grow the female demographic of games have studied female preferences and obstacles of adoption i.a. Since then, the video games market has developed significantly and continues growing with an increasing speed. A significant part of this growth is due to the advancements in mobile games that have expanded the potential player base of games. Interestingly, the majority of the player base of mobile games is female. Yet, research on gender and video games has more or less stagnated.

The study on hand focuses on this major demographic of mobile games and the prevailing consumer culture behind it. Current business oriented academic research on mobile games is still fairly scarce and not much is yet known about the characteristics of mobile game consumers even in general. By introducing the platform of mobile games to the discussion, the study on hand attempts to remove established presumptions of female players and contribute towards moving into more multifaceted research approach. Understanding the female player demographic, which has clearly benefited from the mobile platform, benefits both marketers and industry professionals in developing their actions.

The topic is studied through the research question of how do young adult females play mobile games and what factors are linked to the consumption culture. A constructivist approach and interpretivist perspective are taken towards the topic. Narrative data was collected through seven semi-structured interviews and analyzed by utilizing consumer culture theory.

The study identifies three significant groups of actions in consumption of mobile games: positive patterns of play, negative patterns of play, and control mechanisms. These thematic groups hold a specific behavior patterns that are used to negotiate mobile games consumption both with oneself and surrounding people. The observed behavior patterns illustrate the statements in previous literature that female players are a diverse consumer group and should not be reviewed with limited and positivist views. The study finds out that mobile games have removed many previous obstacles of female play. However, negative associations of gaming as antisocial and masculine activity still remain in mobile games that affects perceptions and how gaming is negotiated. It is finally proposed that many female players construct a consumption enclave for themselves in order to control the undesired associations from their surroundings.

The main contribution of the study is identifying how varied female patters of play are, thus underlining the need to abandon narrow conceptions of female players as a homogeneous group. Further diversifying the understanding of video game demographics helps marketers and industry professionals in better addressing market needs and expanding the player base.

Keywords mobile games, gender and video games, consumption as play, consumer culture, consumer culture theory

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Tiivistelmä

Naispelaajat ovat kiinnostaneet tutkijoita ja toimialan ammattilaisia siitä lähtien, kun videopelimarkkinat kääntyivät uudestaan huomattavaan kasvuun 80-luvun puolivälin jälkeen. Naiskuluttajien määrän kasvattaminen on motivoinut lukuisia tutkimuksia keskittyen mm. naisten mieltymyksiin ja kuluttamisen esteisiin. Sittemmin videopelimarkkinat ovat kehittyneet huomattavasti ja jatkavat nopeutuvaa kasvuaan. Merkittävä osa tästä kasvusta on mobiilipeliteknologian kehittymisen ansiota, mikä on laajentanut pelien potentiaalista pelaajakuntaa. Mielenkiintoista on kuitenkin, että mobiilipelien pelaajista valtaosa on naispuolisia. Tästä huolimatta gender ja videopelien tutkimus on pitkälti juuttunut paikoilleen.

Oheinen tutkimus keskittyy tähän mobiilipelien suurempaan käyttäjäjoukkoon ja sen vallitsevaan kulutuskulttuuriin. Mobiilipeleihin keskittyvää akateemista taloustutkimusta on toistaiseksi vielä niukasti, eikä mobiilipelikuluttajia tunneta vielä kovin hyvin edes yleisesti. Tuomalla mobiilipelit mukaan keskusteluun, tutkimus pyrkii kumoamaan vakiintuneita olettamuksia naispelaajista ja osaltaan edistämään siirtymistä kohti monimuotoisempia tutkimusnäkökulmia. Ymmärtämällä naispelaajakuntaa, joka on selvästi hyötynyt mobiilialustasta, sekä markkinoijat että toimialan ammattilaiset voivat kehittää toimintaansa paremmaksi.

Aihetta käsitellään seuraavan tutkimuskysymyksen kautta: Miten nuoret aikuiset naiset pelaavat mobiilipelejä ja mitkä tekijät ovat yhteydessä niiden kulutuskulttuuriin. Aiheen lähestymistapa on konstruktivistinen ja näkökulma interpretivistinen. Narratiivinen tutkimusaineisto kerättiin seitsemässä puolistrukturoidussa haastattelussa ja analysoitiin käyttäen kuluttajakulttuuriteoriaa.

Tutkimus määrittelee kolme merkittävää toimintoryhmää mobiilipelien kuluttamisessa: myönteiset ja kielteiset pelimallit sekä ohjausmekanismit. Näiden temaattisten ryhmien alle on kerätty erillisiä käyttäytymismalleja, joita käytetään mobiilipelaamisen käsittelyyn itsensä ja ympäröivien ihmisten kanssa. Nämä havaitut käyttäytymismallit todentavat aiemmassa kirjallisuudessa tehdyt väittämät naispelaajista monitahoisena kuluttajaryhmänä, jota ei tulisi tarkastella positivistisesti. Tutkimuksessa huomataan, että mobiilipelit ovat poistaneet monet aikaisemmat esteet pelaamiselle. Pelaamiseen liittyvät kielteiset mielikuvat epäsosiaalisena ja maskuliinisena toimintana kuitenkin säilyvät, mikä vaikuttaa siihen liittyviin käsityksiin ja käsittelyyn. Lopuksi tutkimus esittää, että monet naispuoliset pelaajat rakentavat nk. kulutusenklaavin säädelläkseen ympäröivän yhteisön epäsuotuisaa palautetta.

Tutkimuksen tärkein panos on tunnistaa naisten pelimallien monimuotoisuus ja siten korostaa tarvetta luopua rajoittuneesta tavasta nähdä naispelaajat homogeenisenä ryhmänä. Monipuolistamalla käsityksiä videopelien kuluttajakunnasta markkinoijat ja toimialan ammattilaiset kykenevät paremmin vastaamaan markkinoiden tarpeisiin ja laajentamaan pelaajakuntaa.

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1 Introduction

The first home video game systems were introduced in the U.S. markets in 1972 (Schilling, 2003). Since then video games have been a part of mainstream entertainment for over four decades and grown into a significant market with several different platforms. According to a study by Newzoo (2014) in 2013 global games market consisted of 1.6 billion players producing revenues totaling 75.5 billion dollars. On the other hand, Entertainment Software Association (ESA, 2015) reported that in 2015 42% of Americans play games 3 hours or more per week. Notably, gaming has shed much of its historical connotations as children's activity as the average video game player in the USA is currently 35 years old (ESA, 2015).

A crucial factor in the booming growth of the gaming industry is the strong advancement of mobile games along the development of smart phones and tablets in the past decade. In 2013 (Newzoo, 2014), out of the 1.6 billion gamers 450 million players played games on tablets and an outstanding 1.11 billion players on mobile phones. In addition, revenues generated from mobile games formed 23% of the entire revenues in the industry (Newzoo, 2014). Newzoo (2014) further estimates that the whole games market will grow to 102.9 billion dollars by the year 2017 with a share of 34% (35.4 billion dollars) coming from mobile games. As mobile gaming has grown in popularity, the video games industry has reached a significant achievement in its history: while the overall number of female players in video games has been steadily growing over the decades, in mobile female players are now in the majority constituting 56% of mobile gamers in 2014 (56%; EEDAR, 2014).

The study on hand sets focus on this emerged majority player group of mobile games and falls under the broader discussion of gender and video games. Historically, research on gender and video games branched out from gender and technology studies in the beginning of 1990s (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998). Since then researchers interested in the topic have conducted studies on a variety of themes, such as depiction of women in video games (e.g. Greenfield, 1994), female preferences (e.g. Brunner et al., 1998), violence in video games (e.g. Kinder, 1996), and gender roles (e.g. Dietz, 1998). Lately, a need for more gender sensitive research has been voiced out (Jenson & de Castell, 2007; 2010) and studies examining more comprehensively how women play in different ways have slowly emerged (e.g. Royse et al., 2007).

Despite the current, and continuously growing, massive popularity of mobile games, the amount of academic research focusing on mobile games is fairly small. This is partly understandable as mobile gaming was truly revolutionized only some years ago when Apple set up the App Store in 2008, expanding the mobile games market significantly. As a new developing platform the main interest in games for mobile platforms has been game design (e.g. Bell et al., 2006; Hjorth, 2013), technical capabilities (e.g. Gilbertson et al., 2008; Chehimi et al., 2009), and utilization of the technology in learning (e.g. Huizenga et al., 2009; Kurkovsky, 2009) with just some studies on the experience of mobile gaming itself (e.g. Ivory & Magee, 2009). Interestingly a major part of research conducted on mobile games is in the form of conference papers and proceedings, which indicates that the platform has not yet reached the wide interest of video games studies let alone gender and video games.

Reviewing precious academic research on gender and video games, a clear need for progress exists inside the field. Jenson and de Castell (2007) have encouraged rethinking the terms and conditions of what they call a resilient orthodoxy about "what girls like best" and argue that until something surprising is found games research into gender does not accomplish a lot more than re-instating and further legitimating inequality of access, condition, and opportunity. However, mobile gaming has very much changed the market as the current player demographics shows. Because mobile devices are personal, portable (Mahatanankoon et al., 2005) and an evolving hybrid medium (Wei, 2008), it is fair to question if mobile games bear the same inequalities of access, condition, and opportunity as other gaming platforms. Thus, expanding gender and video games research into mobile games could benefit the overall advancement of the field by questioning the generalized conditions games are played in. Furthermore, not much is known about the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of consumers who play mobile games and the existing research, conducted largely prior to 2010, is already outdated in such a rapidly evolving field. Better understanding of the player base and player experience would surely benefit marketers as well and help competing in both mobile games and video games markets in general.

1.1 Research question

Understanding what female players want in video games has been a stable source of interest in previous studies and has been researched extensively. Large body of this research takes a fairly positivistic approach to their findings, trying to produce a list of features which can be

used to address the female player base in overall game design. The study on hand tries to take a significantly different approach by focusing on solely mobile games and on the holistic experience of consuming them among female players. In addition, the research sample is limited to young adults only in order to better compare the collected data. Finally, the study contributes up to date discussion to the field of gender and video game studies.

The main contribution of the study is to build a better holistic understanding of what is involved in the experience of playing mobile games among female young adults. It is hypothesized that female mobile game culture is not yet established as a widely spread and shared culture but rather is a collection of individual players' similar practises that are shaped by surrounding culture, myths, and meanings in society. Due to this, there are as many distinctive personal practices as there are female players but the study on hand attempts to build a holistic understanding of which behavior patterns are shared by a significant part of the players. This focus is in line with the criticism that gender and video games research has faced for being too focused on the question of "what women want" (Jenson & de Castell, 2007). Instead of producing a list of actions to follow, the study strives to understand the complex culture of female mobile games consumption on its own through consumption culture theory. According to Juul (2005) there are three aspects that interact and complement each other when analyzing video games and the experience of playing: the game, the player, and the world. Mäyrä (2008) further expands the "world" to "context" in order to include multiple frames of reference and possible realities in analyses. The study on hand aims to effectively consider all three of these aspects. Considering the current state of gender and video games research, the field would benefit from a broadminded study that does not pitch female players against their male peers but investigates their experiences in their own rights. Considering the criticism that research should aim to forget traditional binary roles and focus on more gender sensitive research (Jenson & de Castell, 2010), the study takes an opposite direction and narrows the sample down to young adult females only. While the study on hand believes that the broad video games research would benefit from a more gender sensitive approach, the scope used in the current study is limited in order to get more valid and reliable results from its small sample. Limitations and possibilities of reflecting the collected findings into broader discussion are later discussed in the final chapter.

From business point of view the study on hand is interested in providing more information about the experience of consuming mobile games, a subject that has not been researched a lot despite the popularity of the platform. Most research so far has focused on

technical aspects and design, while consumption culture and experience has been largely neglected. As mobile gaming grows ever popular engaging new player segments, marketing professionals benefit from understanding how mobile games are played, and what factors affect the gaming habits in different situations. With this information marketing professionals can constructively review their actions and develop better products, and marketing strategies. In addition, the study on hand contributes to better understanding the general video games culture and how it could be developed to be more approachable and inclusive.

In summary, the main goal of the research is to examine how female young adults consume mobile games through investigating the participants' personal experiences, meanings, and actions. Furthermore, the study attemps to identify practices that are distinctively performed but unbeknownst shared between many players. From this an understanding of what different factors may impact the consumption of mobile games among their majority player group, female players, is formed. These findings are then placed inside the broader discussion on gender and video games in hopes of understanding better how women play games. Additionally, the study attempts to demonstrate that even if many practices are shared between female players, the group consists of a plethora of different types of players and they cannot be addressed as a uniform group of consumers with identical needs and preferences.

The main research question of the study is framed as follows:

HOW DO YOUNG ADULT FEMALES PLAY MOBILE GAMES AND WHAT FACTORS ARE LINKED TO THE CONSUMPTION CULTURE?

The research question was answered through conducting semi-structured interviews that focused on collecting stories of everyday consumption experiences of mobile games. These stories worked as a basis for uncovering conscious and unconscious factors in consumption, and for identifying shared characteristics between participants. Approaching the topic through consumer culture theory, the study considered these collected stories as holistic experiences of consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings.

1.2 Research structure

First, chapter one provides an overview of the research topic and its positioning in the current research along with the research question. Chapter two summarizes the principles of studying play and its importance in marketing research. Chapter three continues to lay the background by examining previous studies conducted on gender and video games. In addition, existing criticism towards the field is presented. Chapter four introduces the theoretical framework of the study that has been used to analyze and understand the consumer culture of the chosen sample.

Next, chapter five clarifies the methodological approach in the study, and presents the methods used in the data collection and analysis. Chapter six introduces the main findings of the study, dividing them into three segments and combining them into a framework. The findings are them further discussed in chapter seven reflecting them to previous research introduced earlier in the study. Finally, chapter eight presents the conclusions and discusses the possible implications and limitations of the research. In addition, suggestions for future research are proposed.

1.3 Terminology

In order to understand both the study on hand and the previous literature conducted in the field of video games, it is necessary to make the difference between certain video game terms. In academic literature and colloquial language some of them are sometimes used interchangeably, which can cause confusion when reviewing previous literature. Official, established definitions do not really exist and thus the following definitions represent the researcher's views which are used systematically throughout the study.

Video games

Dictionary definition for any electronic game in which players control images on a television or computer screen, or other display. Colloquially often considered an exclusive term for console and handheld console games.

Console games

A more explicit term used for video games played on a television screen and a stand-alone system (game console) mainly dedicated for playing. In older literature also referred to as "home console games", and "home electronic games".

Computer/PC games

Colloquially used exclusively for games that are loaded into personal computers, both desktop and laptop, as a software. Some academic articles or publications use it, however, as a general term for all electronic games.

Mobile games

In colloquial language refers to games played on mobile devices – mainly smart phones, tablets, portable media players, and smart watches – on which games are purchased from a dedicated application store. Excludes handheld video game consoles (*see; handheld (video) games*). By some definitions, also includes games on other portable devices that are not specifically designed to play games as their primary function – such as feature phones, PDSs, and calculators.

Handheld (video) games

The term usually refers to games played on a handheld game console that historically required separately bought game cartridges or discs to play. Technically can be included in "mobile games" but it is not used colloquially. Sometimes referred to as "portable games".

Casual games

A casual game is what could be considered the opposite of more "involved" games and geared towards players who engage in play only occasionally. Casual games are often low-involvement, easy to pick up and get into, and can be played in bursts. They often utilize endless game play.

2 Studying consumption of play and games

Play as an activity and consumption practice has, for a long time, been an object of interest in many fields of study, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, literature, and neuropsychology. The body of research on the topic is wide and there is a large variety of differing accounts on the topic. So many, in fact, that a thorough review of the topic has even been called "discouraging" and "hopeless" (Bende & Grastyán, 1992), and the concept of play "categorically uncategorizable" (Schechner, 1993). Still, something that constitutes such an essential element in human social and spiritual development (Caillois, 1961) has always been seen very important to comprehend, even so much that Grayson and Deighton (1995) call it indispensable to understanding much of consumers' behavior.

In marketing literature researchers have identified many functions for how consumers consume products from consuming as experience to classifying others based on the objects they consume (Holt, 1995). As mobile games are a recreational activity, it is safe to presume that it falls primarily under the concept of consumption as play. However, not all play is identical and academic literature has distinguished between different types of play. One such grouping divides playful consumption into "games" and "play" (Goffman, 1974), which is essentially a question between whether certain pre-established set of rules is followed or not. The study on hand is open to both types of play but anticipates more game-type behavior as mobile games often offer quite a restricted environment for play due to restricted resources and simplistic design, but also because play-based behavior is more common in more developed markets (Featherstone, 1991). Consumption of play differs significantly from a traditional utilitarian view of consumption and thus it is important to understand first how play creates customer value for consumers and how consumption itself can be seen as play. The following will lay the background for understanding consumption as play to direct the further examination of video game studies and underline its importance for marketers and consumers.

2.1 Previous studies on gender and video games

In order to comprehensively understand games and their consumer culture, it is important to first understand how play creates customer value for consumers. Many consumer researchers have drawn upon the topic of customer value in sociology and social psychology to consider

phenomena such as individual differences in life-styles, and the role of instrumental and terminal values in determining the criteria for forming attitudes (Holbrook, 1994). In marketing studies, one popular view on the essence of marketing is that it is exchange of valuable products between individual or groups, as defined by Kotler and Levy (1969). Considering the importance of Kotler and Levy´s study and understanding of customer value in marketing studies, in 1994 Holbrook criticized the poor attention given to the topic of customer value inside the field and developed a systematic taxonomy of the major types of customer value in consumer experience. This systematic division was more or less continuation to his previous studies on experiential aspects of consumption, defined as hedonic consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, Holbrook et al., 1984), in which they called customer value both the basis for purchase decision but also the principal outcome of consumption experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Thus it is important for marketers to know how quality and customer value are created in order to understand what fundamentally drives consumption of games.

Historically, quality has always interested businesses and it has been a stable topic of examination in marketing producing a group of detached definitions that lack a place within the broader frame of other types of value judgments (Holbrook & Corfman, 1985). Many researchers have examined the individual elements of value (see Holbrook, 1994, pp. 26-39) but Holbrook's (1994) study has been a significant actor in focusing the field overall and has had an important impact on research of play consumption. Holbrook proposes a definition of customer value as an interactive relativistic preference experience, which captures the key elements of how interacting with objects (tangible or intangible) creates value for customers. Briefly, value involving *preference* refers to that there is always an element of, for example, general liking, positive affect, or pro versus con attitude involved, and *interactive* emphasizes that value is always interaction between a subject and an object. Moreover, *relativistic* qualities entail that value 1) depends on rating objects against another (*comparative*), 2) differs among individuals (*personal*), and 3) depends on the context within which it is judged (*situational*). Finally, value's *experimental* nature underlines that it is connected to the moment of consumption instead of acquisition.

