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The factors that drive non-gaming brands' marketers to underutilize video ads in casual games

Underutilization of casual gaming as an advertising medium

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ABSTRACT:

This research investigates the factors influencing non-gaming brands' marketers in Finland to underutilize video ads in casual games, aiming to unravel the perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making activities that guide their investment decisions. Despite the vast potential of casual gaming advertising, particularly for non-gaming brands, this medium remains underutilized in the Finnish market. The study commences with an exploration of casual games as a relatively new advertising medium, addressing misperceptions that are surrounding casual gaming as and advertising medium (CGAM). The central research question focuses on identifying the driving factors that drive non-gaming brands' marketers to underutilize video ads in casual games.

The theoretical framework incorporates Roger's Diffusion of Innovations theory, and explores the influences of experiences, social dynamics, individual characteristics, brand perception, target audience understanding, and Integrated Marketing Communications theory. The study adopts a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured interviews with five carefully selected participants from leading media agencies in Finland. Thematic analysis is applied to extract patterns and themes from the rich qualitative data, ensuring a systematic examination of participants' narratives.

Results highlight the nuanced landscape of marketers' decision-making, revealing the pivotal role of experiences, both direct and indirect, in shaping attitudes. Individual decision-makers' characteristics and social dynamics within agencies emerge as influential, emphasizing the collaborative nature of decision-making. The brand's positive perception, especially in enhancing brand image, acts as a driving force for investment. However, misperceptions about the target audience, lack of comprehensive data, and the perceived relative advantage present notable barriers.

In terms of piloting video ads in casual gaming, the study identifies the perception of positive influence and context overshadowing other factors, emphasizing the role of emotional responses and subjective perceptions in decision-making. In conclusion, the decision-making activities of non-gaming brands' marketers in piloting video ads in casual games represent a multi-faceted interplay of experiences, individual characteristics, social dynamics, brand perception, target audience understanding, data availability, and perceived relative advantage. These insights provide a comprehensive understanding to guide marketers and casual gaming ad sellers in navigating the evolving landscape of casual gaming as an advertising medium in the Finnish market.

KEYWORDS: casual gaming, casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM), casual gaming video ads, driving factors to pilot, non-gaming brands

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1 Introduction

This chapter acts as an introduction to the thesis, explaining the background and the scope of the study. Additionally, the primary research question and the research objectives are declared in this chapter. This chapter also includes a list of the key terms of the study. Finally, the structure of the thesis and the research methodology of this study is described.

1.1 Background of the study

Casual games are a relatively new medium for marketers to advertise their brands, especially for non-gaming brands. The potential of this medium has not yet been fully exploited by marketers, particularly non-gaming brand marketers in Finland, despite the massive casual gaming industry that offers substantial advertising opportunities (IAB, 2023). However, casual gaming advertising has been increasingly gaining traction among non-gaming brands. A significant indicator of this trend is that IAB Finland, a digital marketing educator for Finnish marketers, recently established a gaming working group to enhance the knowledge of Finnish marketers about gaming marketing opportunities, including casual gaming advertising (IAB Finland, 2022).

The rapidly evolving media landscape has undergone profound transformations in recent years, reshaping the dynamics of advertising. Traditional advertising channels like television, radio, magazines, and newspapers are witnessing diminishing influence over consumers. This shift, driven by advancements in technology and changing consumer behavior, has disrupted established communication patterns and compelled marketers to re-evaluate their conventional strategies (Kiley, 2005). These sweeping changes have notably diminished the efficacy of mass media (O'Leary, 2003; Bianco, 2004). To illustrate, consider that in 1960, Procter & Gamble (P&G) could reach 80% of American women with a single 30-second Tide commercial broadcast simultaneously on only three TV networks (Keller, 2009). In today's landscape, achieving a similar marketing impact

would require the same ad to run across a hundred channels. Despite the potential, casual gaming remains underutilized as an advertising medium, representing a missed opportunity to engage a vast and diverse audience directly (IAB Europe, 2023).

The paradigm of digital gaming has witnessed a significant shift in recent years, giving rise to distinct categories of games. Within this landscape, 'casual game' and 'mobile game' are pivotal terms but bear non-interchangeable meanings (Willson & Leaver, 2016; Kinnunen, Tuomela, & Mäyrä, 2022). A 'casual game' represents a genre of digital games known for their uncomplicated gameplay, easily comprehensible mechanics, and brief gaming sessions, making them accessible to a wide audience, including those who may not typically identify as gamers (Willson & Leaver, 2016; Kinnunen, Tuomela, & Mäyrä, 2022; Mobiilitutka, 2023). Conversely, a 'mobile game' denotes any game designed to be played on mobile devices, such as smartphones or tablets (Mobiilitutka, 2023). While numerous casual games find their platform on mobile devices, it's imperative to note that not all mobile games fall under the casual game genre and not all casual games are mobile games. Smartphone technology has developed substantially in recent years, leading to an explosion in the phenomenon of mobile and casual gaming.