Holbrook (1994) bases his typology of value in consumption experiences on three underlying taxonomic dimensions: extrinsic and intrinsic value, self-oriented and other-oriented value, and finally active and reactive value, all of which have been individually studied extensively by previous research (see Holbrook, 1994, pp. 39-44). The constructed

taxonomy distinguishes eight different types of customer value ranging from excellence/quality (extrinsic, self-oriented, and reactive) to morality/virtue (intrinsic, other-oriented, and active). The type of interest for the study on hand is the value of play/fun, which essentially is constructed of intrinsic, self-oriented, and active value. *Intrinsic value* of play emphasizes its autotelic motivation and that the experience is appreciated for its own sake, regardless of what other consequences it may yield. In turn, *self-oriented value* refers to whose interest is being addressed. In the case of play, its self-oriented value stems largely from self-interest or the effect on "me". Finally, *active value* describes how the consumer's valuation of an object or experience results from something she did to manipulate its environment. In other words, value is created through active involvement with the object of consumption, for example, by physically manipulating a game with a controller. In summary, play involves an active self-oriented experience enjoyed for its own sake, which is an important characteristic of games and various creative phenomena (Holbrook, 1994). If any of the identified factors change in their dimensions, the activity effectively loses its playful nature and moves to another field inside the typology. It is important to recognize, however, that no consumption experience is likely to engage only one type of value (Holbrook, 1994).

As mentioned earlier, perceived quality of a service is closely linked to the type of customer value the service offers to the consumer and further affects the perception of the service quality (Bitner & Hubbert, 1994). Thus, understanding the experiential perspectives of consumption can help marketers comprehend the multiple facets of consumption experience (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) and use that understanding to improve their product. Understanding the nature of customer value also helps to interpret the multifaceted reasons why consumers engage in playful consumption and consumption of games.

2.2 Consumption as play

As mentioned earlier, Holbrook (1994) defines play and fun as an outcome from active, self-oriented, and intrinsic consumption experiences essentially focusing on play as customer value. On the other hand, another significant strand of play research has focused on play as a consumption practice, often referred to by consumption as play or playful consumption. Under this branch of research a variety of different consumer services and consumption experiences from white water river rafting (Arnould & Price, 1993) to baseball spectating (Holt, 1995) and roleplaying (Belk & Costa, 1998) to retail spectacles (Kozinets et al., 2004)

have been studied. A significant body of this research has examined how consumers engage in playful consumption to seek unarticulated meanings from consumption objects that eventually help marketers to comprehend additional drivers behind consumers' actions.

As a basis for understanding different ways of consumption practices, Holt (1995) recognizes four metaphors for consuming based on Holbrook's (1994) taxonomic dimensions and previous literature: consumers' subjective, emotional reactions to consumption objects (*consuming as experience*); consumers acquiring and manipulating object meanings (*consuming as integration*); consumers classifying themselves through consumption (*consuming as classification*); and finally consumers using consumption objects to play and develop relationships between all of the four aspects of consuming (*consuming as play*). Thus, it is relevant to understand that playful consumption experience always combines elements from all four practices. Holt's significant extension to the understanding of playful consumption is that, in addition to play's intrinsic/autotelic nature, it involves interaction with other people in which consumption objects serve as focal resources.

The diversity of play in different consumption experiences is significant and can clearly be seen from the variety of studies addressing the phenomenon. Belk and Costa (1998) studied contemporary consumption fantasies through observing a reenactment (live action roleplaying) of 1825-40 fur-trade rendezvous in Western USA. They found out that apart from fun and enjoyment fantasy offers a world of possibility, character development, challenge, and performance. In addition, they claim that consumption fantasies create a community set apart from the outside world, where a place of comfort and belonging is established through a process of group action. On the other hand, Kozinets, et al. (2004) observed how consumers build and engage in consumption fantasies of, for example, games and sports that are complex combinations of commercial and social forces. In turn, Arnould and Price (1993) studied how for white water river rafting is essentially part-taking in rites of intensification and integration that return the consumers back to everyday world "transformed".

Regarding the study on hand, playful consumption has also been studied in digital environments, which provide an entirely different platform of consumption in terms of consumer interactions, product interactions, and opportunities to reinterpret set rules. Molesworth and Denegri-Knott (2008) studied how consumption of eBay as a game could both support and undermine playful consumption. Despite lacking tangible elements,

Molesworth and Denegri-Knott identified many possibilities of play within the restrictions of the online platform of eBay. They report, for example, that consumers engage in playful consumption when competing and gambling for items on sale and build their roles in the community through their aliases, communication, and items they buy. In addition, these channels of innovation and creativity can be used for negative play such as false identities, speculating, and harassment too. From the above examples it can be clearly seen that considering playful consumption in digital platforms is extremely important, as perception of play is important even in online information search experience and can significantly affect consumers' attitude towards company website and focal brand (Mathwick & Rigdon, 2004).

Expanding from the importance of understanding play as customer value, examining play as a consumption practice helps researchers to investigate underlying motives and outcomes of consumption. Consumer actions are essentially lived experiences that enlighten, bore, entertain, or raise our ire but also mean that consumers use play to draw themselves closer to valued objects and resources that they use to engage other consumers (Holt, 1995). Arnould and Price (1993) in turn point out that many times consumers might be unable or unwilling to articulate the meanings they really seek from many service encounters and deciphering the unarticulated meanings that people seek become more important to provision than recording articulated expectations. Consequently, mechanically linking managerial decisions to stated consumer expectations does not necessarily lead to increased customer satisfaction. Finally, as consumption of play has theoretical ties in behavioral sciences like sociology, motivation research, and product symbolism in marketing theory (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) it offers an excellent fundament for studying consumer culture.

2.3 Differentiating types of play

From above we can conclude that play can be studied from multiple different angles and all research contributes to the overall comprehension of play within different elements of consumption. However, the challenge of studying play is that the word can be used in so many different ways (Grayson, 1999) and studied in so many contexts from playing alone to playing with someone, and from playing piano to playing games. Nevertheless, Huizinga (1950 cited in Grayson, 1999) claims that the basis of the play element is ultimately similar in all types of play and every product or service can be consumed as play. Both Holbrook

(1994) and Holt (1995) agree with this as they recognize the fact that their respective typologies are not exclusive and one product can contain elements from multiple categories.

As mentioned previously, consumption as play has interested researchers in different settings from fantasy role-play (Belk & Costa, 1998) to sports (Kozinets, et al., 2004) and eBay (Molesworth and Denegri-Knott, 2008). This seems to support Huizinga's claim that in principle every product or service could be consumed as play and can contain playful elements. However, the variety of play is wide and it is important for researchers to recognize the differences between different types of play, especially in the still young contexts of digital platforms such as Internet services or video games as they are limited, or unbounded, by the capabilities of technology. In academic literature of play distinguishing between different types of play has caught the interest of researchers and has produced various ways to establish distinction. One popular way of differentiation has been rule and restriction based categorization, where *play* is seen as temporary, not established, and free from external rules (Goffman, 1974; Monighan-Nourot, et al., 1987), and *games* as institutionalized and fixed by formal rules (Goffman, 1974). Another way of categorizing, which works especially well in examining consumption activities other than games, is differentiation based on consumers following expected roles in a situation, where *ludus* refers to following role expectations and *paidia* to defying them (Caillois, 1961). In the context of video games, the terms *game* and *play* describe the distinction between different types of play the best as a game's capabilities of providing a platform for playful consumption are limited by its design and technology. In other words, an open world multiplayer game on a PC probably offers a better platform for "bending the rules" due to magnitude of elements and possible glitches in the design compared to a simplistic and constricted mobile game.

Grayson and Deighton (1995) claim that playing can be viewed as an agreement or social consensus between two or more individuals to follow unique set of rules. This view is not supported by many studies, as majority of literature agrees the defining factor for play is that it is enjoyed for its own sake. Moreover, not following rules, or *paidia* behavior, does not necessarily mean that play equals negative consequences. Grayson (1999) claims that, while having the possibility of being offensive or harmful, disruptive play can also mean innovatively bending the rules and adding value to the consumption experience. Grayson argues that it is important for marketers to distinguish among finer types of playful activity because once a role definition has been decided for one party it implies certain role expectations from the other.

Understanding the variety of how playful consumption can manifest itself in practice is important for studying play and games comprehensively. Play is often thought to be inherently enjoyable but it is actually a multifaceted and complex concept with sometimes paradoxical qualities (Grayson, 1999). For a marketing a key task to consider is its role in the creation and maintenance of play. Furthermore, it has to accept that rules of the game might be interpreted loosely or even corrupted (Molesworth & Denegri-Knott, 2008). However, the games a society plays also essentially reflect and inform its structure (Molesworth & Denegri-Knott, 2008). Reflecting the previous literature of play elements in consumption on the current research of the consumer culture of mobile games among female players, the importance lies in understanding the diversity of meanings, presumptions, consumption habits, and motives playful consumption can hold. Mobile games market is still young and technically more limited compared to video games. In addition, it presumably carries some of the connotations of video games that affect ways the consumption experience can manifest the different consumption metaphors.

3 Gender and video games

When examining previous research on gender and video games, it is widely considered that technology and electronic games have always been seen as predominantly male activities, or at least very heavily masculine gendered whether they are being discussed in the context of research, employment, or leisure activities (e.g. Dominick, 1984 cited in Buchman & Funk, 1996; Cassell & Jenkins, 1998; Royse et al., 2007; Salter & Blodgett, 2012). Most likely for this reason, research and the games market have for a long time been interested in women and their use of technology or, as a newer field of study, gender and video games. This is especially due to the constantly growing number of female players (e.g. Cassell & Jenkins, 1998; Bryce & Rutter, 2002; ESA, 2015) and the evolving nature of gaming altogether.

As Jenson and de Castell (2010) note, the research on gender and video games is very scarce before the publication of Cassell and Jenkins' edited collection *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat* in 1998 and was mostly situated inside the broader discussion of feminist interest in gender and technology, which had developed mainly during the latter half of the 20th century (Wajcman, 2000). Furthermore they note that Cassell and Jenkins' (1998) collection marked off "gender and video games" as a particular realm of study within the more general debates on gender and technology. From that on, the focus of research shifted from identifying the "invisible girl gamers" (Bryce & Rutter, 2002) and finding evidence that female players really exist to understanding what female players really like and how to sell more video games to this new growing market (Jenson & de Castell, 2010).

As the academic discussion has developed after Cassell and Jenkins' publication, the research field has started to better understand the systematic shortcomings of the studies conducted under gender and video games. Jenson and de Castell (2007; 2010) have turned into one of the most vocal critics in the field claiming that most of the current body of research contains too many methodological flaws to understand significant interplay across the fields of gender studies and game research. Due to this, they claim, familiar themes and unremarkable findings persist to appear in studies time after time.

In the 90's and especially in the 1998, when Cassell and Jenkins really established women and video games as an standalone field of research inside the research of gender and technology, the main motivator for research was the fear of "digital divide". In other words,

there existed a fear that girls would fall behind their male peers in technological proficiency and that way in career development as technology became more and more integral part of workplace. This point of view is reminiscent from the second-wave of feminism that was, among other things, concerned about breaking down the gendered division of the labor market and gendered patterns of socialization (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005).

As technology worked its way into every part of society and an understanding that early video game playing does not create an unfair advantage became reality (Woodrow, 1994), focus in gender and video games research shifted to ideologies of third-wave feminism. Briefly, third-wave feminism is in practice manifested in different ways but in general females are seen as capable, strong, and social agents (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005). This view sparked, for example, the "girl games" and "gamer grrls" movements in the video games community (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998). The former tried to establish girls games as an individual genre of games encouraging girls to play, but was also driven by commercial interest. The latter rather tried to break the social norm of girls games, create a feeling of female empowerment, and show that female players enjoy a large variety of game genres including genres traditionally deemed as "boy games", like fighting, shooting, and strategy games. Currently the focus of the field has shifted more to breaking stereotypes, questioning the still gendered nature of video gaming, and examining different types of play. A good notion of this change is that "gender and video games" has been established as the preferred name of the field instead of "girls and video games" or "women and video games" (Jenson & de Castell, 2010).

The following will discuss previous findings collected from academic research of gender and video games. In the past, gender and video games have been considered from sufficient amount of different perspectives but from consumer culture point of view there are several common themes that emerge from the literature regarding consumption practices, meanings, myths, and discourses. Therefore, previous studies are discussed under two main categories: female preferences and genderization of video games. As the naming suggests, first main part of the review will cover different impressions of how females play, what they prefer in video games, and what is the reason behind their interest towards video games. The second main part investigates the different reasons why video gaming has become masculine gendered and how this has affected the status of the activity in society.

Essentially, it could be argued that historically the interest in female preferences has been largely driven by business interest to develop the female games market. In contrast, the

genderization question has been largely driven by academic interest, such as feminism, sociology, and psychology. While the study on hand does not specifically take any strong ideological interest towards the topic of discussion, it is important to understand which ideologies have driven the previous research and still have significant roots in the topic. Arguably, these ideological forces have also effected the following compilation and it likely can be seen as a feminist presence overall. Finally, as the following effectively examines one consumption object (video games) from the two ends of the same factor (gender), it is notable that the categories overlap to some extent with each other.

3.1 Female player preferences

The focus on gender and video games was for a long time on identifying the "invisible girl gamers" (Bryce & Rutter, 2002) in gaming. Still, some years ago Jenson and de Castell (2010) criticized the continuing "play or don't play" research and called for more emphasis on female players' different play patterns, preferences, and possibilities that actually started to get a lot of attention in the mid 90's when the first breakthrough "girl game" *Barbie Fashion Designer* (1996) was released. Quickly, it became very evident for the developers that an untapped market segment exists and thus a strong focus on female players' preferences emerged largely to get female players to buy more games (de Castell & Bryson, 1998) but also to better understand the topic of gender and game design (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998). Later these studies on "what women want in games" have been criticized for their positivistic take on a diverse group of players and firmly dividing differences in playstyles under male/female sex binaries (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). On the contrary many researchers also call for respecting traditional differences in interests between sexes while still striving for expanding them (Seiter, 1995).

In academic literature, there are a lot of commonly held perceptions on what female players want in their games that are backed with numerous studies on the subject. When reading these studies, however, it is important to notice that a strong majority of the conducted studies focus on young girls and their play but the results are often applied to the discussion about female video game play in general. This generally assumed understanding of the female player base can roughly be divided into three main areas: feature preferences, genre preferences, and interest towards playing. The following briefly examines findings under each category and sheds light to the views that have lead game designers, marketers, companies, and researchers in the past and may remain in perceptions even today.

3.1.1 Feature preferences

In order to activate and engage the segment of female players, whether to sell more games or to design more satisfying games for female players, research has tried to identify specific features in gameplay that appeal to them. Cassell and Jenkins (1998) point out that for this reason the motives between academic and market research have started to blur. Research on the topic is numerous and consistent in its own respect.

Overall, the researched preferences of female players tend to favor a picture of calmer, socially and mentally more focused gaming experience. Female players are reported to prefer games with such things as adventure and exploration (e.g. Miller et al., 1996; Rubin et al., 1997; Gorriz & Medina, 2000), social interaction (e.g. Brunner et al., 1998; de Castell & Bryson, 1998; Thomas & Walkerdine, 2000), challenge (Miller et al., 1996; Brunner et al., 1998), rich and engaging narrative (e.g. Rubin et al., 1997; de Castell & Bryson, 1998; Gorriz & Medina, 2000), design and creation (Gorriz & Medina, 2000; AAUW, 2000), realism and meaningful consequences (Kafai, 1996; Brunner et al., 1998, AAUW, 2000), and identity play (AAUW, 2000). A large body of research also supports an understanding that females want to use computers as tools and channels of education rather than toys (Miller et al., 1996; AAUW, 2000). In addition, a wide opinion among researchers and industry alike seems to be that female players do not favor violent content in video games (e.g. Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Dietz, 1998) but this finding might have been taken too absolutely by the industry. For example, Laurel (2001) found that the lack of rich stories and characters affected girls more negatively than violence. In addition, Hartmann and Klimmt (2006) found similarly that the relevance of social interaction outweighed the relevance of gender role stereotyping and violence in young adult females.

One of the widely held perceptions about female-friendly games is that girls like working together and boys enjoy competing (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998). However, Jenson and de Castell (2007) bring up a good point that we might be misinterpreting competition and cooperation, and many other widely held gendered "truths" about female gaming. Supporting the widely held opinion, there are findings outside video games research too that girls and women are less competitive compared to men (Findlay & Bowker, 2009; Croson & Gneezy, 2009). To challenge this view Jenson and de Castell suggest that the majority of female players, in fact, enjoy competition but in video games competition takes a more gender-specific form that is socially regulated as more appropriate and acceptable for them.

They call this form on competition 'benevolent competition' that definitely is competing against each other but in a supporting, encouraging, and helping atmosphere. Jenson and de Castell (2010) are among some of the most vocal critics of the established manners in gender and video games research, whose views will be considered later under criticism. Ultimately they suggest that contrary to a lot of the conducted research the reality might even be that there are not as many groundbreaking differences in what different genders enjoy. Just different ways they are expressed through various actions.

3.1.2 Genre preferences

Just as literature often sees that there are preferred feminine features in game design, certain game genres are seen as more female appropriate too. These findings follow the same qualities that are found in research considering preferred game features, as discussed previously. Many researchers suggest that female players do not like quick-paced interactions and prefer games that can be played without stress at one's own pace (Sherry et al., 2006). This most commonly results in more straightforward game genres – classic board games, quiz/trivia games, puzzle games, arcade games, card/dice games, and kids' games – to be dubbed as female players' favorites (Roberts et al., 1999; Gorriz & Medina, 2000; Sherry et al., 2006). Research has also suggested that violence and fighting are a turn-off for female players (Bryce & Rutter, 2003; Greenfield, 1994) and that girls prefer cartoon violence over realistic, human violence that boys like (Buchman & Funk, 1996).

Notably, these views have been challenged as technology and game development have advanced, player audiences together with game content have matured, and as new hybrid genres have emerged and affected the industry. Consequently, Bryce and Rutter (2003) and Taylor (2003) have acknowledged the growing female player base of (massive multiplayer online) role playing games that incorporate a lot of rich story, characters, exploration, and interaction in them. However it is good to notice, as Bryce and Rutter (2002) point out, that the industry and player base has developed really drastically during the past 20-25 years. Previous studies on gender and video games are often made with limited samples and possibly on specific games that are not representative of the current range of games, genres, and formats. Thus, all the findings must be considered in the current context of contemporary games markets.

3.1.3 Interest towards playing

On top of discussing the preferences of female players in video games, a big question in research has been the smaller number of female players compared to male players in video games (Jenson & de Castell, 2010) and how does their views on playing differ from their male counterparts (e.g. Cassell & Jenkins, 1998; Cunningham, 2000; Schott & Horrell, 2000). These studies have been criticized for their small sample sizes that does not offer a lot of space for expanding the findings to wider population (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). In addition, they claim that in studies gender is often accorded to analytically dismiss it.

In various research, females have been many times found to lack interest towards playing in the same extent as male players (Jenson & de Castell, 2010) but in the light of the growing numbers of female players in both video games and mobile games, it has been suggested that the reported lack of interest is more of a reaction to the gendered nature of the activity than an inherent preference. Furthermore, instead of lacking the interest to play early research suggests that females have a disadvantage in choosing leisure activities (Shaw, 1994) due to constraints like time, marital and parental status, game content, natural capabilities, or gendered spaces. Surely, these reported constraints mirror the world of 1994 but there still might be obstacles in female players' lives that prevent them from playing as much as male players. Furthermore, there might be aspects in gaming culture that discourage female players from participating making it a problem of access over interest. These restrictions and negotiations of gaming strategies are discussed further in the next chapter. Additionally, studies on video game console availability on kids have reported that boys have easier access to gaming devices and play more despite of girls being reported to have a good access to them too (Schott & Horrell, 2000).

In previous research many different explanations for girls lesser use of technology and video game play has been hypothesized so it is no surprise that it has even been suggested that girls are biologically less capable of using digital technology (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998). However, there have not been any findings supporting this claim (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998) and instead, for example, girls have been found out to perform equally well in programming (Linn, 1985). The once big fear of girls falling behind boys in technologic ability has similarly been proven unnecessary as girls have been found to catch up quickly after they get access to computers through school computer classes (Woodrow, 1994) and no digital divide has formed.

Despite the equal capability of working with technology, research does report that some fundamental differences exist between the binary sexes, which may explain some differences in preferred video game genres. It has, for example, been found that male players perform mental rotation of three-dimensional objects, navigation through routes or mazes, and target-directed motor skills better than female players. Female players on the other hand are better at landmark memory, object displacement, and perceptual speed (Kimura, 1999). The reason these differences have interested researchers is that traditionally games have emphasized the skills male players are better on average. All in all, Cassell and Jenkins summed up in 1998 that despite boys and girls can be equally good with computers and computer games, boys are more likely than girls to choose to play, and both sexes consider computers and computer games to be primarily boys' toys. Unfortunately, while this situation has improved over the years, the masculine genderization of technology and video games still continues to exist today. Next, this genderization will be examined more closely in order to understand the field of gender and video games from another perspective.

3.2 Genderization of video games

In academic research and public discourse gaming has traditionally been marginalized and regarded as a dominantly male activity. Bryce and Rutter (2002) have summed this recurring discourse as suggesting that the consumption practices associated with computer gaming are solitary and male, that their gaming is domestic and part of a transitional phase of leisure interest. While the latter is not true anymore, as the average age of a game player in the USA is 35 (ESA, 2015), there are claims the marginalization of the activity still remains strong (Taylor, 2012).

As mentioned previously, the field of gender and video games research spans several decades thus studies carrying feminist interests are shaped by the changes and different ideologies inside the movement. In order to understand the various views in previous literature, it is important to regard them in their appropriate context. Many studies conducted in the 90's when Cassell and Jenkins (1998) established women and video games as a standalone field of research carried the reminiscent of second-wave feminism that viewed any existing gender stereotypes as social constructions to be broken (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005). As the field has advanced, research has drawn more and more from third-wave feminism encouraging gender sensitive research that ultimately benefits from the

understanding of all types of play (Jenson & de Castell, 2010) and resists traditional conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity (Bryce & Rutter, 2002).

The following reviews different accounts in previous literature that has examined the perception of dominant masculinity in video games. While the topic has been actively researched in the past, critics have also accused that the very research of these topics helps to reinforce them (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). For more clear investigation, the genderization of video games has been divided into three segments based on an approach by Bryce and Rutter (2002). Dominant masculine features reported in previous literature are examined in relation to game content, gaming spaces, and related activities. This gives a comprehensive cross-section of key concerns of gender roles in video games research and helps to put the conducted study on mobile game consume culture in a broader context.

3.2.1 Gendered content

Gendered content has widely received a lot of attention inside gender and video games research. Generally, the focus has landed on two issues: representation of females in video games and the focus on male game themes (Bryce & Rutter, 2002). Studies examining female representation often approach game content as embodying gendered, sexualized, patriarchal, and stereotypical representations of females and has systematically highlighted the lack of female characters altogether (Dietz, 1998; Greenfield, 1994). Stereotypically, female representations in games take the form of such recurring tropes as the helpless princess, the wise old woman, as objects to be rescued, or sexualized subjects of the male protagonist (Dietz, 1994). These representations reinforce skills and characteristics stereotyped as feminine, and emphasize the false presentation of female passivity (Gailey, 1993; Fox, 1993). In addition, previous literature has emphasized the dominant presentation of "masculine" themes in games such as war, competition, sports, and violence (Greenfield, 1994; Kinder, 1996). As a consequence, Bryce and Rutter (2003) claim that an environment which has strong textual predispositions to masculine interest becomes distant to females and offers little space or motivation for female participation.

As noted earlier, in the 1990s when girls started to interest game companies as a demographic, the first wave of "girls games" started offering games geared to girls based on themes traditionally seen as feminine, like horse riding, and doll dress up (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998). Although a significant amount of research criticizes the observed stereotypes, there

are also requests for appreciating traditional girls' interests as dismissal might communicate feminine qualities as unfavorable in general and dismiss the feminine space that is free of masculine demands (Seiter, 1995). Moreover, it has been claimed that the custom of gendering consumption lies so deep in our societies' roots that by the time children are old enough to state their preferences, a significant part of them have been assimilated to traditional gender appropriate views (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998).

It is noteworthy to recognize that while depiction of female characters has been examined a lot, a significant amount of research referenced in academic literature comes from the 1990s. As game genres, platforms, game content, and player base has diversified over time, previous research has to be reviewed in the current context (Bryce & Rutter, 2002). In addition, while modern systems of controlling violent, sexual, and other adult themes in games are in place and have been claimed to complicate investigation of gendered representations of game content (Bryce & Rutter, 2003) they do not prevent usage of other traditional female tropes.

Luckily, even though views on gendered content still remain strong in set groups in games research and gaming community, a growing body of research has acknowledged the need for more open understanding of female play. Taylor's (2003) study on women playing massive multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPG) called for sensitive examining of the multiple pleasures women derive from gaming and recognizing the variety of contexts where gaming occurs. In turn, Royse et al. (2007) studied and identified different levels of play and integration to video games among women dismissing the traditional view of female casual play. Finally, even if the preconception of dominant masculinity in games remains, Bryce and Rutter (2002) point out that female players might construct different meanings in relation to the themes of computer games, may play computer games in a masculine fashion, or may construct their own oppositional reading of game content. A significant shift in research is also studies targeting adult players instead of young girls.

3.2.2 Gendered spaces

The effects of the gendered nature of gaming spaces is often overlooked in the textual content research of video games (Bryce & Rutter, 2002) but is usually recognized to some extent in broader research on gender and video games (e.g. Cassell & Jenkins; Hartmann & Klippt, 2006). Historically, the basis of the masculine nature of video games can be argued to lie

already in the way many traditional games such as chess, and cards were played in male-dominated spaces like pubs and bars (Bryce & Rutter, 2003). Public leisure spaces in general have been claimed to be highly gendered and patriarchal (Wearing, 1998) so it is not surprising that arcades followed this tradition as pinball machines and individual arcade games found themselves to these masculine spaces (Griffiths, 1991). Later, the trend continued to other forms of playing too. Even though the amount of female players has been constantly on the rise, large part of the literature still agrees on that gaming still retains its image of being masculine gendered (e.g. Royse et al., 2007; Jenson & de Castell, 2010; Salter & Blodgett, 2012). This gender asymmetry is claimed to work towards excluding female players even before game content has any effect, to grant limited access, and make females assume particular roles in set spaces. (Bryce and Rutter, 2002).

Computer gaming has most regularly been associated with "bedroom culture" (McRobbie, 1991), a term originally used as female use of domestic space, which highlights the manner in which girls are restricted from full access to many social spaces (Bryce and Rutter, 2002). Moreover, domestic spaces have historically been viewed as the primary site of female leisure (McRobbie, 1991). Due to this fact Bryce and Rutter (2003) suggest that constraints and access to computer in domestic settings might be less rigid, and they provide a less gendered environment in which female access and participation is more easily negotiated. Despite of this it is widely recognized that girls tend to have limited access to gameplay technologies (e.g. McRobbie, 1991; Schott & Horrell, 2000) and are more often, and more intensively, parentally regulated concerning their playing often falling behind their male relatives in play rotation (Jenson & De Castell, 2007). Schott and Horrell (2000) observed that male members of families dominate computers also in domestic settings as they took on the role of "expert" in gaming situations undermining female skills, knowledge, and access to the game machines, even if the game machine belonged to a female member of the family. Bryce and Rutter (2002) further point out that this may be due to these originally female dominated spaces being compromised as public and masculine spaces have integrated with domestic spaces through domestication of technology and consumption practices linked to them.

Finally, the development of virtual gaming and online communities through Internet connections has created a hybrid space of public and private values (Bryce and Rutter, 2002). The anonymity of these spaces has been presumed to improve female participation (Bryce & Rutter, 2003) and have been reported to be a reason behind the relative popularity of

MMORPGs among female players (Taylor, 2003). However, research on other online communities suggests that female users continue to experience sexist and offensive behavior from male users once their gender is learned or assumed (Herring, et al., 1995; Salter & Blodgett, 2012).

3.2.3 Gendered activities

In addition to the gendered content in video games and the gendered spaces where games are engaged in, Bryce and Rutter (2002) extrapolate the popularity of computer games among males as masculine genderization of the activities and practices that make up computer gaming. In other words, they refer to experiences of everyday gaming that give reality to game content and define gaming as a social practice. The gendered nature of gaming can be partly seen as a reflection of prevalent gender roles in society that define appropriate behavior and choice of activities (Bryce & Rutter, 2001). As we could see previously from the systematic understanding of female preferred features in games, there are number of specific qualities that are seen as female typical behavior, such as social interaction and creativity. This is contrasted with the academically unsupported perception of gaming being unsocial and dominated by solitary male "nerds" and "gamers", a view that is much flaunted in popular media. Jenson and de Castell (2010) claim that these deeply engrained, hegemonic normative discourses and practices are difficult if not impossible to shake loose, and position women and girls as "less able", "less competent", and "casual."

Due to the social perception described above, gaming bears a heavy perception of being gendered. Griffiths (1997) suggests that playing or identifying as a gamer is not socially rewarding for female players as gaming is considered so much a male dominated activity. Bryce and Rutter (2002) propose that the frequency in males and females may in itself reflect a lack of self-identification as a gamer by females who perceive themselves as casual or infrequent gamers. This proposition is supported by Royse et al.'s (2007) findings that the extent to which female players integrated their gendered self with gaming technology was in line with the level of play which they engaged in.

Royse et al.'s (2007) findings are significant for the study on hand as their research effectively examined how women described their electronic gaming experiences and how they constructed their own perspectives about gaming culture. They found that among active players gaming technology was comfortably integrated into their lives and they felt free to

express their relationship with it. Conversely, non-gamers rejected gaming as a waste of time and critically asserted other priorities. Interestingly, players falling in the middle negotiated gaming technology and gender more carefully, creating a situation Royse et al. calls an "uneasy truce". Notably, Royse et al.'s study differs from the current study by examining the usage of all electronic games in comparison to only mobile games, which enjoy significantly more popularity among female players, and targeting a wider array of players.

Overall, Bryce and Rutter (2002) argue that the above discussed behavior reproduces the perception of computer gaming as a masculine activity which is a form of gendered exclusion experienced, negotiated, and reproduced at a routine and everyday level. However, they add that the growing number of female players may be an ongoing indicator of the masculine nature of gaming and the view of female technological inferiority being challenged and changed. Studies conducted some ten years later supply evidence that this change has continued as new technology and games has diversified the new gaming public into more female players, casual players, and players of different ages. Evidence of change, and natural resistance to said change, can for example be seen in the public stir of "GamerGate" in 2014 (Dewey, 2014; Kain, 2014) and "Dickwolves" in 2010 (Salter & Blodgett, 2012). Consequently, Juul (2010; 151) suggests that: "The traditional hardcore player is worrying that the games he or she enjoys will stop being made. For some players, there is a genuine sense of loss, watching games becoming mainstream and accessible."

3.3 Criticism

The culture of gaming in general has changed a lot over the decades. The amount of female players has grown significantly and gaming has established its place in the modern society. Among other changes, shifts in feminist interests have shaped the focus of gender and video games research. Themes important for third-wave feminism have advanced the field of research but also raised criticism in researchers aspiring to better break free of binary sex roles. Consequently, a call for new direction has started to form criticizing the progress that has – or has not – been made during the past decades.

Various critique towards established methods inside gender and video games research have been made but Jenson and de Castell (2007; 2010) effectively voice out their critique the most clearly. As gender and video games research has moved from asking "Do females play?" to "What do females like?" and more lately "How do females play?", these

two authors actively push for asking "How do different genders play?" instead. Notably, this criticism is primarily concerned in regards of gender research but a wider understanding would arguably benefit other applied areas (Jenson & de Castell, 2007) such as game designers, and marketers by better understanding different types of play.

The following reviews the main criticism directed towards the current body of gender and video games research in order to better understand the previously introduced academic findings. The review is largely based on the arguments of Jenson and de Castell as they are effectively one of the main critical voices inside field of research. The following critiques have arguably affected the current study and the coming arguments are later addressed in the conclusions of the conducted study.

Focus on gender instead of binary sex roles

As mentioned before, around 1998 Jenkins and Cassell observed gender and video games research focusing on identifying girls as players and establishing them as a new gaming market. Despite advances in the field of video games, in 2008 they claim the focus has still remained mainly unchanged debating whether girls play or not, and that women are still much underrepresented in fields of digital technology (Jenkins & Cassell, 2008). Jenson and de Castell (2010) criticize that this growing amount of positivistic account on female preferences has paralleled the research of gender and technology, continuing to reinforce the view of female "choice", "lack of interest", and "differing ability" compared to the generalized male player. They further express this crooked view in research by pointing out the scarcity of studies focusing on solely male players and the masculine culture of digital game play, commerce, and media.

Despite that the aforementioned choice, lack of interest, and differing ability to play have been proven wrong in previous studies, Jenson and de Castell (2010) criticize the resilient tradition to divide existence into sexes and sexes into two, one of which is then investigated in terms of what it lacks compared to the other (Phipps, 2007). They claim that this research setting alone assures that nothing new can be learned either about gender or games as only old accounts of female gaming, familiar gender assumptions, and truisms are reaffirmed. They also claim that there is a commonly perceived and documented tension between the male cultures of gameplay, which constructs and enables the production of contemporary masculinity (Walkerdine, 2007) that restructure the masculine/feminine binary and construe female gamers as something marginal. Bryce and Rutter (2002) join this

critique by saying that the gendering of computer gaming is consistent with the reinforcement and reproduction of societal gender roles, and the gendering of certain recreational activities.

Instead of examining different players as representatives of a certain sex with predetermined assumptions, Jenson and de Castell (2007; 2010) call for more gender-sensitive approach in order not to revoke sex-based stereotypes that have been researched and documented numerous times. In other words, they encourage research about the range of possibilities for gender-based play that would also account feminized male play and masculinized female play more sensitively. In game development and game content, it has been suggested that the focus should be more on, for example, inventing new game genres and character elements, focusing on design (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998), and challenging covertly stereotyped concepts (Jenson & de Castell, 2007) to satisfy alternative tastes and sensitivities.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the literature review on hand recognizes a small glimpse of identifiable change towards understanding the female demographics better in gender and video games research, and moving towards gender sensitive focus. Royse et al. (2007), for example, are open for different levels of female play and integrating gendered self into gaming. On the other hand, Taylor (2003) recognizes the possibility of her findings being applicable to male players as well.

More sensitive interpretation

As discussed, Jenson and de Castell (2007; 2010) critique that the current body of gender and video games research has hit a stagnant point, and rather than advances the field reinstates and further establishes the resilient thoughts on access, condition, and opportunity. They claim that these hegemonic discourses and practices that demarcate, delimit, and predominate everyday gendered subject positions, especially in relation to technologies, are difficult or impossible to remove (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). In fact, Bryson and de Castell (1996) claim that women have not been alienated from technologies, as argued by for example Bryce and Rutter (2002; 2003), but "technologies" are often defined so as to exclude the technologies that women use.

Thus, Jenson and de Castell (2007) calls for rethinking the common results that are derived from studies focusing on female preferences. Bryce and Rutter (2002) agree by claiming that research that break out of the constraints of established results does so by

recasting the purpose of gender and gaming research. Furthermore, they say that researchers should aim to destabilize and reorganize concepts and practices, rather than describing and reauthorizing them. Jenson and de Castell (2007) even claim that the state of repeating findings is not by accident but is an expression of purposeful, deeply structured process of naturalizing the convention of "inner truth" of gender. Effectively, repeating conventional gender performances only accomplishes hegemony (Jenson & de Castell, 2007).

Continuing the earlier example of the concept of competition among female players, Jenson and de Castell (2007) use it as an example of aspired rethinking of established conventions. They point out that, against a common belief, females are involved in a lot of competitive hobbies and activities. They continue that practically all video games incorporate some kind of a competitive element, for example, in the form of points, timer, or accuracy against either another player or the player herself. They further emphasize the need for not only advancing research methods but more interpretation and critical thinking into the situational analysis of recurring themes inside the findings. Jenson and de Castell (2007; 770) also make an important remark that as a result of built-in gender conventions of culture, research respondents' answers effectively vary based on situation, interpreted intention of the questions, and questioner. In other words, the aforementioned factors reconstitute and reconfigure what the question "is", and shape the responses given in the moment. Finally, they conclude by saying there is a need to discard stereotypical assumptions and challenge latent stereotyped concepts in order to discover something new about female video game playing.

3.4 Conclusion

The current body of research has comprehensively identified that female players exist as a player demographic and that certain game features systematically come up as preferred by female players. These same themes have been criticized as reinforcing traditional gender roles and not advancing the field of research (Bryson & Rutter, 2002). Thus, careful consideration in constructing research questions, methodologies, and data analysis is urged (Jenson & de Castell, 2007; 2010). Moreover, it is suggested that more attention is given to identifying different ways to play regarding who is playing, what is being played, and in what situation (Jenson & de Castell, 2010).