The gaming environment, in general, and particularly in the past, has been perceived by marketers as a media platform targeting only young men (Willson & Leaver, 2016). This perception stemmed from the demographics of hardcore gamers (Williams, Yea, & Caplan, 2009). However, a study of Finnish gamers (Kinnunen et al., 2022) found that people in Finland play casual games across all demographics, and casual games overwhelmingly stand as the most used medium for playing digital games among the Finnish population. Studies clearly demonstrate that casual games are played by all ages and demographics (Kinnunen et al., 2022; AdColony & GWI, 2021; Williams et al., 2009). Thus, casual gaming as a marketing medium can be exploited by a variety of brands, not just those directly associated with gaming.

Kantar (2022) conducted research to determine the preferred ad platforms among global consumers and marketers, providing a comprehensive view of the current media landscape. The research highlights the trend that consumers usually engage first with

new media platforms, and marketers follow as the audiences grow. A prime example is TikTok, which quickly surged to the fourth place among the top preferred ad platforms for marketers within just a couple of years due to its high success with consumers. In terms of casual gaming marketing channel budgets, the research states a 39% increase in resource allocation in 2022 and expects a 52% increase in 2023, indicating a significant upsurge in the use of casual games as a marketing channel on a global scale.

In the dynamic landscape of the casual gaming environment, video ad formats have emerged as frontrunners, becoming the most common and widely used format in the Finnish casual gaming industry. Despite this, there exist significant misperceptions, unawareness, and a surprisingly low level of adoption among Finnish non-gaming brands. This study aims to shed light on the context of video ads in casual gaming, seeking to develop a better understanding of the reasons behind the underutilization of this potential advertising medium and the video ad format.

In the Finnish market, there is a stereotypical perception that new innovations are adopted rather slowly. For casual gaming ad sellers, comprehending how Finnish marketers perceive and form attitudes toward video ads in casual games is crucial. Additionally, understanding how different stages of decision-making activities influence the ultimate decision to invest in video ads in casual games is paramount. In the end, one objective of this study is to provide valuable recommendations for casual gaming ad sellers based on research findings, enabling them to enhance their sales approach and navigate the challenges posed by the current perceptions and adoption patterns in the Finnish market.

1.2 Research question and objectives of the study

The main research question is formed as follows:

Which are the factors that drive non-gaming brands' marketers to underutilize video ads in casual games?

The primary objective of this study is **to increase the understanding of factors influencing non-gaming brands' marketers' underutilization of video ads in casual games.** The primary objective is divided into three sub-objectives which are going to support the main objective of this thesis. The three sub-objectives are as follows:

1. To understand the perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making activities of non-gaming brands' marketers towards video ads in casual games.
2. To investigate why and how non-gaming brands' marketers' preferences to pilot video ads in casual games are formed.
3. To provide managerial implications for casual gaming video ad sellers based on the research findings.

1.3 Limitations of the study

A limitation of this study lies in its exclusive focus on non-gaming brands and media agencies within the geographical context of Finland. The deliberate exclusion of gaming brands and closely associated entities restricts the generalizability of findings beyond this specific context. This limitation arises from the intentional framing of the study, emphasizing the exploration of key factors influencing non-gaming brands' decisions to invest in casual gaming video ads. Consequently, the outcomes may not be directly applicable to gaming brands or extendable to regions outside the defined geographical

scope. This particular segment is chosen due to its perceived difficulty in attracting non-gaming brands, making the study more relevant for casual gaming ad sellers. The study targets leading media agencies as participants, given their role as crucial stakeholders of ad sellers and their close engagement with a diverse range of non-gaming advertisers and brands. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the primary influencing factors for non-gaming brands in general, rather than focusing on any specific industry.

The study centers on video ads in casual gaming, considering its significance for ad sellers and its status as the most recognized and fundamental ad format in casual gaming. While the investigation concentrates on video ads, many of the perceptions and attitudes explored can be extrapolated to the broader context of the casual gaming ad environment.

1.4 Definition of key terms

Casual gaming:
Informal, accessible video games designed for a broad audience, typically with simple gameplay and user-friendly mechanics.

Casual gamer:
Individuals who play games occasionally, without a deep commitment or extensive gaming experience.

Casual gaming advertising:
Marketing strategies that leverage casual gaming platforms to promote products or services, targeting a diverse audience.

CGAM (Casual Gaming as an Advertising Medium):

The utilization of casual gaming environments for advertising purposes, tapping into the engaged user base of casual gamers.

Non-gaming brand:
A non-gaming brand refers to a brand or company that is not directly associated with the production or marketing of video games or gaming-related products. Instead, it operates in a different industry or sector

1.5 Description of the research methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to delve into the factors influencing non-gaming brands' marketers in Finland to pilot video ads in casual games. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making activities. Semi-structured interviews are employed as the primary data collection method, providing a rich source of qualitative insights. The five participants, carefully selected from leading media agencies in Finland, are key stakeholders who engage closely with non-gaming advertisers. This selection aims to capture diverse perspectives within the non-gaming brand domain.

The interviews focus on various aspects, including participants' direct and indirect experiences with casual gaming, their attitudes towards video ads in this context, and the factors influencing their decision-making. Thematic analysis is utilized to extract patterns and themes from the qualitative data, ensuring a systematic examination of the participants' narratives.

The study concentrates specifically on video ads in casual gaming due to its prevalence and familiarity, yet the findings may offer insights applicable to the broader casual gaming advertising environment. Ethical considerations, including participant confidentiality and informed consent, are integral to the research process.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

The thesis allows for a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing non-gaming brands' marketers in piloting video ads in casual games. The introduction provides a contextual background, introduces the research question, outlines objectives, and establishes the study's scope. The literature review delves into key concepts such as casual gaming, casual gamers, and casual gaming advertising, as well as perceptions and attitudes in the context of casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM). The theoretical framework is crafted and illustrated based on existing theories influencing implementation and piloting of casual gaming video ads. The research methodology section details the study's design, data collection methods, and ensures the validity and reliability of the research. Findings and results are presented in the subsequent chapter. The discussion chapter thoroughly analyzes the discovered insights, particularly focusing on factors influencing marketers' decision to pilot casual gaming video ads. The conclusion chapter succinctly summarizes the key findings, provides managerial implications for casual gaming video ad sellers, and suggest future research themes.

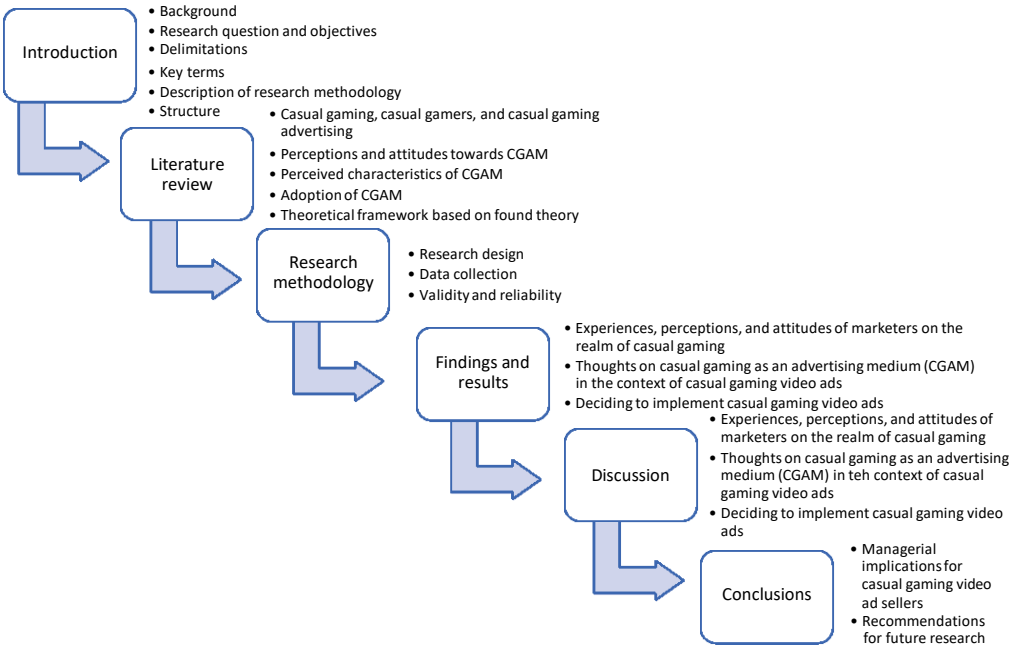

Figure 1. Structure of the thesis.

2 Literature review

2.1 Casual gaming, casual gamers, and casual gaming advertising

2.1.1 Casual gaming

Casual gaming is a form of digital gaming, which can be defined as all types of gaming mediated by technology. To better understand the casual gaming concept, a brief takeback into the evolution of digital gaming (hereafter *gaming)* landscape is needed. Yet probably the most drastic change in the gaming landscape is the increased number of new devices and platforms to play games. (Willson & Leaver, 2016; Kinnunen, Tuomela, & Mäyrä, 2022; Mobiilitutka, 2023.)

As the smartphone technology evolved, simultaneously evolved the predominant platform for casual gaming. Soon smartphones took over most of the population, meaning that games started to be accessible to play wherever people go (Willson & Leaver, 2016). Today, when one hops into a public transport in Finland, it is rarer to see people not engaging with their smartphones than to see them scrolling news, social media feed or playing casual games.