The most important demand the reviewed literature places upon the study on hand is to critically position itself inside the continuum of gender and video games research. Applying Jenson and de Castell's (2010) thoughts, much of the tension in the work of this field is in writing about, and simultaneously co-constructing and reconstructing masculinities and femininities, in ways that do not simply reinforce and solidify the very gender stereotypes they are pushing against. However, the study on hand argues that a difference must be made between reinforcing current stereotypes and recognizing them in order to consciously look for a change.

As mobile games are still an unexplored domain in the field of gender and video games, as well as marketing research, it is unclear how the relatively young platform and growing number of female players have and will affect the video game culture. Good understanding of the previous research is essential in avoiding the results many former studies have been scrutinized for. Finally, sensitivity and alertness must be used to comprehensively analyze the collected data in relation to the extensive research setting.

4 Consumer culture theory

In order to understand how players consume mobile games and what kind of shared behavior patterns are involved in the experience, the topic will be examined through consumer culture theory (CCT). Consumer culture theory is essentially a method to examine consumption practices outside the commonly used practices of economics and psychology, and it offers "a distributed view of cultural meaning" (Hannerz, 1992). This cultural meaning offers an excellent frame for studying consumption practices shaped by different interconnected influences from the surrounding society and culture. Matching the nature of diverse motivations behind gender and video games research, consumer culture theory positions itself in the network of different fields of research, such as anthropology, sociology, media studies, critical studies, and feminist studies.

Most importantly consumer culture theory conceptualizes culture as an interwoven construction of experience, meaning, and action (Geertz, 1973). Consumer culture frames participators' understanding of conceivable action, feeling, and thought loosely guiding their patterns of behavior (Holt, 1997; Kozinets, 2002). This system essentially emphasizes the fragmented, plural, fluid, and hybrid nature of consumption traditions (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Lastly consumer culture theory analyzes how individual manifestations of consumer culture are constituted, sustained, transformed, and shaped by broader historical forces like cultural narratives, myths, or ideologies and grounded in specific socioeconomic circumstances and marketplace systems (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The focus of consumer culture is to dynamically link together consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings utilizing research efforts from different disciplines in the larger study of cultural complexity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Perpetuation and reproduction of market-made commodities and desire-inducing marketing symbols is central in consumer culture and mostly up to the free personal choice of consumer in their private everyday life (Holt, 2002). In addition, consumer culture conceptualizes an interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects that are used collectively to interpret the environment and to orient groups' members' experiences and lives (Kozinets, 2001).

The disciplinary basis of CCT lies in investigation of the contextual, symbolic, and experiential aspects of consumption as they unfold across a consumption cycle that includes

acquisition, consumption and possession, and disposition processes and analysis of these from different theoretical perspectives (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). As this agenda has advanced, consumer culture theory has paid much attention to the hedonic, aesthetic, and ritualistic dimensions of consumption and possession practices (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Still, CCT explores how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings, and material goods to manifest their particular personal and social circumstances, and further their identity and lifestyle goals (Holt, 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005)

Opposed to mainstream consumer research, which has been critiqued for too determinate theorizing (Wells, 1993), consumer culture theory takes carefully into consideration cultural meanings, sociohistorical influences, and social dynamics that shape consumer experiences and identities in the complex contexts of consumers' lives (Holt, 1997; Fournier, 1998) from, for example, the home to the Web and office. For any given consumer the world is not unified or transparently rational (Hirschman 1985; Mick & Fournier, 1998) and it is constructed around multiple realities which are experienced through consumption (e.g. Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 2002; Kozinets 2001).

True to its multidisciplinary tradition, theoretical questions and research agendas of consumer culture theory cut across the process-oriented categories of acquisition, consumption, and disposition (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In other words, CCT examines sociocultural processes and structures related to four research programs: consumer identity, marketplace culture, sociohistorical patterning of consumption, and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Studies conducted under the broad framework of consumer culture theory often do not strictly fall under one single research program but address different aspects of each (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Out of these research programs the study on hand mainly addresses aspects under consumer identity, and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies with certain themes brushing the other two.

Consumer culture theory suits the conducted study well as CCT is concerned with cultural meanings, sociohistorical influences, and social dynamics that shape consumer experience and consumer identities in numerous, complex contexts of everyday life (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). The consumption experience of mobile games is affected by many factors, for example, associated to masculine gaming spaces, historical studies of women and technology, and video games culture. Effectively, CCT considers what consumers

experience is neither unified, monolithic, nor transparently rational (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In addition, most consumers' lives are constructed around multiple realities shaped by consumption experiences (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Next, the research programs most relevant to the conducted research will be examined more closely in order to better understand the issues related to women's consumption practices of mobile games.

4.1 Consumer identity projects

Consumer identity projects see consumers co-constituting and coproducing a coherent but simultaneously diversified and commonly fragmented sense of self using marketer-generated materials (Belk, 1988). Essentially, they are seen as identity seekers and makers (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The marketplace becomes a source of mythic and symbolic meanings that consumers use to construct narratives of identity even if they lack the resources to participate in the market as full members (Belk, 1988; Holt, 2002).

Consumer identity projects are typically considered to be goal driven but also marked by points of conflict, internal contradictions, ambivalence, and even pathologies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). These complications often cause the use of myriad coping strategies, compensatory mechanisms, and juxtapositions of seemingly antithetical meanings and ideals (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In their study Schau and Gilly (2003) examined the way consumers use brand images and hyperlinks on their personal websites to create online self-presentations of themselves. Notably, the participants were able to construct multiple self-presentations with nonlinear qualities without needing to possess the brand qualities in real life or sacrificing the image of an integrated self. In other words, a consumer culture can constitute a multitude of practices that ostensibly do not match but make up a culture of consumption that makes sense for the consumer (Schau & Gilly, 2003).

Inside CCT research it has commonly been thought that individuals are drawn to a consumption practice because the associated marketplace myths help them resolve salient sociocultural contradictions and/or incorporate abstract cultural ideals into their identity projects (Arsel & Thompson, 2011). They argue that this view overstates the centrality of marketplace myths in consumers' identity projects and do not pay enough attention to sociocultural dynamics that equally affect the consumption experience. Consequently, Arsel and Thompson (2011) found out that consumers started demythologizing undesirable

meanings associated with their marketplace. In other words, negative socio-cultural forces did not drive consumers to abandon their identity projects.

Arnould and Thompson (2005) further argue that more attention have been given to the relationships between consumers' identity projects and how the structuring influence of the marketplace might produce predefined consumer positions that consumers can then choose to inhabit in order to pursue personally uplifting goals. Moreover, they suggest that consumers can in addition to this enact and personalize cultural scripts that align their identities with the structural imperatives of a consumer-driven global economy.

4.2 Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies

Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies deal with the dominant normative ideological influence of commercial media and marketing, and consumers, who are seen as interpretive agents rather than passive actors (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consumer culture theory examines consumer ideologies, systems of meaning that tend to channel and reproduce consumers' thoughts and actions, in such a way as to defend dominant interests in society (Hirschman, 1993). Arnould and Thompson (2005) summarize the guiding questions of this research program based on previous literature as: What normative messages do commercial media transmit about consumption? And how do consumers make sense of these messages and formulate critical responses? They continue by describing that consumers are conceived of as interpretive agents whose meaning-creating activities range from those that tacitly embrace the dominant representations of consumer identity and life-style ideals portrayed in advertising and mass media to those that consciously deviate from these ideological instructions. The interpretive strategies of straying away from dominant culture create different diverse forms of identity play and sometimes reflect criticisms of corporate capitalism and marketing as a social institution (Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2002).

At a broader level, consumer culture theory examines the influences that economic and cultural globalization push to consumer identity projects and identity-defining patterns of social interaction in social contexts (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). On a more concrete level this means, for example, exploring how particular cultural production systems like marketing communications systematically predispose consumers toward certain kinds of identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The effects of mass-mediated marketplace

ideologies can be well seen from Kozinets' (2008) study on how technology ideologies influence consumer-level thought, speech, and action that revealed interesting new aspects of consumers' dynamic relations to technology ideologies. One of the identified technology ideologies, *techspressive ideology*, which links the ultimate fulfillment of pleasure onto technology, has been said to have risen in popularity along the popularization of video games. Kozinets sums up that messages and practices surrounding video gaming in mass culture were promoting an ideology of pleasurable play in the category of technology in the 1990s, and provided technologically enabled role models of top fashion, entertainment, and art. However, he continues, the technologically mediated pleasure, escape, and expression also quickly became a basis for mass culture cautionary tales of antisocial, addictive, frivolous, and onanistic behavior, an image which gaming has never since really been able to shed off.

Finally, studies handling the program of mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies borrow from anthropology and media studies, using semiotic and literary critical theories to analyze the symbolic meanings, cultural ideals, and ideological inducements encoded in popular culture texts and the rhetorical tactics that are used to make these ideological appeals appealing (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; McQuarrie and Mick, 1996). Popular texts (advertisements, series, films) are essentially read as lifestyle and identity instructions that convey unadulterated marketplace ideologies (how to look and act, and what to want or aspire to) and idealized consumer types (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Belk & Pollay, 1985).

5   Methodology

Next, the basis of the research is established by defining the methodology used in the conducted study. First, the research approach is defined including the research paradigm which explains the effective views on epistemology and ontology. Secondly, the data collection methods are introduced. Finally, the data analysis methods used to process the collected data are presented.

5.1   Research approach

Through the researcher's previous experience and discussions with female players, it is assumed that female mobile game culture is not yet established as a coherent and publicly communicated culture. It is hypothesized that individual players collect their personal experiences and interpret external cues on their own, and the consumer culture then forms from these individual realities. Considering this, narrative inquiry was chosen as the defining methodology of the research. Narrative inquiry is mainly interested in understanding human action and human meaning in large (Polkinghorne, 1988) which goes in the same lines with the chosen theoretical framework of consumer culture theory that essentially looks for "a distributed view of cultural meaning" through examining consumers' consumption practices (Hannerz, 1992). As the narrative data collection is conducted through individual interviews and examined with interpretivist perspectives, they are not capable of creating a generalized view of the world or the existing consumer culture. Rather, the collected narratives provide a window to players' personal realities and help to understand the prevailing cultural narratives, myths, and ideologies. Both CCT and narrative inquiry recognize the possibility of multiple self-presentations and thus players' narratives are regarded as versions of reality that can be multiple, overlapping, nonlinear, and contradictory.

The main focus in the methodology of narrative inquiry is to study the ways humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Personal narratives are simultaneously born out of experience and give shape to experience thus making narrative and self inseparable (Ochs & Capps, 1996). When we experience things in life, we often do not pay too much attention to our doings and we might do things without realizing our actions. Ochs & Capps (1996) crystallize the basis of narrative inquiry well by saying that entities are given meaning through being experienced and that narrative is an essential resource in the

struggle to bring experiences to conscious awareness. Simultaneously, they continue, we have to understand that remembering is a form of forgetting (Kundera, 1995 cited in Ochs & Capps, 1996) and lives are the pasts we tell ourselves. Consequently, the study on hand regards collected narratives as the current reality of the participants accepting that the narratives might be affected by time- and context-bound factors.

Research paradigm

Based on industry reports and everyday observations of female mobile gaming, it seems that the activity is generally held quite personal and there is no publically shared marketplace culture among consumers by large. For this reason the study takes a constructivist epistemological approach and interpretivist theoretical perspective to the topic. In constructivist approach subjects construct their own meaning in different ways and thus there can be multiple, contradictory but equally valid accounts of the world (Gray, 2013). Here the interviewed female players will be considered as individual actors that personally construct their own view of mobile gaming through own experiences and cues from the outside world. That is, the study starts from the assumption that there is not publically articulated culture of female mobile gaming. However, this does not dismiss the possibility of individual realities sharing elements and thus forming one or more hidden or invisible consumer cultures.

On the other hand, constructivist approach to ontology is essentially relativist. Guba and Lincoln (1994) summarize constructivist ontology as realities that are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, and socially and experientially based. In addition, they are local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. They continue that constructions are not more or less "true," in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated. Lastly, they note that constructions are alterable, as are their associated "realities". Interpretivist perspective specifies this approach by seeing social beings as constructing reality and giving it meaning based on context that, if separated of fragmented, changes the meaning of the reality too (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Moreover, reality is also socially constructed in that all human knowledge is developed, transmitted, and maintained in social situations (Berger and Luckman, 1967 in Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Regarding the nature of social beings in interpretivist ontology people are seen as voluntarily and actively

creating and interacting in order to shape their environment, not acting upon by outside influences (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

In turn, constructivist approach to epistemology is essentially transactional and subjectivist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It sees that the truth and meaning (knowledge) are something that are created by the subject's interactions with the world or, in other words, meaning is constructed and not discovered (Gray, 2013). As mentioned, these meanings are constructed in different ways and can be multiple or contradictory but they still offer equally valid accounts of the surrounding world (Gray, 2013). Interpretivist perspective specifies the constructivist epistemology by emphasizing the importance of time and place in the research setting, and seeks to discover motives, meanings, reasons, and other subjective experiences that are time- and context-bound (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Interpretivist perspective also sees causality as something too difficult to establish in the complex and changing world (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) and prefers a holistic view of the world, where mutual, simultaneous shaping occurs between entities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

Considering the gendered focus of the study and the charged nature revolving around gender and video games research, ethical considerations and concerns about the validity of the study are held especially important. Previously, Jenson and de Castell (2010) have criticized the resilient tradition to divide existence into sexes and sexes into two while investigating one in terms of what it lacks compared to the other. They claim that this ends up just reaffirming old accounts of female gaming and familiar gender assumptions, and eventually nothing new is learned. In addition, they shun the commonly perceived and documented tension between the male cultures of play, which they claim to enable the production of contemporary masculinity (Walkerdine, 2007) and construe female gamers as something marginal. Jenson and de Castell (2010) call for more gender-sensitive research, interpretation, and critical thinking into the analysis of recurring themes inside the findings of the field of study.

While the reasoning for the female focus of the study was argued earlier, the critique by Jenson and de Castell (2010) is taken into account in the limitations of the research setting as effectively as possible in order to achieve new and relevant findings to advance the field of study. The conclusions, implications, and limitations of the study are discussed at the end of the study.

During the course of the research it was recognized that a possible bias generated by the researcher's gender and previous background in video games posed a threat in the validity of the study considering question-setting and analyzing participants' narratives. This was addressed in data collection by letting the conversion flow from topics brought up by the players and introducing themes lifted from previous research when necessary. In data analysis, much attention was paid into considering the data set from multiple angles in order to not derive hasty conclusions from it. In conclusion, critical self-reflection, and low inference fieldwork (Burke, 1997) were used to ensure the quality of the research.

Finally, the study bears no affiliations to any of the companies whose games are mentioned in the participants' narratives. All the participating interviewees were chosen based on their gaming habits with aim for as diverse coverage of games as possible. The choice which games to bring up in their narratives was left entirely up to the participants themselves.

5.2 Data collection method

Considering the research approach of the study and the ethical considerations based on previous research, interviews were seen as the most suitable data collection tool out of different methods suitable for narrative inquiry, as introduced by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). Interviews allowed the participants to construct their experiences and view of the world at their own pace, and low inference data helped to control potential interviewer bias. However, against the suggestion of Connelly and Clandinin (1990) a semi-structured build was chosen as the most effective form of interviews as it was emphasized that interviews might hit some stagnant points due to participants being unaccustomed to talking about the subject organically. Effectively, the interviews took a lot of inspiration from the conversational portions of traditional Labovian sociolinguistic interviews that are loosely structured interviews designed to yield large quantities of casual and natural speech from interviewees (Labov, 1972). This method also went along with the interpretivist approach, which emphasizes subjective experiences and multiple, changing realities (Hudson & Ozanne, 1985; Gray, 2013).

The interviews were conducted in Finnish and in casual locations such as cafés in order to try to reflect the mood mobile games are often played in. Throughout the interviews the nature of the discussion was held as conversational as possible to encourage experience sharing, storytelling, and spontaneous development of topics. The aim of the research was

made clear in two points of the interview process: in the public invitation for interviewees and in the beginning of each interview. As noted earlier, the semi-structured interview were mostly built around spontaneous conversation of player-raised topics but themes from previous literature were lifted when the discussion would hit a stagnant point. Close attention was paid in directing the interviews so that ideas would not be fed by the interviewer. When necessary, the interviewer would briefly take an active role in the discussion sharing own experiences in order to encourage analytic discussion and story sharing in the participants.

Personal mobile devices were also used as a way to stimulate the conversation. When necessary, the interviewer and interviewee deemed would go through the interviewee's mobile device to discuss the games they had installed and even play some games for a short period of time. This was also done when the interviewees would not remember the games they play. The average interview length was around 45 minutes and the 7 interviews resulted in total 311 minutes (101 pages) of collected verbatim data.

Interviewees

The collected data set consists of interviews with seven female mobile gamers chosen with convenience sampling out of the researcher's extended social network after an open interview invitation in social media with two predefined criteria: the participants should play mobile games daily and their active gaming repertoire should consist of more than one game. The interviewees were chosen with this criteria to target players who are actively involved in the activity and can, hopefully, discuss their mobile gaming experiences in more depth. In addition, attention was paid to the selection of games the interviewees played so that the variety of games would be as versatile as possible in terms of game mechanics, themes, popularity, etc. Final selection of interviewees was chosen from volunteers who fulfilled the prerequisites the best and formed a diverse group of players. The following will shortly introduce the interviewees and provide more information about their relationship to mobile gaming. The names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy.

Stella (25) works in a gaming company and plays mobile games actively every day both on her free time and at work. She plays a variety of different genres and themes ranging from battle strategy to brightly colored puzzle games.

Aino (27) plays popular top rated mobile games on a daily basis. She often experiments with random games with a "let's try it" attitude. On top of mobile

gaming she has always played some console games and currently has a PlayStation 3 at home.

Rosa (24) currently can't play with her Lumia phone but plays daily with her boyfriend's smart phone. She sometimes goes around the problem by playing Facebook versions of mobile games on her phone. She used to play video games as a child but has since stopped.

Sini (26) plays a set of different puzzle and logic games every day ranging from popular titles to unbranded classics. She is also an enthusiastic video gamer but prefers to play them only intensively and thus saves them to rare occasions.

Kaisa (25) plays mobile games every other day and prefers puzzle and quiz type games. To her, mobile games are strictly for killing time and she turns to them only if no other ways of entertainment are available.