The challenge that has surrounded the casual gaming concept is how to precisely define a casual game. Most often the term mobile game is mixed-up with the term casual game creating a lack of clarity (Wilsson & Leaver, 2016; Juul, 2010). The constantly evolving gaming landscape emerges new terms and new characteristics, but today a casual game can be defined as a digital game that is targeted at or used by a mass audience of casual gamers (Winter, 2011; Juul, 2010). Casual games can be also called mobile games if they are playable on mobile (Winter, 2011). Most of the casual games are on mobile but not all. Mobile also indicates the potential engagement with the gamer's surrounding environment, which in all casual games is not relevant (Juul, 2010). For the purpose of

this study, it is chosen to use the term casual game, since the objectives include to help media sellers to enhance their sales approach on their casual gaming video ad offering (mostly casual gaming ads on mobile in-apps but also for example video ads in casual gaming portals on desktop).

Casual games do not have any specific genre or gameplay that they represent. For game producers the production costs of casual games are comparatively low (Winter, 2011). Winter (2011) states that typical characteristics of casual games, simple rules and a lack of required commitment, distinguish them usually from the more complex hardcore games. This means that a casual gamer does not need any special skills or long-term time commitment to play casual games. Gregory Trefry (2010) states that casual gameplay adapts to a player's life and schedule, depicting the large scale of how people can consume casual games. Ten minutes of casual gaming on a lunch break or in the public transport can fit for the lifestyle of a busy single mom, but for the ten-year-old child playing casual games for two hours in a row to the extent that the gaming device is taken off by the parents, is not enough. Willson and Leaver (2016) argued that all styles of consuming casual games are relevant to recognize, since casual games are also designed to be compelling enough for longer periods of time, even though in the emerging part of casual gaming the gaming style was often depicted to be short bursts of time (Juul, 2010), to distinguish them from hardcore games. The study of Lina Eklund (2010) studied Swedes in the casual gaming context and found that the spent time in hardcore games was just slightly above casual games, indicating that long-term time commitment is not a major indicator to distinct casual games and hardcore games.

Above mentioned characteristics represent most of the attributes of casual games, but still there are casual games that are difficult to categorize clearly. In addition, terms like the earlier mentioned, 'mobile game', but also 'social game', can significantly confuse the regular *Duolingo* or *Farmville* gamer, as these games can be referred to different gaming terms based on their game characteristics, yet both being casual games (Winter, 2011).

2.1.2 Casual gamers

Juul's (2010) seminal text was critical in terms of identifying casual gamers. He recognized a group of gamers that were from a wider spectrum of demographics and played games in short timeslots. MacCallum-Stewart (2014, 151) states that casual gaming is a gaming genre that has attracted more gamers than any other gaming genre to date. The study of the lives of casual gamers (2021) by AdColony and GWI highlighted also that there is not one "type" of casual gamer. Casual gamers range from youth to the elderly, female to male, and span all education levels and a wide range of incomes (AdColony & GWI, 2021). Moreover, Kinnunen and the others (2022) found in their latest study, that Finnish people play casual games by far the most compared to the other types of gaming. Moreover, Finnish people play actively casual games in all demographics, and the most significant increase in gaming was found in above 40-year-olds compared to their previous study (Kinnunen, Taskinen & Mäyrä, 2020) of Finnish population. Even though casual gamers can be recognized everywhere, and in every demography, it often surprises people that casual gaming is the largest type of gaming today. Probably one of the reasons is that often casual gamers do not consider themselves as casual gamers, or gamers at all (Trefry, 2010), which illustrates the obscurity and the lack of acknowledgement of the term 'casual gamer', and its different characteristics compared to the term 'hardcore gamer', which is often associated with the term 'gamer'. Still, dividing gamers into casual gamers and hardcore gamers is the base of understanding different types of gamers (Juul, 2010). These observations point out that casual gamers should be considered differently than the more commonly known hardcore gamers and the term 'casual gamer' should be spread more aggressively to get people aware of its distinction.

The gaming industry portrays often casual gamers as female (Kuittinen et al. 2007). 'Casual' is usually used to describe the playing style, with less time and dedication, that is associated to females by the gaming community and industry (Kuittinen et al., 2007;

Juul, 2010). However, this very simplified classification to male and female playing styles is argued to be too polarizing classification as both genres are sizeable in both casual gamers and hardcore gamers (Eklund, 2010). In the mainstream gaming culture females are excluded, though females are remarkable part of the gaming demography, particularly in casual gaming. As a result, the image of female casual gamers and hardcore male gamers are formed (Royse et al. 2007; Vanderhoef 2013).

2.1.3 Casual gaming advertising

Advertising within the casual gaming context is seen as a substantial opportunity for brands to reach wide range of demographics via multiple different ad types. The absence of user-generated content, hence positive brand-safe environment, and the high engagement between casual game ads and the gamer, are seen to be the major attributes of casual game ads generating to high-quality KPIs (Smartclip, 2023).

IAB has described most of the casual game ad types as 'around the game', meaning ads that are available for brands during the casual gaming, but not within the gameplay itself (Smartclip, 2023). Several ad formats are available and ready for brands to exploit. First common group of casual gaming ad formats are banner ads. During gameplay, these ads are displayed as banners positioned at the top, bottom, or sides of the screen, occupying only a small portion of the screen, thereby avoiding any interruption or interference with the actual gameplay (Smartclip, 2023).

The second ad format group, interstitial ads, are full-screen ads that are displayed between natural breaks in the gaming, such as breaks between levels (Smartclip, 2023). Interstitials' goal is to get the full attention of the gamer for few seconds after which they are skippable (IAB, 2023). Third significant ad format group is the intrinsic in-game ads, which are ads that are seamlessly integrated in the actual gameplay (IAB, 2023). They are commonly known as native in-game or in-play ads. These ads become a natural part of the gaming experience and are not disruptive in any way.

All type of sponsored content is significant ad format group in casual gaming. It includes such as advergames, games that are tailored and created to showcase a particular brand in a distinctive manner, brand themed in-game levels or events, branded skins for gamers to change the appearance of their in-game character, branded worlds and hard coded brand ads. (IAB, 2023.)

Then there is the category of instream video ads. Instream video ads can be displayed in the same way how interstitials between natural breaks of gameplay. The most intriguing instream video ad format is the rewarded video ad. This video ad format does not interrupt, and provides an actual reward for the gamer in exchange of watching the ad, in example an extra life, points, currency etc. Based on studies (Kantar, 2019; Knezovic, 2023; Facebook Audience Network, 2021) rewarded video is the least disruptive out of all ad formats. From the Finnish market a great example of the attitudes of gamers towards rewarded videos is, when Rovio, a Finnish video game developer best known from the Angry Birds franchise, took off rewarded video ad placements from their games for a while, just to get bombarded by gamers complaining the absence of rewarded video ads as they already experienced them as part of the gameplay. From the perspective of this study, rewarded video ads in casual games are taken into focus as it is the most common and leading ad format in the Finnish casual gaming market.

Casual gaming advertising is surrounded by different perceptions and attitudes. Compared to many other media channels, it is argued that casual gaming advertising landscape involves more misperceptions among marketeers (Smartclip, 2023; IAB, 2023), which can be due to the earlier mentioned unclarity in the gaming terminology and associations, or unawareness of the rather new medium and landscape. Hence, perceptions and attitudes of marketeers towards casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM) is needed to investigate further. This helps to understand factors that influence marketing investment decision-making on CGAM, focusing on casual gaming video ads

2.2 Perceptions and attitudes towards CGAM

2.2.1 Perception

Perceptions and attitudes towards casual gaming media landscape clearly form the ultimate motivation to either invest in casual gaming video ads or not. To understand the factors driving non-gaming brands' marketers' motivations to invest in casual gaming video ads, it is necessary to conceptualize the term *perception* and *attitude,* and deepen into factors that influence peoples' perceptions and attitudes.

Perception represents the process of transforming sensory input into an understanding of how the world works (Kenyon & Sen, 2015). According to Sethna and Blythe (2019) perception is commonly understood somehow different from the truth, although this is not the case. They state that perceptions may differ between individuals, yet for every person the own perception is the whole truth. In this regard each persons' perception about casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM) ultimately forms the whole truth about its effectiveness as an advertising environment. Individual's perception is formed from several elements such as subjectivity, categorization, selectivity, expectations, and law of primacy (Sethna & Blythe, 2019).

Subjectivity of the perception is how the person judges everything from a personal viewpoint through the lens of an individual's unique experiences, values, and emotions. (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). Sethna and Blythe (2019) continue that this subjectivity means that two people may perceive the same stimuli differently based on their distinct personal backgrounds. Subjective perception underscores the role of individuality in shaping how information is interpreted and understood. In the casual gaming context this subjectivity can be seen easily in how people can judge casual gaming from the viewpoint of their own gaming habits, that influences their whole picture of casual gaming itself.

In the same way *expectations* lead individuals to interpret later information in a specific way based on existing information and attitudes (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). Pre-existing beliefs, assumptions, and anticipations can create cognitive frameworks through which individuals filter and interpret new stimuli. These expectations can enhance or distort perception, illustrating the powerful impact of cognitive biases on the construction of reality (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). The first experiences and initial impressions influence a lot the interpretation of the later experiences, this being called the *law of primacy* (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). This cognitive principle highlights the significance of first impressions and the enduring effect they can have on shaping an individual's overall perception over time. In the casual gaming context this can be seen as marketers tend to perceive, in example, that casual gaming advertising is very expensive (IAB, 2023). The misperception stems from the initial impressions of first generation of gaming advertising, in which the media landscape was fragmented and difficult to buy.