Noora's (27) mobile gaming habits are periodic with her gaming frequency ranging from not playing to playing actively every day. She enjoys a variety of different themes in games and does not shy away from nontraditional themes.

Siiri (27) also works in a games company and is always interested to discover new interesting games. She tends to favor games with certain mechanics under varying periods of time with Mach-3 type games being her current favorite.

5.3 Data analysis method

As noted earlier, the collected narrative data was regarded through interpretivist perspective and regarded as versions of reality that can be multiple, overlapping, nonlinear, and even contradictory. In other words, participants' stories are depictions of their realities and describe the different cultural narratives, myths, and ideologies around them. As the study on hand considers female mobile gaming practices from the viewpoint of consumer culture theory, the objective of data analysis was to identify players' actions and feelings, as well as historical forces and marketplace systems forming them into an interwoven construction of existing consumer culture.

As mentioned earlier, a set of predefined themes emerged from the previous research was used as the core base of the interviews in order to give beginning points for the

narratives. Analysis process was started right after the first interviews to find any recurring themes that could be looked for and used as additional themes in the further interviews. These pre-analyzed themes would then appear alongside other identified themes later in the analysis process. The proper analysis process was in practice guided by the principles of thematic analysis, in which conceptual groupings are inductively created from the data and where the emphasis is more on "what" is said rather than "how" it is said (Riessman, 2008). Still, significant linguistic findings in the narratives were not overlooked.

The process began by reading through the collected data multiple times, breaking the narratives into coherent entities and making initial notes about their contents looking for recurring themes. Continuing, the data was worked in a narrowing manner starting with a large set of detailed notes and reworking the data under broader themes. After coding the data under ten broader themes, it was possible to compare the collected narratives and try to better understand the consumption experience of the seven interviewed women. Finally, the consumption model introduced in the next chapter emerged naturally from the coded data. This enabled to further place the ten identified themes under the three elements of the model effectively ending the process in the data being coded on multiple levels.

Finally it is important to mention that as the interviews were conducted in Finnish to create a comfortable, natural interview setting, the chosen narratives were then translated into English. As the chosen approach of analysis was thematic, effectively focusing on "what" instead of "how", this does not compromise the validity of the data. Nevertheless, the narratives were translated with a balance between readability and appreciation for the original presentation. In addition, pace of the narratives, distinct word choices, and overall structures were maintained as well as possible.

6 Findings

In the following section the key results of the study will be presented. As the collected data is looked through the lenses of Consumer Culture Theory, the focus is on how the participants are co-constituting and coproducing a coherent but simultaneously diversified and fragmented sense of personal consumption and surrounding consumption culture of mobile games. The findings consist of different interwoven experiences, meanings, and actions that consistently recurred in the conducted interviews. These patterns of actions, feelings, and discursions are divided under two broader categories: 1) **Positive patterns of play** and 2) **Negative patterns of play**. These groups essentially describe different ways mobile games are played, and considered through actions and discourse. In other words, the groups introduce a set of positive and negative play patterns that are associated with mobile gaming either through experience or cultural narratives. Specific categories are further identified inside the two groups to understand the key drivers in mobile game consumption. This simple dual categorization well expressed the polar nature of mobile gaming in the participants' eyes. In addition to the first two categories, a third group of play related behavior emerged from the interviews: 3) **Control mechanisms**. These patterns of controlling the consumption of mobile games introduced an interesting complement and a dynamic element to the other categories.

To more easily demonstrate the observed experience of consumption and relationship between the patterns of play, a framework was created. It works as the foundation of the findings demonstrating how different patterns of behavior interact with each other. Based on the findings, for example, the perceptions of favorable and unfavorable outcomes vary between participants. Certain behaviors can move between the positive and negative sides based on time, place, and intensity of the action, or sometimes even exist simultaneously on both sides. In general, however, the perceived division between positive and negative patterns of behavior seemed to be quite clear to the participants. This reflects well the fragmented, plural, fluid, and hybrid nature of consumption traditions as described by Firat and Venkatesh (1995). Lastly, the overlapping light blue panel expresses the variety of control mechanisms which are embedded in the actions and discursions of the players. Some of the mechanisms are tied to the point of consumption but some are used outside of it on their own.
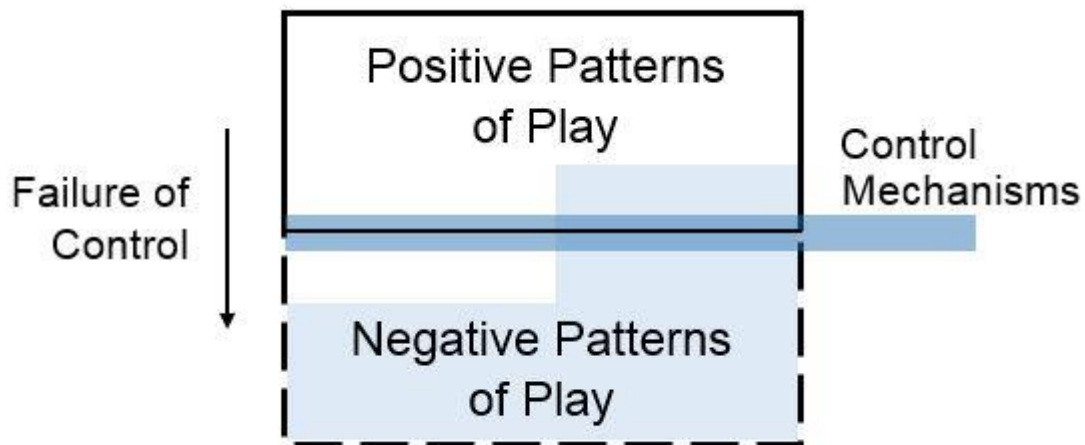
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Figure 1 Framework of female mobile games consumption

For many of the participants the roots of their perceptions towards video games, and that way towards mobile games, come from their childhood, when they had varying experiences with video games on either their own, sibling's, or friend's gaming devices. For all of them the amount they spent playing reduced as they got older and only Aino and Sini can be said to have somewhat continued playing video games. When asked for their reasons to start mobile gaming, none of the participants can point out to have made a specific decision to start playing. All of them seem to agree that games have figuratively crept into their lives along mobile phones.

> *Siiri: When you think about it that I got my first mobile phone when I was maybe 12 – old-fashioned Nokia 5110 and it had the classic game Snake. I remember that always when you got a new phone as a child/teenager, the first thing to do was to check ringtones, backgrounds – when color displays started to be available – and games. So basically since 12-year-old you have had some kind of a game with you.*

Siiri's narrative describes appropriately the common conception that adopting mobile games consumption was not seen as a consciously made decision but a naturally absorbed behavior from the surrounding culture. Some player-identified reasons for the favorable image of mobile games were described to be availability, low cost of consumption, and a lower commitment level. New games are easily found by browsing application stores and the different top lists offer a point of reference to discover quality games in various styles, themes, and mechanics. Many of the players had started with playing popular titles out of

curiosity seeing their popularity. Notably, Stella speculates that playing mobile games has become more acceptable and, in a way, a "must" as it has grown as a phenomenon. Essentially, the availability and grown acceptance seems to be the reasons all the participants had at some point tried mobile games and continued playing. Due to the stable flow of new titles, many of the interviewed players had developed a habit of frequently downloading games randomly in order to find a next favorite or popular title.

In the next subchapters the findings will be presented under three different themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes introduce a series of different patterns of play that are guided by various actions, feelings, and thoughts deemed conceivable or necessary by the interviewed players just like is typical in consumer culture (Holt, 1997). The research on hand attempts to describe these guiding actions, feelings, and thoughts in order to understand the motivations behind mobile game consumption in the experience of these individuals. This is done by examining selected narratives from conducted interviews that expressed the different reasons and ways to play to act in the best way. Finally, the findings will be summarized and placed inside the introduced framework to understand the consumption culture more effectively.

6.1 Positive patterns of play

The first broader category under examination is positive patterns of behavior. This group essentially gathers up different favorable outcomes that are associated with playing mobile games. By engaging in the act of playing the respondents feel certain needs are being satisfied and the activity is seen as worthwhile. In other words, the actions grouped in this category could also be called the reasons or motivation the participants are playing mobile games. The selection of positive outcomes ranges from rather low-involvement actions, such as relaxation and passing time, to more involving actions like competing against other players and strategizing.

Initial Perception

When asked for their motives to play, the players consistently began with three spontaneous reasons for their playing: passing time, relaxing, and having fun. This is an interesting combination of reasons considering that their levels of involvement and motivation are quite different. Out of the self-identified reasons to play passing time was the first answer given by all of the participants. Our lives contain a lot of situations that require waiting and in

today's active world we are used to always having an assortment of different stimuli in our reach from online videos to instant messaging and news feeds to games. The following quotes from Kaisa and Aino sum up well a common reaction to playing mobile games:

> *Kaisa: And why do I play… well, I would say that the biggest reason is just to pass time. I would say that the reason for me to start up a game on my phone is that I kill time, very often during bus trips. I don't listen a lot of music with my phone, so I might spend bus trips playing some game, usually Candy Crush.*

> *Aino: It is just that you get time to pass quicker. And when you are going to work or coming from work it is basically "downtime" that you don't have to think about work. You switch your mind to free time in a way. It's kind of a bridge to calibrating your brain in a different way.*

Just like these narratives point out active playing of mobile games is very often associated with situations where one is forced to stay in an environment with very few engaging activities. All the participants identified bus trips as their most common situation to play alongside playing at home. Due to the often simplistic nature of mobile games they tend to be exceptionally suitable in these kind of situations as they are easy to pick up, quick to play, and do not include large barriers to be quickly dropped if necessary, like sparse saving points in a lot of video games. They are essentially effective time-fillers that do not require a careful evaluation of available time and thus offer an easy way to start. In all interviews the words "*quick*", "*easy*", and "*simple*" were repeated very often.

> *Sini: They are sort of games that you can start whenever. That is, I usually play during bus trips. I can pick up the phone just like this and continue from where I left. The checkpoints are not very long apart so you can play for a little while, have a break, and continue but you can also play a couple of hours if you feel like it.*

As can be seen from Sini's narrative, the lack of commitment is very often an attractive quality in mobile games. The player is essentially free to choose the length of their play session as they please. However, Sini brings up an important point about playing that often did not come up in the first reactions to the discussed topic: mobile games are not only played is short bursts and not just to "*brainlessly kill time*", as one of the interviewees put it. Upon

discussing the topic of mobile games further and exploring their motives to play, several other reasons to play were identified.

One of these reasons can be identified from Aino's earlier comment. She describes playing as something that in practice helps her to make a clear distinction between different parts of her life, in this case between her work and free time. This was also something that other participants reported doing. For these players their work requires a certain state of thinking and by playing games when commuting to or from work that mental transition is made easier. Playing mobile games work as kind of a ritual in that process just like one could imagine, for example, putting on work attire or commuting does. Aino describes this action as "*switching to free time*" and "*a bridge to calibrating your brain in a different way*". Interestingly in their interviews only the transition from work or school responsibilities to free time was emphasized.

> *Rosa: Usually what's in those slightly longer games, because one thinks all sorts of complicating things at school or brain runs on overdrive during the day anyway, the big part is that you can just be spaced-out and play the game.*

When examining the way these female players played mobile games, a lot of their views can be sensed from the language they use. The used language indicates, for instance, the interesting conflict between the underestimating language they used and the level of interest they eventually showed towards mobile games. In the previous comment Rosa sees it as a positive attribute that games offer an opportunity to "*space out*" while playing. It is important to notice that this does not describe so much the activity itself but more the way playing is valued as a social activity especially against other means of spending one's time. Judging the conducted interviews this kind of language was often used to emphasize the recreational value of playing but I also hypothesize that it is an important part of socially valuing the activity. This social valuing will be discussed more under the negative patterns of play and control mechanisms.

Continuing further the feeling that the interviewees' initial perception of mobile gaming is something quintessentially negligible, it is interesting to notice how mobile gaming is seen to rank among other means of recreational activities. As mentioned before, the participants tended to have a clear understanding of how their gaming behavior should be justified as an acceptable way to spend surplus time. We have already established that it is acceptable in restricted situations where other means of entertainment are not necessarily

available. However, the way they are valued for example in the other popular gaming location, home, the views differed slightly from people to people. Noora describes that she often plays in situations where she doesn't have "*anything better to do.*" This already sets the activity in an interesting light and reflects the valuation from earlier: gaming is acceptable in situations where nothing that could be valued more important is available. Noora's comment on the matter, however, gives a hint of how practice might differ from how the activity is often initially described.

> *Noora: Uhm, maybe if I have made some plans - I'm seeing friends or something – then that's of course more important. But if I have a choice of watching Netflix, reading a book, playing alone, or something, then it depends on my current mood. Essentially those three options are more or less on the same level. All of them are pastimes that you can do when you have time and no plans with anyone or if there's nothing on TV you absolutely have to see directly. Maybe it's precisely that what the reason for playing is, that I don't feel like reading a book. I don't have energy to concentrate on it and I don't want to watch any series or a movie because it takes always an hour or more. So it's kind of like that - I feel like doing a little bit of something. Then comes that "I could play a little bit." It's not so long commitment compared to watching a series or similar.*

This narrative highlights well the low-involvement nature of mobile games but also shows that, in reality, they might enjoy better acceptance than how it first seems. Noora's earlier story described how mobile games are suitable in situations where there is "*nothing better to do.*" However, she then evaluates them as equal with books, movies and TV series. Across the interviewees it was a common practice to group mobile games together with other medias that traditionally involve some kind of a story line, making time availability a common factor in choosing between activities. Interestingly the respondents did not tend to mention other hobbies when discussing choosing between activities. Only Kaisa seemed to rank mobile games as the ultimately last choice, for example, behind readings books, watching television, and going to the gym. One thing all of the women seemed to agree with, though, was that social activities should always be valued over mobile gaming and it is generally objectionable if playing interferes with social situations.

Underlying Motivations

So far it has looked like mobile gaming is a common, low-involvement activity in the interviewees' lives and that mobile gaming does not offer anything more complicated than an unstressful opportunity to pass time and relax. Nevertheless all of these players engage in regular play and can even spend longer periods of time playing. If playing is just a quick, low-involvement action, why do so many people play outside commutes and ultimate boring situations? A hint that there might be several underlying reasons for playing can already be seen from the previous narrative from Aino. For her mobile gaming offers a relaxation ritual when switching from leisure to work. Even though many interviewees described their playing as something "*brainless*" it is hard to believe that such shallow motivation could be behind so frequent play patterns.

In my personal experience talking about games is not yet a very common practice among mobile gamers and so it was evident, just like earlier reported, that participants tended to have a similar first response to the topic. Therefore it was delightful to notice that after the initial formality of the interview setting had shed off, the interviewees got more comfortable talking about mobile games and their mind started to open for deeper examination about their feelings towards playing. After this varying positive motivations and playing patterns were discovered. Not surprisingly many of the discussed feelings and preferences linked to mobile games followed the same themes that have been discovered in previous literature but often took a drastically different form due to different reasons. The underlying reasons that drive the positive play patterns can roughly be divided into two groups: **objective based** and **feeling based reasons**. As the names suggest, they divide the reasons into two different forms of targets. Objective based reasons are usually very action oriented and often tied into in-game mechanics. The players aspire to achieve certain effects or targets inside the games in order to enjoy feelings like accomplishment, effectiveness, mastery, or improvement. On the other hand, feeling based reasons tend to focus on playing the game in a certain way to achieve a particular overall feeling while playing. It could also be expressed that objective based reasons are achieved by reaching distinct points in the games while feeling based reasons come from continuously playing the games in certain ways. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that, like the consumption framework, these factors are dynamic and not strictly unambiguous. It could be argued that all the discussed playing is feeling oriented trying to achieve for example enjoyment through playing. Likewise, all the discussed playing could be argued to be goal oriented trying to reach

particular feelings like freedom while playing. There also might be and very likely are more motivations than the ones discussed here but these were the ones extracted from the conducted interviews. It came clear in the interviews that there are many occasions of play, which the players might not register as playing due to their quick nature. Also, since not enough significant data was collected about all of them, the findings will focus on the themes that came forth the most clearly.

Table 1 Positive patterns of play

Usually games are constructed in a manner that incorporates different kinds of in-game objectives or encourages player set **targets**. Targets can be, for example, completing levels, unlocking new items, or saving enough currency to buy new elements to the game. It quickly came clear that the sense of achieving these objectives is one of the most evident motivations to play in mobile games. Achieving the objectives takes often time and dedication but, when accomplished, can rouse a multitude of different feelings in the player.

> *Noora: Maybe it brings a little bit of satisfaction and you kinda want to advance in it [game]. Maybe what's in Hay Day is that you want to have it, want to get new things, and want to build new machines and whatever comes in the next level. And one thing that I had for a long time – this is embarrassing – one fairly long time motivator in Hay Day was to get a cat (laughs). So you wanted to have those vouchers in order to buy cats. Now I have all three of the different cats, which you can buy in it. After that, I have*

to admit, it [urge to play] calmed down a bit. Then it was horses, and now I have two.

Aino: It's quite easy for me to get hooked. It all depends on the game. Sometimes it can be that I don't seem to advance or I get stuck on a level. You get sort of a "I'm going to do it" feeling that now I'm going to play as long as it takes for me to pass that level no matter how long it takes. - - Getting forward motivates. When I see that I'm now on this level and have this amount of XP [experience points], diamonds, and whatever – you get that "Yes, I'm doing fine!" and "How far can I take this?"

From the narratives of Noora and Aino it is easy to identify the target based motivation around different in-game elements. In-game objectives are, of course, a traditional game mechanic found in most games and purposefully built in to both encourage further playing and to take the game forward. For Aino this element is a big feature in her mobile gaming habits and she admits right in the beginning to get easily "*hooked*" in games. This was a common narrative from the interviewees and most of them reported different levels of uncontrolled playing habits when the determination to achieve a target gets too strong. Aino further describes that sometimes the frustration of not advancing or the urge to get forward gets so strong that she plays "*as long as it takes for me to pass that level no matter how long it takes.*" Meeting the desired progression objectives gives the player a sense of accomplishment as well as moves the game forward revealing new content inside the game. Aino then describes a feeling of skill as well as a personal challenge to try to improve even more. This is an essential consumption mechanic in mobile games and often one of the easiest reasons to observe. The objective can also be self-set and unrelated to actual advancement inside the game as can be seen in the case of Noora. She displays a possession based motivation inside the game, which is fueled by collecting different items inside the game, in this case animal characters. These personal targets in the games are highly personal and differed between players from collecting the most stars in Candy Crush to finding the longest word in Sanajahti (a Finnish word searching game). Examining this motivational behavior is sometimes difficult because, as mentioned earlier, most mobile games have a certain objective or reason to play in the game. This makes it difficult to distinguish game objectives that do not have a particular meaning to the player and are merely just an in-game

mechanic. Accordingly, not all games sparked similar determination to play as mentioned in the previous comments. Noora continues her previous story like this:

> *Noora: That is perhaps the thing that motivates it [playing]. That you have to complete this boat order to get vouchers so you can purchase cats and animals. But then the number game [2048], it's maybe more "well, I'll play something for a while" type of game. It's like, "I have 5 spare minutes here so I could fiddle around a little."*

This shows very well that even the same player's motivation to play can differ from game to game, and certain types of games are seen as more suitable in different situations. Notably, all the participants seemed to have a good understanding of the level of time commitment of each of their games and the amount of time they usually were willing to invest in them.

Tied to the target based motivation to play was a factor that has been often deemed almost non-existent in female players: **competition**. As previously discussed, just like different in-game objectives most games include some kind of a competition element in their design. Usually that is either competition between players or against the player herself in the form of competing to improve personal records. Jenson and de Castell (2007) suggest that in order to comply with social expectations female players participate in "benevolent competition", which is competing with others in a non-offensive but rather supportive manner. Interestingly, in the four interviews where competitiveness was brought in to the discussion by the players they expressed this type of attitude in their playstyle.

> *Sini: In no way do I think that I play against my friends. I don't think about if I win them or not while I'm playing, which is kinda weird. I'm the kind of person who wants to get the high score and do it for myself.*

> *Rosa: The first thing is to get "full 3 stars" and then if you can even get better score than your friends. Maybe it's more about getting the stars than winning your friends. It's that kind of competing with yourself, to some extent.*

In these two comments we can clearly see the common attitude towards competition elements in the mobile games these female players enjoy. Both Sini and Rosa enjoy first and foremost competing with themselves for the high scores. This is understandable in the light that many of the participants seemed to consider mobile gaming a fairly personal thing,

which can be seen from participants' comments when sociality is later discussed. For this reason, it felt like the players did not pay too much thought for the element of competition in their games but also because their listed games did not incorporate very offensive competition setups, apart from competing with points and progression. Siiri mentions briefly that she enjoys playing Clash of Clans, which incorporates a game element of attacking other players' villages but for her attacking other players does not seem to spark any competitive thoughts. However, it cannot definitely be said that competition does not play a role in motivation to play. Both Sini and Rosa mention clearly that they are motivated by getting the high score and improving their earlier performance. It is just notable that, at least in discourse, they do not consider their enjoyment to be mainly linked to specifically beating other players. Nevertheless, it is not said that they do not enjoy succeeding in games and this can be seen in Rosa's narrative. This is just not such a driving element that it would be strongly articulated in many cases, unlike in the case of Stella. For Stella mobile games that are connected to people she knows spark a strong urge of competition:

> *Stella: In Word Monster you have different leagues through Facebook. So I get sort of a feeling that I have to show I'm the best because my colleagues are there (laughs). I don't know. I tried to think about this because I'm not otherwise very competitive person but I don't want to be last. I want to be the first and want my friends to be last.*

Stella's narrative brings out a very different attitude towards the competition elements in the discussed game and it is possible that it also carries to other games as well. Even as it stands out as the only differing narrative in the interviews, it is an important notion to the fact that female players are a diverse group of players and include many different play styles and reactions to different game elements. The collected narratives are also from a variety of different games and thus game specific design differences could play a role in different reactions. Stella's narrative is especially interesting because she identifies herself as generally not very competitive person and did not voice out her interest towards competing against her own scores. Instead, she is very clear with her enjoyment to be linked to succeeding on the detriment of her co-workers and friends.

Even though mobile games are often described as quick and easy games that often do not require a lot of thinking, as stated earlier, players' narratives steered into describing how they enjoy the problem solving aspect of mobile games, especially in puzzle games.

Puzzle games have often been quoted by previous studies as one of the favorites among female players and they do offer an enjoyable combination of factors preferred by them. Upon further discussing what the interviewees enjoyed in mobile gaming the elements of **skills** and **process thinking** often came forth in a form or another. These factors mainly refer to the way games are played and how effectively players, for example, make moves in puzzle games. Apart from offering an enjoyable way to spend their excess time the players also liked the way it challenged them to think about patterns, outcomes, obstacles, and such.

The element of skills refers to any ability that a player either possesses or has developed through playing, which helps them to be more effective in the game they are playing. A skill can, for example, be the ability to play very quickly or to skillfully analyze the game board, and recognize the most effective moves and their consequences. Essentially, a big part of the gaming experience can be mental and not require as much active movement compared to a common everyday misconception that "*killing time*" often requires one to actively do something with their hands. The following narratives from Sini and Rosa offer a good insight to this style of play:

> *Sini: I was thinking that I have two kinds of games. The ones like Tic-tac-toe and Sudoku, which are just plain doing, but in the rest of the games I like to have some strategy elements. You have to plan ahead like this I'm going to do this way, and this… And I hate time limits! I like to look at it [game] and plan like if I do this then this is going to happen. I often just stare and think for a long time before I start doing anything.*

> *Rosa: When you solve that kind of small problems, it's that "brainless doing" for me. If you were just pushing a button, it would be pretty brainless, but it would be very boring. There has to be something to ponder so it stays interesting, but it can't be anything too complicated. I tend to consider things quite mathematically so in that kind of games, where you have to make moves, it's fun to try logically estimate what happens next when that piece falls. It's kinda cleansing, mechanical thinking.*

Regarding findings so far, Sini's narrative is significant because it pays attention to the fact that there is a variety of different mobile games on the market, which cater to different needs. To her, some games are just very simple and designed to be very quick, easy, and low-involvement – or like she describes them "*just doing*". Rosa's narrative agrees with this

opinion and defines what is her definition of "*brainless doing*", a term that was used by surprisingly many of the interviewees. To Rosa, "*brainless*" does not necessarily equal easy or simple but rather approachable, or balanced. Notably, it is interesting how she calls the experience of strategic playing "*cleansing, mechanical thinking*". To her it seems that just like mobile games can be used to switch from one state of mind to another she perceives this element of gaming as a similar experience. This state of strategic thinking, which sometimes also serves other purposes than just entertainment, can even absorb the player in unnoticed.

> *Sini: In mobile games, because I like to spend less time with them, I don't have room for mistakes and thus I like to choose a certain strategy. Of course, sometimes I play just without thinking, like "whoa, I'll just do this". And like ALL THE TIME, when I'm alone or there's a silent moment – during a lecture, for example – I might be in my own world and think about different moves even when I'm not playing the game. If someone came to ask what I'm thinking about, I would definitely not tell that: "About how I'm going to play a game when I leave this lecture."*

Sini's story explains how engaging and rewarding a mobile game that is supposedly simpler and shorter than a more traditional video game can be. What makes her remarks interesting are that she says to prefer spending less time with mobile games but actively engages in thinking about them outside of play. Moreover, in her example she is constricted by a lecture setting, where her means of entertainment are limited and thus it is not unheard of to think about entertaining thoughts. However, she also describes to engage in these thoughts in other situations, like when alone, which means she is choosing the activity over other options. It can be speculated if this is a form of self-regulating her mobile gaming but can also be just a mean of processing different strategies without the pressure of a game running on device a screen waiting for a choice to be made. Finally, she also mentions that she would not want to admit out loud that she is thinking about a game while not actually playing. There is definitely something uncomfortable in the thought, or other factors, that she does not want to make public and keep private instead.

On the other hand, directly related to the skill-based motivation of playing mobile games is the enjoyment of process thinking, which is a commonly used gameplay mechanic. In games which incorporate process management and process thinking to the game the players are given changing objectives and limited resources to accomplish them. The

available resources are often either in the form of in-game materials, processes, and time. These games challenge the players for example to find a working balance of producing materials, combining materials to new products, and managing their restricted storage space while trying to meet objectives as effectively as possible. This careful planning and juggling of varying factors often creates feelings of effectiveness and accomplishment, and many times inspires a desire to advance and develop. This urge can be so strong that it eventually starts to considerably affect player's behavior.

> *Sini: In Hay Day it's more the time factor that you always have to wait. So I'm like "gee, still 4 minutes and 52 seconds until I get wheat and then I can do this, and finish that truck order, and…" Then I get crazy and build an operating sequence in my head, which I can't forget, and I have to stare my phone until the whole 12-step plan has finished.*

> *(…) Sometimes it has gone way overboard when I have started to calculate time-profit expectations in my head (laughs). "So this takes this long and that gives me this much money, or this truck order gives me that much so should I optimize by doing this or that first…" At that point I'm not sure if it's relaxing anymore because I'm doing same things that I could be doing in real life. But it doesn't feel real, so it's somehow relaxing.*

Sini's narrative shows in an amusing way how easily the game's enjoyable aspects can sweep the player along and all of a sudden previously controlled gaming can start to near limits of unwanted behavior. In the case of Sini this does not happen but potentially all of the discussed positive patterns of play can steer the playing behavior on the other side of the control line. If nearing the line, the playing experience starts to adopt hints of the negative play patterns and puts it under question. Sini can be seen to question her own perception of mobile gaming's relaxing effect but she makes a clear distinction between ambition to be effective in real-life and in the game, and thus the experience stays on the acceptable side of the control line. Players also see resource management as a compelling game mechanics as they have a high level of control of the game mechanics. As mobile games are seen as a quick bursts of fun and relaxation, players react more sensitively to game elements that distract from the desired experience.

Siiri: For me it's that I like these resource management games. I like that you basically play them by yourself – well ok, you can sell items and buy from others – but basically you play more or less alone. Compared to games like Clash of Clans, I just don't… I played Clash of Clans in the beginning when it came out and it was fun until it got slow if you didn't pay for speed ups. So I did like it and it was fun to go wreck other's villages but it got distressing, when someone would wreck my village and I'd have to regroup after that.

As can be seen from Siiri's discourse, she values the predictability and control over her gaming experience. This is most likely related to the earlier identified factor that there is usually a framed window of time, where mobile games are played. Game mechanics that interfere with predictability might be seen as distracting and unpleasant. Firstly, Siiri mentions slowed down progress, which is a common mechanic in mobile games often created to encourage microtransactions for speed ups. She further describes how the constant need to regroup after getting attacked drove her to stop playing. Consequently, it is possible that games allowing disruptive competition evoke negative feelings in players and affect the overall enjoyment of the gaming experience. Ultimately, it came evident from Siiri's and other players' discourses that many of them value this control over many other things, such as social contacts to other players.

As noted earlier, the group of feeling based reasons to play consists of reasons identified in the interviews that are more based on playing mobile games in ways that enable the player to achieve a certain feeling. Here the feelings, such as enjoyment and relaxation, are not discussed as they were usually organically identified by the participants themselves in the beginning of their interviews. Just like there are different objectives that make the participants want to play, they also get enjoyment from playing in particular ways. Earlier it was identified that relaxing and passing time are some of the core reasons to play. Mobile games are played in situations where the player wants, for example, to ease their stress, let their mind rest, or focus on something out of their everyday chores. Even though many objectives that drive players' attention were identified, every interviewed player emphasized the importance of relaxed playing in some way. In order to make the distinction between this and the overall sense of relaxation mobile games bring, this pattern of play will be called **freedom**. Notably, for the interviewed players a sense of freedom does not necessarily mean being aimless or not trying to accomplish anything but the feeling of being free to play

however they will. This freedom can cover factors such as frequency of play, in-game time-limits, requirements for too much planning, or forced competition. As we can see from Siiri's previous story, her enjoyable playing experience takes an undesirable turn when her progress is wiped by competitors and she is forced to recover in order to play further. She even describes the feeling as distressing. On the other hand, Aino's narrative captivates well the essence of freedom in her situation.

> *Aino: For me it's maybe that I'm happy if I advance in it [game]. The main thing, for me, isn't to optimize as much money, experience points, or gems as I can. I definitely could have way more machines and what not there but for me it's a bit like my personal farm to mess around with. There's no clear plan of "I want a row of cows here, and here a row of smelters!"*
>
> *(…) You see farms organized extremely efficiently, where everything is in rows, nothing ever runs out, and everything always works but that's not my farm. My farm is a little bit crummy, and that works for me (laughs). Then it's ridiculous when you sometimes get visitors wanting to buy something, or you have a boat, or you should produce 15 time-consuming products and I might have only one machine. Those times I sort of wonder if I need to play a bit differently since I've played through quite a lot of levels. On the other hand, for me it's like a place to relax so I don't feel pressured to change my habits.*

As we can see, Aino knows very well what her preferred way of playing is. For her, the enjoyment in mobile gaming seems to come from the pleasure of being able to do as she pleases inside her own farm and this, as mentioned earlier, is an important factor for many of the interviewed players. She does understand that her chosen play style is not as effective as it could be and she even questions the rationality of her play style in relation to the experience she has gathered inside the game but she does not feel the need to adjust her attitude based on these extrinsic motivations. In order to emphasize her "non-optimal" style of play, she uses colorful or somewhat belittling expressions such as "*to mess around with*", "*ridiculous*", and "*my farm is a little bit crummy*" to describe her style of play. This type of language was also used by the other players to describe the same casual style of play but also in different contexts, for example, when talking about their playing habits. Furthermore, Noora describes her sense of freedom in Hay Day as: "*It's more that kind of 'let's just put*

that there' attitude. More like random fooling around." Siiri goes along the same lines by saying: "*For me it's basically that I go and do a little something there, and be like 'okay, that was that.'*" All of these narratives give a clear indication that even though, for example, skill based objectives gave the players satisfaction and sometimes ran them into playing more than they initially planned there is an understanding of the limits these objectives can go. Even if it is not prompted by the game, too determined playing is seen as something that can shatter the relaxing experience.

> *Sini: It loses the stress-free and comfortable feel because then I have to set myself some crazy objectives. Like, "now I want this here and that there." I rather move on in little steps and live in the game's own pace which then grows little by little.*
>
> *(…) Then again, I do spend more time in the game because I get more and more excited and want to get further and further in the game. I'm also the kind of "everything, here, now" person. So if I plan too far ahead and am there still after 20 levels, my hype fades out because my plans don't happen quickly enough. I'm very impatient.*

It is interesting to notice that in the case of Sini, who earlier indicated a strong preference towards process thinking elements in games, does not regard it as a limitation of her free play but a moment later shuns having too clear of a plan for organizing her farm. The same notion can be seen in the narratives of Aino, Siiri and Noora as well. For some reason, in the context of Hay Day the farm game, freedom was established as not having to be organized and placing their items down in a seemingly arbitrary fashion. Somehow this was seen as the factor between the sense of free play and "*too determined*" or "*too serious*", expressions used in other parts of the interviews to describe unwanted behavior in games. It is especially interesting in the case of Sini, who previously expressed a strong liking towards planning ahead even on her free time. Notably, in her case this is partly due to her recognizing the shortcomings of her own personality and controlling them through her play style, a control mechanism used by some of the players.

The last identified theme under the reasons to play does not clearly land under either one of the earlier identified groups of objective and feeling based reasons. In fact, it exhibited both objective and feeling based attitudes towards the discussed social features. **Sociality** is a theme that has often been discussed in the previous research on gender and video games,

and is usually considered one of the preferred features of female players in games. Here sociality is used as a thematic name for a group of different in-game features or play that deal with interaction between players. In the following narratives we can see that these social factors, which are supposedly implemented to promote a sense of community, encourage helping other players, and create a feeling of not playing alone are interpreted and played very differently by these players. Different games utilize different social mechanisms to complement their gameplay and thus produce various reactions in players. In addition, many mobile games do not include any social element of any kind.

> *Aino: You do get a strong feeling of happiness, when somebody succeeds. I think it's a fairly curious thing or good aspect in Hay Day – sense of community. For example, if you help even a stranger, you get a good feeling as inexplicable as it sounds. Or if someone saves your withered apple tree, or buys items from you, or you need apples and find them… So you do get these good feelings from it.*

Based on previous studies on female preferences, Aino's reaction to the general topic of social elements, here in the context of Hay Day, is similar to what has widely regarded to be the standard. In Hay Day the players have a possibility to visit each other's farms and help them to tend it or fill orders on their behalf for a small reward. Even though the helper receives a reward for the altruism, it is not necessarily a viable gaming tactic for gathering large amounts of in-game currency. In Aino's case, she tells that her motivation to participate in helping other members of the player community is to selflessly help them to succeed. The helped player does not even have to belong to her list of friends so even helping a total stranger evokes good feelings in her. It is fascinating how this type of altruistic playing has found its way into games that are generally considered quick, personal fun and it demonstrates how the activity involves many complex reasons to play.

Representing another stance on social elements in mobile games is Noora, whose view on the social elements is more objective focused than Aino's attitude. For her, the sense of community is not an important factor in a game but she does not dismiss the feeling she gets from helping other players.

> *Noora: Maybe I just see it from a benefit viewpoint. I hope to benefit from those other people. Of course I always try to look if I can help in some way, fill someone's boat crate or whatever help they might need. There's always*

the benefit aspect that I hope to get favors back. In my opinion it's not social in any way. For example, I have a friend from junior high there, who I haven't seen even once after junior high and still we help each other in Hay Day. I find it weird that we haven't been in any contact and still help each other in that world. In that sense there is no social side for me in it.

In her narrative Noora describes her attitude towards social elements, here in the context of Hay Day, very clearly as determined and lacking the sense of altruism that could be sensed from the previous story of Aino. She does recognize that there might be some other drivers besides utility behind her actions but the aspect of benefitting from seemingly altruistic actions is always on top. Interestingly, her interpretation of her actions not being social is based on her sense of genuineness. She describes a situation, where she has connected with an old friend and they help each other's farms in-game even when they have not seen each other face-to-face in years. It seems that to her an objective based action cannot truly be interpreted as socially driven and thus it does not count towards being a social element. Yet, it is good to note that the reason could also be the lack of direct contact with a player. During the time these interviews were conducted the game in question, Hay Day, did not have a chat function and thus the players were not able to communicate directly with each other.

As a social element, and to promote their game, a lot of games incorporate an element of sending help requests in Facebook to other players who might have installed the game. This is often not seen as a pleasant practice and had affected many interviewee's perception on all social elements in mobile games.

Sini: I also hate sending those requests, so I stopped. I thought that my limit goes here and I don't want to send "Hey, I'm now playing this, please send me help!" messages to my "girl friends". Thus I removed it from Facebook entirely. I downloaded it to my smart phone without linking it to Facebook and instead skip levels by doing extra tasks in the game.