Categorization is a cognitive process through which individuals organize and classify stimuli into meaningful groups (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). This mental shortcut helps in simplifying complex information by associating it with pre-existing categories. By categorizing stimuli, individuals can efficiently navigate their environment. However, categorization also introduces the potential for biases, as people may rely on stereotypes or oversimplified categories to make sense of information (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). In the context of gaming stereotypes, categorization plays a role in shaping perceptions about different types of gamers. For example, there is a prevailing stereotype that all gamers are young males, particularly teenagers. This categorization is based on historical representations in media and gaming culture that have often portrayed gamers in this demographic (Willson & Leaver, 2016). Hence, when people encounter someone who does not fit this stereotype, such as an older individual or a female gamer, there might be a cognitive dissonance because it challenges the established category (Kinnunen, Tuomela & Mäyrä, 2022). This can lead to biases or misperceptions, as individuals may struggle to reconcile the new information with their pre-existing category (Sethna & Blythe, 2019) of what a ‘typical’ gamer looks like.

Selectivity in perception refers to the tendency of individuals to focus on specific aspects of stimuli while ignoring others (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). This selectivity is influenced by factors such as personal interests, goals, and attentional resources. The limited capacity of attention necessitates selectivity, and what individuals choose to focus on shapes their overall perception of a situation or object. In the context of choosing marketing mediums and channels, selectivity is evident in the deliberate choice of certain environments over others, driven by the marketers' beliefs about which platforms offer the most effective reach. They may selectively attend to data points that align with their preconceived notions about the audience, such as demographics, while potentially overlooking the broader diversity within other marketing landscapes.

2.2.2 Attitude

Attitude can be defined as a person's learned tendency to respond to an object in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1994). An attitude is not instinctive, rather learned tendency towards a particular behaviour, referring to a relationship between a person and an object (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). In the context of this study, the person refers to a marketer (excluding marketers in the gaming industry) and the object refers to casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM). The relationship between the object and the person cannot be neutral (Sethna & Blythe, 2019), in other words, person's expressed attitude towards CGAM is either positive or negative, although the intensity of the attitude can vary. All in all, the formation of a certain attitude is based on the experience of the object, usually *direct experience*, which refers to first-hand encounters, involvement, or exposure that an individual has with a particular activity, situation, or object (Sethna & Blythe, 2019), for instance previous experience on CGAM.

However, without the previous direct experience, attitude is formed by other perceptions that assemble the attitude towards the object (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). The

problem in the formation of attitude towards CGAM is particularly the lack of previous direct experience of marketers; hence other factors' impact can be assumed to be emphasized in the context of CGAM. Substantial indicator of the lack of previous direct experience and underutilization of CGAM is that gaming places in the third place just slightly behind TV and social media, in terms of where people spend their time, yet marketers' marketing budget allocation encompasses only less than 5% of gaming advertising (IAB, 2023). Consequently, the size of the casual gaming advertising is even less, as the mentioned portion refers to the whole gaming advertising. Also in line, Zoe Soon (2023), the vice president of the IAB Experience Center, expresses that the success stories of gaming advertising buyers are not at all in line with the misperceptions of the industry at large. She adds that marketers are really missing a huge opportunity to reach and engage with consumers in the dynamic gaming environment.

Based on the above facts there is doubtfully a huge portion of marketers who have no previous direct experience from CGAM, especially this can be assumed to imply to the Finnish market, in which adoption of new things comes stereotypically behindhand. Lack of previous direct experience can be estimated to influence the formation of attitudes of Finnish marketers. However, *indirect experience* which is knowledge gained through second-hand sources such as all the communicated experiences of others, can be noticeable factor influencing the attitudes of Finnish marketers towards CGAM. While direct experience involves first-hand engagement with CGAM, indirect experience relies on information acquired from external channels.

It can be argued that many misperceptions about CGAM could stem from the synthetic nature of perception. Synthetic nature of perception is assembled from disparate components of perception deriving to an overall view (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). This kind of synthetic nature of perception can easily lead to prejudices and irrational beliefs, consequently deriving to negative attitudes towards the object (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). This event can be linked to the derivation of misperceptions of CGAM. In the context of marketers' perception of CGAM, the synthetic nature of perception becomes evident

through the interpretative processes applied to information about the platform. Marketers may encounter data on the popularity of casual gaming and its diverse audience. Their perception of this information is not a direct, objective reflection but is influenced by cognitive processes, prior experiences, and industry expectations. For instance, a marketer with a background in traditional advertising might construct a perception that casual gaming lacks the seriousness or engagement level of more conventional channels. Conversely, a marketer familiar with digital trends may interpret the same data as an opportunity for precise targeting and high engagement. These varying perceptions showcase how the synthetic nature of perception allows individuals to actively construct meanings from information, shaping their attitudes and decisions in the dynamic landscape of advertising (Sethna & Blythe, 2019).