As Sini describes, to her this practice was eventually too much and she has ended up to disconnect her game from Facebook despite some of the benefits it brings. Other participants also commented on this particular game element and had settled on turning off the ability to receive help requests in Facebook, or to send them to a selected group of friends they had evaluated suitable in terms of how they generally viewed mobile gaming. The link to Facebook usually has positive effects on players' game ranging from the benefit of an

extended list of helpers to receiving extra features in-game. However, as we will discuss later under control mechanisms, the link to Facebook is also seen as an effective and easy way to regulate one's privacy and play. Similar to Sini, Siiri falls into the other side of the spectrum in this matter as well. She just does not see the appeal in social elements in mobile games.

> *Siiri: I'm not very eager to join clans or bigger groups in those games. I could go and build my own clan and occasionally raid other players but I don't get the social or communal aspect from them.*

Looking at the different reasons these players engage in playing mobile games the results do not fall in unison and there are very different attitudes, and reactions towards various themes and mechanics. The participants construct an appealing combination of these elements in their minds that result in a good mental valuation to continue consumption. Nevertheless, just like in any type of consumption there are additionally different negative sides to mobile gaming, which weigh down the attractiveness of the activity. These negative patterns of play affect simultaneously both personal gaming experience and the general perception of mobile games.

6.2 Negative patterns of play

The group of negative play patterns combines different unfavorable behavioral outcomes as well as problems or drawbacks that the participants assumed to be linked to mobile gaming. As previously examined, the participants have different reasons to engage in the act of playing and seek feelings such as enjoyment, success, and mastery through different objectives and play styles in games. In addition to positive patterns of play there are different negative outcomes that mobile gaming can bring along. These behavioral patterns or associations with them are generally seen as undesirable and are usually avoided by the players. Furthermore, the interviewed players largely shared these preconceptions and were aware of this common understanding among people. Notably, it is important to understand that the preconceptions were often not based on personal experiences but understanding learned from surrounding culture.

Mobile games are still a newcomer as a widely spread media and are constantly trying the boundaries. Thus many current preconceptions of mobile gaming are derived from video games culture that can also be negative. Still, players are engaging in mobile gaming and so it can be assumed that mere playing is not seen as unwanted behavior. It is noteworthy, however, that due to the lighter nature of mobile games the preconceptions from video games seemed to also be lighter in this context. Essentially the negative associations with gaming and mobile gaming can be divided into two groups: **behavior issues** and **image issues**. Behavior issues are problems considering different effects on player's life, social behavior, and level of activity. To some extent gaming is seen as rather fruitless activity that can control players' lives. Certain level of gaming is thus seen as an addiction that affects the player's actions. Concerns under image related issues deal with bad image and other unfavorable qualities that are linked to gaming, and thus are avoided by the players. These issues mainly revolve around the negative picture of "gamers" and the unfavorable features entailed by games' being associated with masculine qualities.

BEHAVIOR	IMAGE
Unsocial	"Gamers"
Unproductive	Masculinity
Time-Consuming	

Table 2 Negative patterns of play

Generally speaking the participants' perceptions on behavioral issues are based on gaming's quality of making players more passive. Video gaming is fundamentally seen as something unsocial, unproductive, and time-consuming potentially preventing the players from doing something that is perceived more worthwhile such as socializing with people, accomplishing things, or learning. Out of the seven participants Kaisa's opinion on mobile gaming was the most straightforward: mobile games are strictly an effective way of killing time in the ultimate situation where there is nothing better to do. She sees spending any longer time periods with games as a waste of time but can understand that someone sees them as delightful a hobby similar to how she sees reading books. Rosa on the other hand admits to

liking games as a pastime but likewise prefers to use her free time being social – seeing her friends or spending time with her boyfriend. Notably, the effects on person's social life were often brought up when discussing the negative effects of playing games. This link was also evident when it came clear that mobile games are often not regarded a preferable topic of discussion.

One big fear of the interviewees was that playing games would start to affect their everyday behavior and cause negative reactions in social settings. The following narrative from Aino describes excellently different concerns associated with mobile games:

> *Aino: I know very different types of people who play it [Hay Day] like mothers, fathers, and children. People have two farms, one on phone and another on iPad. But then it becomes that when you wake up in the morning you have to immediately milk your cow and "I'm not coming to dinner table because I have to do this, and this…" and "Wait, wait, wait!" It got irritating that the game took all of the time that I spent with them. That was one of the reasons why I wanted to avoid it. I didn't want to be the one who gets her phone out in company because I have to milk my cows. I can give you a real life example: Both my cousin and his wife are in their forties. She plays Hay Day and one day had merrily said to her husband that you can feed our cat, and I'll feed our cows. The difference being that the cat is real (laughs) living thing and the cows are not. I didn't want to get to that point.*
>
> *(…) Myself, I tend to play the most while traveling [public transportation]. In addition, I live alone so it doesn't bother anybody. Still, I try to stay reasonable that even if there's something important waiting in the game and I'm out somewhere, I don't get my phone out. It can wait. I will get it out eventually but not necessarily during a party or whatever. Maybe when I get back home.*

As we can see from Aino's narrative the participants' worries of mobile games affecting their everyday lives is not unjustified. Aino describes a situation where the family, who she is visiting, is so deeply absorbed into the game world that the game objectives have even crept their way into their daily list of chores. They are neglecting social gatherings in favor of tending their farms. Her narrative even describes an event where the border between real

and imaginary has somewhat blurred, when the wife of the couple regards feeding in-game animals as equal to feeding their family cat.

Another common concern for the participants in playing games was the level of commitment and time required. As noted earlier, all of the interviewees preferred mobile games because of their short level designs and the ease of putting them down. In general, mobile games were seen as a better alternative of gaming due to their freedom and ease of control. This does not necessarily mean that the overall amount of play time would be shorter but it is seen as an easier factor to control in mobile games as can be seen from the following narrative.

> *Siiri: A game can start like: "I'll play a couple of levels" and that's what you plant to do but end up playing an hour. Even though the end result is the same the baseline is that you don't have to commit because the game says so. It's because you found it interesting.*

Besides negative views about the effects gaming can have on one's social behavior, there were different **image issues** that were related to games and being associated with them. Interestingly the participants seemed to have stronger concerns about how their mobile gaming might affect the image other people have of them. Different image issues with gaming were related to the stereotypes of "gamers" and the fear that playing mobile games could be linked to those preconceptions. Also games' strong masculine associations and the lack of visibility in feminine related contexts seemed to cause concerns to the participants.

The old stereotype, which is often learned young, of unsocial, maybe overweight, socially awkward nerd stays strong in people's minds and it could be sensed in the interviews. Even though mobile gaming is seen as an acceptable form of playing games, it is still "gaming" and thus bears a lot of the connotations. Sini's narrative on the subject summarizes the different factors in this effectively.

> *Sini: I believe it's in that a lot of movies, TV, and other places give the image that a person who plays is a teenaged boy who drinks Coke, goes to LAN parties, and is a stereotypical nerd. That doesn't maybe fit well the ideal female image, which many try to cultivate and see themselves as. I don't believe that female players are shown anywhere or are talked about. Or at least I don't see it. Women's magazines never talk about games or playing.*

> *They don't even have ads about any games, which is quite weird. So it's like*
> *an inconspicuous taboo that "hey, I play a game."*

The stereotypical image of a gamer can easily be seen from Sini's narrative. She raises a good and interesting point by mentioning that the associations to the word "game" are generally not seen as very favorable and thus the topic does not find its way into female dominated channels. Even though majority of mobile gamers are female and many are aware of mobile game's popularity, the topic is still seen socially in a rather negative light. Looking at the interviews as a whole many participants talked about being ashamed of saying that they play and considering mobile games a prejudiced topic that is usually kept private. Sini even goes as far as calling it a taboo, which send a strong message. Stella brings the same thing up in her narrative linking the negative connotations with mobile gaming to the PC dominated, more commitment demanding video game culture she grew up with. Nonetheless, she is confident in mobile gaming shedding the negative image in the future due to players seeing more and more easily who is playing: "*It might be that mobile gaming still goes there [having negative image] but I think it's going to change a lot exactly due to the social contacts.*"

The stereotypical connotations with the word "game" are seen as a drawback but the interviewed female players had another less harsh concern with the image of gaming: how gaming is often seen as having a masculine nature to it. This did not show up so much as an image problem rather than as a confusion about games and their content. It was evident that these players have grown up in a culture where games have been strongly gender coded. All the players were familiar with these masculine preconceptions and it can be seen from the word choices they make in their narratives. Stella describes that there is a threshold to try "*traditional boy games*" because there is a pressure to perform well enough in order to not be labeled as "*another girl who cannot play.*"

> *Aino: I have to say that I'm perhaps not the most typical girl – to be interested*
> *in games and having played them. I remember some parties in high school*
> *and junior high when some friends would go discuss relationship issues to*
> *the bedroom and I was playing PlayStation in the living room with boys*
> *because it was more fun.*

Aino describes herself as "*not the most typical girl*" because she has always been interested in games. She further reinforces the gendered divide by describing how in the social situation

other girls preferred to discuss relationships while boys preferred the game console. These, most likely learnt, ways of reinforcing cues for identifying gender appropriate or gender typical content have been much examined in previous literature, and they were also present in different ways in the interviews. Both Aino and Kaisa consider mobile games an easier domain to approach as there are much more gender neutral or unisex games available compared to computer and video games. Kaisa cannot even consider playing rally or sports games, or games that could be categorized more manly. Even Stella, who plays a large variety of games and works in the gaming industry agrees that if a game is color coded pink, she considers it to target women – even if it is otherwise identical to another game on the market. This succeeds to show just how deep these subtle cues are learned and direct our perceptions. In Noora's opinion women's games are more about playing around, and have less objectives and strategy elements thus matching the medium of mobile games better.

> *Sini: I think it'd be great if the gaming world understood women better. It'd be nice if you could read from women's magazines, for example, about a mobile game or how some lady does something like this. Because I do get irritated by those "how to wash your hair" or "you should use this mascara." There could be other articles in the leisure sections than those "make your butt smaller" topics (laughs). Maybe something that people really do in their free time. I don't know, maybe they also kinda market a dream that this is what you always should do. It'd be nice to sometimes have some realism too.*

Sini's narrative again summarizes well how mobile gaming is not shown very much in female-targeted media and thus the wrong associations, and preconceptions, remain linked to the activity. This ends up in mixed feelings about the gaming experience, and creates a need to control the consumption and how it shows to other people. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that these female players also reinforce the divide themselves with their own actions and narratives but that is often normal when there is an understanding of appropriate consumption culture. Because these unfavorable patterns of behavior and associations are present, and can potentially harm the player's image, the participants were identified to control their consumption and how it is seen in social situations. Next some of these control mechanisms are identified and a closer look is taken on how they are used in both action and discourse.

6.3 Control mechanisms

As there are different positive and negative patterns of play associated with mobile gaming, a situation is born where the player has to evaluate whether to start or continue playing mobile games is worth it. The list of identified control mechanisms is not exhaustive and there are very likely other ways of controlling one's gaming as well. In other words, they have to evaluate the positives and negatives, and whether they can control the negative associations that might come with the consumption but essentially it is a question of whether the positive outcomes are worth the potential negative outcomes. As we can learn from practice for many people the eventual conclusion to this question is yes, playing mobile games is worth it as they convey a variety of positive feelings and other effects. Still, as discussed earlier there are many unfavorable effects that can potentially turn the overall activity into an unpleasant experience. Through the interviews it was discovered that when the players engage in the activity of playing mobile games they either believe that the negative patterns of play do not affect them or that they can stay away them by controlling their consumption. Thus, several conscious and subconscious control mechanisms were identified.

ACTION	DISCOURSE
Self-Regulation	Demythologizing
Covering	Privacy

Table 3 Control mechanisms

These control mechanisms were used to manage both the gaming experience itself as well as how it is seen in social settings. Pointing back to the framework of controlled consumption introduced earlier, the participants believed to effectively stay away of the border of negative effects by utilizing these control mechanisms. Failure of control would results in straying over the accepted level of consumption. At this point it is good to notice that the boundaries of accepted consumption varied between players and sometimes negative patterns of play were seen as temporarily acceptable if the player felt a level of control was maintained.

The control mechanisms used by the participants can be divided into two groups: mechanisms used **in action** and mechanisms used **in discourse**. These two groups display the different control mechanisms identified in the conducted interviews. As with the patterns of play, this list is not exhaustive and depicts the behavior extracted from the collected narratives. Each player uses a different set of control mechanisms to regulate their own consumption habits. Notably, the biggest difference between these two groups of mechanisms is that whereas the control mechanisms based in actions were conscious and planned actions to manage consumption, the control mechanisms in discourse seemed to be largely unconscious. This could be because the embedded rules of consumption are so clear for the participants that they have become automated, or part of the consumption culture.

Pointing back to the previous investigation of positive and negative patterns of play, the control mechanisms used in discourse can be clearly seen in the quotes from the interviews. Both the players' word choices as well as the recurring themes in their narratives emphasize the distinction from what could be considered more involved relationship to mobile gaming. One prevalent feature of the collective narratives is the emphasis of the "*easy*", "*quick*", and low-commitment nature of the activity. While this is definitely true it is also an effective tool to communicate the distinction from the negative preconceptions of gaming inherited from the video game culture. Throughout the interviews these factors were clearly pointed out in many narratives even if they did not consider the time-commitment directly. Similarly, the level of low-commitment is also communicated by understating their level of commitment with expressions such as "*brainlessly kill time*" or by saying that they "*fiddle around*" or "*mess around*" with their games. Many participants also expressed many times their preference to not plan their in-game decisions just to describe a moment later how they enjoy the strategizing their moves ahead. Finally, the players tended to underline the relaxing effects of mobile gaming a lot and justify their consumption by focusing on situations where other more acceptable important activities are not available. Again, it is surely true that these are very significant factors in mobile games consumption but they are also an effective way of conveying the previously mentioned distinction between means of gaming.

Another natural way to verbally control one's association to mobile games is also simply not talking about it. The interviewed players had all made the remark that mobile games are not a usual topic in media or between people. Sini's narrative earlier pointed out that female targeted media might mainly evade the topic because it is not considered

something that suits the list of desired female qualities. On the contrary, Noora, Stella, and Siiri do not feel that the issue lies in feeling ashamed of playing. The issue seems to lie more in that games are not an established topic of conversation and the reason stay away from raising the topic is the uncertainty of its success or suitability in the situation. The only situations mentioned in the interviews where talking about games felt natural were when games were considered in the context of recent news or one's work. In addition to these, a common impression was also that not a lot of female's play mobile games and "coming clear" could cause others to think unfavorably of them. By not talking about mobile games the players can keep their playing a private thing and do not need to use energy to think about the social suitability of the topic when in company. Ultimately, Rosa's story on the topic sums up well the complexity of the issue.

> *Rosa: I remember when games started to come to Facebook. Many played them but nobody ever talked about them because it was somehow embarrassing to play. Maybe there's still a bit of a "oh, you play games?" even though you actually see how many friends are e.g. playing Candy Crush. There's ton of them if you look at the player records. And I know some friends who play games without linking them to Facebook because they don't want people to see that they play. I think it's interesting. Is it embarrassing? At least I don't have enough energy to care if someone sees that I'm playing something. But for some people it's a thing.*

Whereas the previous control mechanisms are used in verbal communication, action related mechanisms are concrete doings used to direct one's playing. As the participants are aware of the negative play patterns and unfavorable associations that might affect them, most of them use different mechanisms to keep their gaming in moderate limits or not aware to other people. The limit of moderation is set by each player according to their own standards.

Related to the previous verbal means of justifying their gaming by associating it with relevant outcomes or appropriate situations, the participants regulated their play time by trying to see it as a reward for working on responsibilities like work or studies, or other useful tasks. The following narrative is a good presentation of this behavior:

> *Rosa: When I have that kind of a situation where I give myself permission to play because I've earner it, I really enjoy it. You could always think that "I*

could be jogging or something…", but who cares. I can also enjoy playing when I don't have any compelling need to do something else.

As we can see from Rosa's story, she feels playing a game is in place when she has "*earned it*" by doing something else she finds important. It is almost like the useful behavior negates the recreational activity. Yet, she points out that she can enjoy playing games otherwise as well if she does not have a need to do anything else. Interestingly, as we can see, the familiar theme of "as long as there is nothing else to do" is present in the discourse again. Another way of pacing one's gaming time was to use the lengthy in-game life or process mechanisms, which main purpose supposedly is to cut players' game flow and encourage them to spend money to speed up the waiting time.

Finally, the last identified control mechanism deals with the previously identified problem of other people's reaction in social settings. As the participants get into the gaming experience and start adopting the in-game objectives, they might find themselves absorbed in the action and see it even affecting their lives outside the game. Due to previous bad comments, perception of the rules of a public place, and uncertainty of how people in a social setting might react to their playing, Sini and Noora felt a need to control their behavior in surprising ways.

Sini: I had to stop playing in buses (laughs). Firstly, always when I'm playing in the bus I try to take a seat where nobody sees me playing because I don't want to look like a gamer. One time I had been stuck on a level many weeks and I thought: "Goddamit I'm going to clear this!", so I played and played. I happened to be on a bus when I cleared the level and shouted "YES!" accidentally out loud on the full bus. Only then I realized that "oh right, there's other people too" (laughs) and put the phone away. It itched so badly in my pocket and I ran home so I could start playing the next level.

Noora: I think there was one moment when I realized that this is totally crazy. It was once again a situation where there was a boat and I had to fill every crate so I can buy cats. Well, I was out with my friends in a bar. At one point around midnight I realized that "Shit, the boat! I have to go!" So I said: Hey, I'm going to the bathroom. Somehow at that point I thought that maybe it's going too far when you leave your friends at the table in a bar and go play secretly in the toilet. Afterwards I was feeling great even though it felt like I

> *can't believe how much of an idiot I am for doing this for something like that. But still, I felt great. Kinda conflicting thoughts.*

Firstly, it is interesting how Sini considers playing in public. She is so concerned about the opinions of others that she does even feel uncomfortable playing in the direct line of site of total strangers in the bus. She also has a strong view on what is socially allowed in a public place and felt a sense of inappropriateness for reacting to an in-game event in a public setting. Ashamed of her reaction but so eager to continue playing she runs home in order to get her phone out. For Noora, her determination to meet her in-game goals is so strong that she cannot bear the idea of ruining an important plan. Because she cannot risk being looked down upon because of her situation inappropriate activity, she ends up hiding her consumption by doing it in secret. This sounds like an extreme example and was not displayed by any other of the participants. However, it is an effective way to cope with a situation that might otherwise have an unfavorable effect on her image. Resorting to extreme measures, she is able to both get the positive game experience and maintain the positive social atmosphere with her friends. As mentioned earlier, every player sets their own boundaries for accepted playing behavior. Previously, Aino's boundaries were identified to lie in social settings and she does not pay attention to her mobile games while out with her friends. For Sini and Noora, however, the situation is different and despite of feeling a little shame in their decisions they considered the overall outcome positive. This is a good presentation of how sometimes the negative patterns of play can be considered positive and the line of control is adapted.

Finally, the act of playing mobile games can already be a control mechanisms in itself. As mentioned earlier the players tended to emphasize the low-commitment factors of mobile games. Especially if a player has previous experience from video games, they might have identified qualities in themselves that predispose themselves for negative patterns of play. Thus, choosing to play mobile games can be a way to prevent one from falling to her own weakness. Both Aino and Sini, who still play video games from time to time, were familiar with this.

> *Aino: It's [mobile games] maybe a question of time. You feel there's so many other things to do that, knowing myself, if I started to play [video games] that it would take a chunk of time. That's why I have aimed at this kind of fast-paced, kinda easier games.*

As we are examining these seven different kinds of players, we can see that they each have a different relationship to mobile games and engage in the activity with different levels of commitment. This level is not fixed but adapts together with positive and negative patterns of play in players' changing environment. In order to find balance between the favorable outcomes and potential disadvantages, different control mechanisms are used to cope in varying situations. If control mechanisms fail, the players face the possibility of developing negative behavior or being associated with unwanted qualities.

6.4 Summary

The research examined the consumption culture of video games among young female adults and identified a consumption structure with three different main elements: positive patterns of play, negative patterns of play, and control mechanisms. These three sets of actions driven by varying factors describe the way these players are engaging in the activity of playing mobile games. Players utilize these elements in different ways constructing their own favored practices and understanding of appropriate consumption limits. The boundary between positive and negative patterns of play are not fixed and individual patterns of behavior can move across the control line.

The study on hand identified that the interviewed players have several different reasons to play mobile games. The initial perception of the motivation to play is that playing mobile games are consumed in order to take a break from reality and to pass time in situations where other means of entertainment are not available. Mobile games were seen as quick and easy, low-commitment activity in the midst of their everyday lives and described with by expressions such as "*brainless*" and "*little something to do*". On a closer look, however, several underlying reasons to play were identified under two groups: objective based and feeling based reasons. Often the participants reported to get enjoyment from achieving certain points in the game, or objectives, that they deemed desirable such as reaching targets or improving their skills in the game. The objective based reasons created sometimes such a strong determination that the players were ready to bend their sense of controlled or accepted consumption to meet these targets. Their playing could also pursue certain feelings during the game like a sense of freedom that manifested itself as a permission to play games as they pleased. Falling in between the two groups, sociality divided the players the most against what could be expected from previous literature. Surprisingly many

participants did not feel a need for social elements or community in their play, and instead valued to maintain privacy in their mobile gaming.

In addition to positive patterns of play, the players' were found out to hold a variety of negative associations and behavior. These negative factors were largely shared with the participants and their effects on social perceptions were clear to them. Due to mobile games young age many of the negative associations are ultimately derived from negative qualities associated with video game culture. These effects on the player were identified to either affect their behavior or image. Behavior related issues affected the way players played mobile games and caused unwanted qualities such as unsocial, or passive behavior. The image affecting issues were generally deemed worse by the players due to their impact on social qualities. Big part of image related issues deals with bad connotations of "gaming" and cultural constructs of desirable feminine qualities. Even though the participants did not feel ashamed of their gaming, a general understanding seemed to favor keeping the behavior rather private matter in order to avoid socially unclear situations.

In order to balance the positive possibilities and potentially negative associations of mobile gaming the players used varying control mechanisms in their everyday lives that were adapted according to each existing situation. By utilizing these control mechanisms, the participants were able to both manage their play time and how their playing was shown to other people. Essentially this was done either through discourse or actions. Discourse mechanisms were mostly focused on how mobile games were talked about, often emphasizing their low-commitment and relaxing nature to justify their consumption, and to reduce unfavorable connotations. The action based mechanisms used most often deal with ways to control one's playtime, limiting playing for example by concerning it as a reward after useful activities or playing mobile games in situations where it did not interfere with activities evaluated more important or appropriate. In extreme cases some participants saw necessary to hide their consumption in social situations by covering it with other activities.
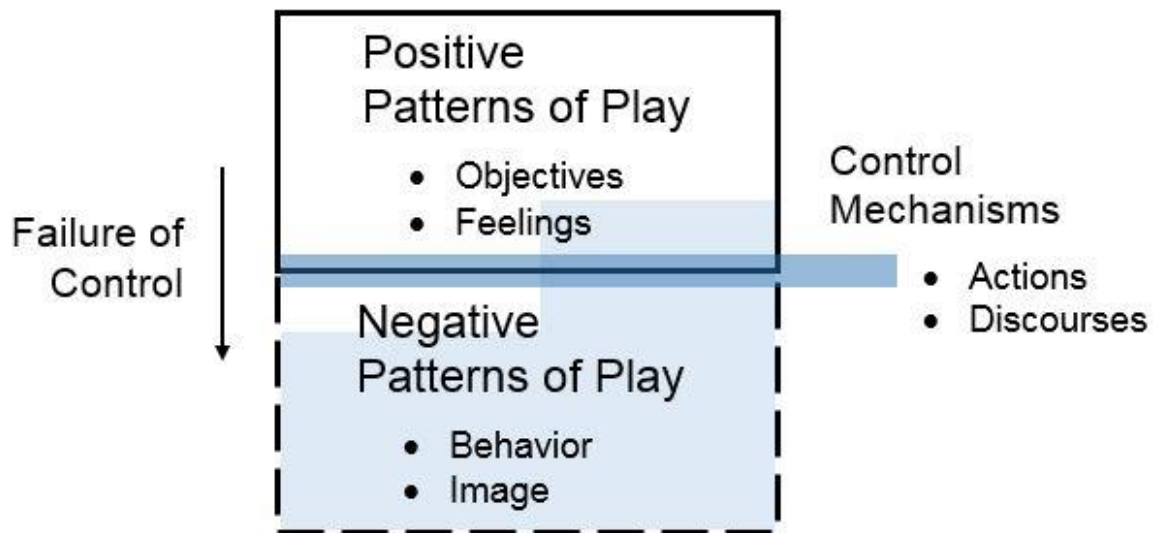
Figure 2 Updated framework of female mobile games consumption

The constructed chart combines the framework introduced in the beginning of the chapter and adds in the group specific subcategories to better illustrate the different factors in the process of consuming mobile games. It also highlights how the different elements relate to and interact with each other underlining the fragmented, plural, and fluid nature of mobile game consumption practices.

7 Discussion

In this section the key findings of the study will be discussed further in relation to previous research. The goal of the study was to understand what different experiences, meanings, and actions are linked to mobile games consumption of young adult females through investigating the prevailing consumption culture. The study on hand compiled three main groups under which the different identified consumption patterns and meanings were categorized: positive patterns of play, negative patterns of play, and control mechanisms. While mobile games have not been studied a lot in previous research, as expected, many of the collected findings followed previous studies conducted on other video game platforms. Despite of this, many differences were also discovered in comparison with earlier research findings. The following will combine these consistencies and differences in more detail, and place them inside the broader discussion of gender and video games research.

Right from the start it is evident that the findings gathered in the current study are well in line with the findings of Royse et al. (2007) on the relationship between female levels of play and their gendered self. While the mobile gamers interviewed in the current study mostly fall under the group of moderate gamers, they interestingly shared certain views with the non-gamers of Royse et al.'s study. This consistency between two studies builds the basis of this discussion and helps to examine the collected information in regards to different levels of female play and sense of gendered self.

The current study identified that the initial reason for playing mobile games is to pass time, to relax, and to have fun. This is in unison with Royse et al.'s findings which found that moderate gamers play to escape or distract themselves from everyday life. Upon closer examination, both studies identified that players are driven by mental challenge and skill based accomplishments inside games. Holbrook (1994) pointed out that this performatory aspect is typical of play, and an emphasis on succeeding often is realized as need for competence (White, 1959), mastery over the environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), or overcoming obstacles "for the sheer fun of it" (Pepper, 1958). Royse et al. point out that moderate gamers tend to choose game genres that are less violent, and provide more opportunities to succeed thus explaining the popularity of such genres as RPGs, puzzles, and problem-solving games, as identified by previous studies and observed in the study on hand. It is significant to also point out that mobile platform has proven to suit these types of games extremely well, providing a vast variety of games in the mentioned genres.

Interestingly, both the study on hand and Royse et al. (2007) identified control as a salient factor in the observed playing experiences but use it to refer to different concepts in female game consumption. Royse et al. define control as a need to control game elements, for example in the form of being able to choose their character or fully control the game environment, in order to ensure a pleasurable gaming experience. In the current study, similar need was identified under the thematic factors of *process thinking* and *freedom*. However, the study on hand connects the factor of "control" mainly to the mechanisms participants used to mitigate or avoid negative patterns of play. In turn, Royse et al. describe this behavior as players negotiating gaming or, in other words, discoursing gaming in a certain way as to position it in relation to their lives and gendered self.

Royse et al.'s (2007) findings on moderate gamers seem to reflect very closely the findings gathered in the current study. While the interviewed participants were open to discuss their mobile gaming habits and claimed to feel indifferent about other people's perceptions of their gaming, they simultaneously expressed reasons or ways to limit their playing especially in public. It is clear in both studies that the observed negotiation, or controlling, is caused by the prevalent genderization of gaming in general, which has been discussed numerous times in previous studies (e.g. Bryce & Rutter, 2003). Interestingly, the two studies agree in that moderate gamers consider *image issues* more significant where as non-gamers (like Kaisa in the current study) are more concerned about the *behavior issues*. This would indicate that once players believe that games can be played in moderation they are more open to engage in the activity but are then concerned about the negative associations placed on the activity's account.

Jenson and de Castell (2007) have criticized that until games studies research is able to find something surprising they doubt that further research accomplishes little beyond re-instating and further legitimating inequality of access, condition, and opportunity. They further claim that often enough just by writing about masculinities and femininities, researchers reinforce and solidify the very stereotypes they are pushing against. The study on hand respects these worries of research stagnating but argues that the sheer recognition of existing genderization does not have to reinforce it. Quite the contrary, it can help to identify, acknowledge, and finally eliminate it. Mobile games have clearly shaken the historical conditions of video gaming and provide a way to bring about a change.

First of all, the reported growing number of female mobile game players has eliminated the need for locating the "invisible girl gamer" and thus urges to question some

of Bryce and Rutter's (2003) criticism. Furthermore, the nature and characteristics of mobile platforms argue firmly against Jenson and de Castell's (2010) criticism of research re-instating female inequality in access, condition, and opportunity. As summarized by Siiri's and other participants' stories (see p. 43), they agree that the adoption of mobile games has come naturally to them as games are readily available in mobile phones, which are always carried along. Stella even suggests that playing mobile games has become a "must" as they have grown in popularity. Essentially, mobile phones are a personal, portable (Mahatanankoon et al., 2005), and a hybrid medium (Wei, 2008) available, mostly, for anyone owning a mobile phone. Having the traditionally limiting obstacles of gendered content and spaces eliminated, the remaining problem of gendered activities can be identified more clearly and measures taken to facilitate change. Finally, it is fair enough to point out that the criticism cited in this study is over 5-10 years old (Bryce & Rutter, 2003; Jenson & de Castell, 2010) but they remain to be some of the most voiced out criticism for change under gender and video games research. It is important to recognize that the same genderization of video games prevails to exist and affects players' gaming habits.

Considering the specific findings of this study, the identified patterns of play provide a better platform for researchers and industry professionals to understand what factors effect mobile gaming experience and the overall consumer culture. While many of the findings repeat same themes as previous research, such as female players preferring to play games with their own pace (Sherry et al., 2006) and especially enjoying certain game genres (Gorriz & Medina, 2000; Sherry et al., 2006), the variety of responses to the recurring themes proves that female players cannot be considered as a homogeneous group of players. For example, while majority of the players commenting on competitive elements in mobile games were in line with Jenson and de Castell's (2007) concept of "benevolent competition", Stella expressed a strong preference towards competing and being better than her friends. Royse et al. (2007) reported similar findings but inside the group of "power gamers", or players who had a high level of activity and integration. More interestingly, while previous research has identified that female players prefer social interaction in games (e.g. Miller et al., 1996; Rubin et al., 1997), the significance of social factors in mobile games produced many different stories in the participants varying from altruistic to indifferent. These findings further demonstrate the diversity of the female player base and the need for gender or temperament based research instead of sex based, like suggested by Jenson and de Castell (2010).

All in all, it seems that while mobile games have opened up the circumstances of play and overturned many difficulties of adopting gaming as a leisure activity, it still carries the inherited burden of video game's gendered image. This finding is in line with several remarks in previous research that playing or identifying as a gamer is not socially rewarding because its male dominant image (Griffiths, 1997). As observed in the presented discourses, even active mobile game players are affected by these factors and, in order to control their social image, they actively engage in different control mechanisms to mitigate negative associations with oneself, especially in social situations. Knowing this effect, it is interesting to speculate whether the stories collected in one-on-one interviews with a male researcher were affected by this.

Yet, as also observed by Royse et al. (2007) in moderate gamers, the participants actively engaged in playing mobile games and enjoyed them despite of actively negotiating their relationship. The players consistently listed their motivation to play mobile games to be based on such factors as quickness, easiness, and low-commitment. As discussed earlier, these are used as control mechanisms mainly in discourse to emphasize the low involvement in the activity. Yet, at the same time most of the participants told about situations where they "get hooked" or "just let go" and "play however long it takes to pass the level", effectively taking part in the very undesirable behavior they try to avoid. While Royse et al. call similar paradoxical behavior an "uneasy truce", the study on hand sees it as another way of feeling a sense of control. By using the identified control mechanisms, the players feel safe to engage in the consumption behavior they otherwise hold negative presumptions for. It is suggested that the players have unconsciously set themselves outside the wide concept of video games while still engaging in playing mobile games. The suggested idea is illustrated with a framework that borrows from Belk and Costa's (1998) concept of consumption enclaves. Essentially, the framework proposes a situation where these mobile gamers have built themselves a safe consumption space by using active control mechanisms that conceptually isolate them outside the dominant consumption phenomenon while, in reality, they are still a part of it.
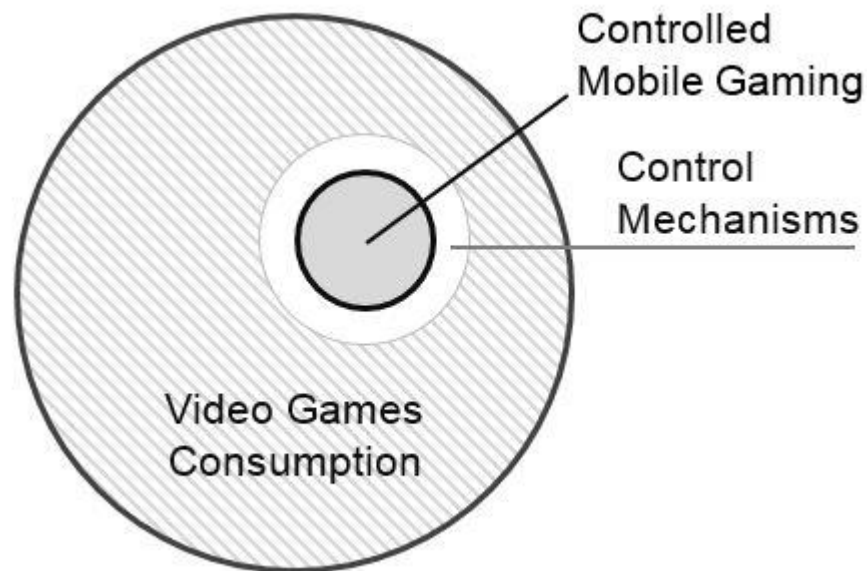
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Figure 3 Framework of consumption enclave in mobile games

In summary, the findings gathered from the current study suggest that mobile platforms have advanced the field of video games significantly in regards of female players. Many of the historical obstacles hindering the participation of female players are non-existent in the mobile platform, which has enabled the player base to grow. Still, even mobile gaming retains the negative associations connected to video games in general that directly affects the consumption culture. Consequently, the interviewed female players regard these associations undesirable and use control mechanisms to negotiate their relationship with the activity. While recognizing these genderizations in academic research has been criticized to further contribute to their existence, the current study suggests that it is in fact a necessary step to breaking them. Having identified the investigated sample of female players a very heterogeneous group, it is suggested that further research, as well as marketers and other interest groups, begin to acknowledge the diversity of video games audience and effectively integrate this thinking to their actions to promote development.

8 Conclusions, implications and limitations

The aim of this study was to investigate how young adult females play mobile games and what factors are linked to the consumption culture. By understanding these questions the study on hand hoped to gather detailed information about mobile games consumption experience, a topic that has been very little studied by previous research. Furthermore, this study attempted to contribute to the slowed down discussion of gender and video games by introducing the perspective of mobile games into it. Following previous criticism, the participants' experiences were respectively studied on their own and not pitched against an alleged standard. However, the conducted study focused solely on female experience in order to not introduce too many new variables at the same time.

Besides defining specific patterns of play inside the consumption culture of mobile games, the main contribution of the study was identifying how varied female patterns of play are and thus underlining the need to abandon conceptions of female players as a homogenous group. Research clearly shows that perception of gaming has changed over the years and, reflecting Royse et al. (2007), more and more female consumers have become at least moderate gamers. As mobile gaming and video gaming still suffer from negative image issues, the significance of marketers striving to overthrow these prevailing associations is great. Besides mobile gaming, a more positive image would benefit the whole video games industry. Observing the player and growth statistics of mobile gaming, it is clear that mobile gaming is the key to further diversifying video games demographics.

While aiming to investigate female mobile gaming in detail, the study on hand has some clear limitations to it. Firstly, due to the small sample size and qualitative nature of the study it is impossible to extrapolate the findings into a larger population. However, the findings give a good indication of the current situation and open possibilities for future research. Secondly, while the female-only sample of the study was justified it could be easily argued that similar findings could be found in a corresponding male sample. Notably, male players would probably not be as concerned about appearing too masculine because of playing games but the concern of appearing "nerdy" could similarly justify using the control mechanisms. Essentially, the findings on hand could effectively describe the general consumer culture of mobile games among 20 to 30-year-old young adults, who do not have wide background in video games and have started to play mobile games.

Regarding the above, the study on hand encourages future research on mobile games and video games in general with a larger sample size and more gender sensitive approach. With the varied findings from the current study, it is fair to argue that games industry would benefit more from trying to identify groups with similar playstyles or temperaments instead of continuing the traditional sex-based segmentation.

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