Marketing communications provides additional information that influences the formation of the person's attitude (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). Thus, advertising and public relations play key roles as activities to form and change people's attitudes. Especially, if there is no direct experience, these activities' influence is greater and more emphasized (Lie, Xi, & Chintagunta, 2018; Juska, 2017). The absence of personal encounters makes individuals more reliant on external sources for information, where marketing communications act as influential guides. These activities, through various channels and messages, contribute significantly to shaping perceptions, preferences, and attitudes, playing a crucial role in the dynamic process of attitude formation and change.

Moreover, without the direct previous experience, also the role of social influences is more pronounced. The social impact theory reveals that the presence of others affects an individual's feelings, attitudes, and behaviors (Latane 1981). Burnkrant and Cousineau (1975) suggested two types of social influence: informational and normative social influence. Both types of social influence can have impact on people's attitudes and behaviours due to the real or imagined influence of others (Chu and Kim 2011; Kuan, Chong, & Chau, 2014).

The informational social influence refers to the influence of information and knowledge as evidence (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Kuan, et al., 2014). The influence of the informational social influence is based on the conformity that people feel as the result of following others' judgments and behavior (Kuan, et al., 2014). People consider others' behavior as a trustable source of information, hence tend to act similarly (Saleem & Ellahi, 2017). The role of informational social influence is emphasized when a person has limited knowledge, faces with time constraints, detects noticeable risk in the action, or purely does not want to decide on its own (Lee, Shi, Cheung, Lim, & Sia, 2011). Limited knowledge and risk in the action to invest in seems to be the most relevant in the CGAM context. Limited knowledge clearly arounds the whole gaming advertising, and particularly CGAM, based on the earlier mentioned facts, seem to be a term that confuses and lacks clarity among people and marketers. Doubtfully, risk in the action to invest concerns marketers as they lack the previous direct experience. In this matter, it can be argued that the influence of informational social influence is considered significant factor that can affect the comprehensive attitude of marketers towards CGAM.

The other type of social influence found by Burnkrant and Cousineau (1975) is the normative social influence. The normative social influence refers to the peoples' tendency to be influenced by group compliance by complying with the expectations of the others (Kwahk & Kim, 2016; Kuan, et al., 2014; Saleem & Ellahi, 2017). For people, normative social influence provides conformity that is driven by its outcomes such as being liked and approved by others (Kuan, et al., 2014). People tend to have positive emotions when they feel being accepted and liked, which evokes unplanned investments (Kuan, et al., 2014). In the CGAM context it can be presumed that normative social influence has its impact in the motivation to invest in, due to the nature of media agencies investment decision making, which stems heavily from in-house guidelines. Hence, it could be assumed that in-house guidelines of media agencies push their marketers to think and act in a certain way as they want to feel to do the 'right' advertising medium decisions that are in line with their organization's guidelines. This

claim is supported by the findings that indicate that the greatest level of normative social influence is normally found within primary reference groups such as family, friends, and co-workers (Cooley, 1909; Kwahk & Kim, 2016).

Certainly, the organizational structure, culture and in-house guidelines vary in different agencies and marketing teams, thus the level of informational and normative social influence differ. Furthermore, these two types of social influence cannot be pointed out to be purely existent and influential in the organizational level as people are affected by these social influences wherever they are engaging with people about gaming and CGAM. However, the most influential social environment, in which these social influences towards CGAM predominate, can be seen to be the work life environment of a marketer as the information and knowledge about CGAM most likely is absorbed from this environment.

A great example about the different organizational approach from the global media industry that concerns strongly CGAM and its adoption, is globally known media agency group Dentsu Group and its solution Dentsu Gaming, which is a globally integrated solution for Dentsu's clients to engage with gaming advertising, including CGAM (Dentsu, 2021). Dentsu's global CEO, Peter Huijboom, depicts Dentsu Gaming as follows: "Bringing together the exceptional talent and deep gaming expertise from across the group, this new global solution makes it easier for clients and partners to leverage the potential of gaming for business growth…". Moreover, Huijboom adds that the global solution ensures coherent sharing of insights, specialisms, and deep knowledge about gaming, inside the media group and for their clients.

Like Huijboom stated Dentsu provides insights, specialisms, and deep knowledge about gaming for their marketers. By providing information and knowledge, Dentsu's marketers become more aware of the real opportunities of CGAM and how to utilize it properly. Moreover, the tone, positive or negative, how Dentsu provides information about CGAM can lead to social influence, informational and normative. Ultimately, the

interactions between people influence individual's cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes (Cheung et al., 2009; Chu & Kim 2011).

2.3 Perceived characteristics of CGAM

2.3.1 Brand perspective

The common misperception about the casual gaming environment is that it is not brand safe, according to Smartclip (2023). *Brand safety* in its simplest refers to the measures used to ensure brand's reputation is not damaged when advertising (Lightfoot, 2022). Generally speaking, this means making sure that the brand's advertisement does not appear in places which are controversial to its brand image. *Brand image,* on the other hand, is part of *brand knowledge* that Keller (1993) divided into *brand awareness* and *brand image.* These terms ultimately form the concept of customer-based brand equity that Keller introduced in the same article. The fundamental premise of this concept is that the power of a brand lies in the minds of customers and the meaning that the brand has achieved in the broadest sense (Janiszewski & van Osselaer 2000). The brand equity can be approached by two different perspectives: company and consumer perspective (Lienkova, 2013). The concept of *brand equity* is core concept of marketing, thus significant aspect that marketeers think about when comparing and choosing different marketing platforms and mediums. To understand, which things marketeers consider from the point of view of brand equity when choosing marketing mediums, it is needed to take a deeper look into the brand equity factors and how marketeers interpret CGAM to fulfill their brand equity objectives. This why the brand equity's influence on the formation of attitude towards CGAM is needed to investigate further.
käy läpi eka brand equity ja sitten kytke se takasin brand safetyyn ja muuhun

One of the most known brand experts, David Aaker (1991), has defined the brand equity as follows: "A set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that

adds to or subtracts from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers." According to Yoo and the others (2001) brand equity means consumers' different responses between a focal brand and unbranded products when both have the same level of marketing stimuli and product attributes. Brand equity simply means the reactions of customers to the certain value offered by a brand (Lienkova, 2013). A modern-day branding author, Susan Gunelius, define the brand equity as follows: "The tangible and intangible value that a brand provides positively or negatively to an organization, its products, its services and its bottom-line derived from consumer knowledge, perceptions and experiences with the brand". In the definition of Gumelius the communications aspect is encompassed besides the product aspect, hence serving considerably the objective of this study. Moreover, the evolution of brand equity can be depicted as a consumers' learning process in which consumers' awareness of the brand translates to attitudes, that in turn influence attitudinal brand loyalty (Buil et al., 2013).

The way how a brand creates value is by providing value for the company through generating value for the customers (Lienkova, 2013). According to Hrebicek (2015), The President of European Brand Institute, the brand value across all industry segments is around 40% of the company's value, based on their research. This indicates a tremendous role for the brand in the comprehensive picture of company's success. One of the most known brand related quotes is the Steve Jobs' "People buy brands, not products", which entitles incredibly well the importance of brands in today's global communication society (Hrebicek, 2015). It is commonly understood that people do not create relationships with products, but with brands, and as a result people become loyal for brands. Consequently, more and more companies put the value of their brands on their balance sheets and the evaluation of brand value has become increasingly important. The creation and the management of a brand is inevitably key function of a successful company, hence one of the most important things marketeers cherish. For the purpose of this study, it will be focused more on the company perspective as it is more

relevant in order to understand the brand equity's influence on marketing medium choices.

Like mentioned earlier the concept of brand equity is formed from *brand knowledge* which is an assembling of *brand awareness* and *brand image* (Keller, 1993). Brand awareness is formed from the person's ability or inability to recall or recognize the brand, or whether the person knows the brand (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Hence, in the CGAM context marketeers must think about, how significantly brand awareness objectives such as market reach, which refers to the approximate number of potential customers to be reached by specific marketing ad campaign (Indeed, 2023a), can be achieved. Brand awareness of people substantially affects their perceptions and attitudes towards different brands (Lienkova, 2013), and therefore marketeers need to consider this aspect when choosing marketing channels and mediums. Jack Koch (2023), the senior vice president of IAB, speaks about the marketeers' misperception on gaming advertising not delivering on key funnel objectives, including brand awareness. Again, the multiple different ad format types today in casual gaming environment are the answer and provide high-quality solutions in every funnel stage, according to Koch (2023).

On the other hand, brand image refers according to Keller (1993, p.5) to "…the set of associations consumers hold in memory". Kapferer (1997) adds the role of stakeholders in his definition, which comprises the reflection of the brand personality and values in the eyes of consumers and stakeholders. Additionally, he stresses the significance of brand image in shaping consumers perceptions and attitudes. Subsequently, Fombrun and van Riel (2004) confer the relationship of brand image and corporate reputation, highlighting the role of brand image in building a strong corporate reputation. In this formation of corporate reputation is linked the brand safety aspect, in which marketeers are strongly concerned about in the context of digital ads, including CGAM (Smartclip, 2023).

Keller determines brand image as a multidimensional construct that is aggregation of several brand association factors. These factors encompass attributes, benefits, personality, values, and experiences. These collectively contribute to shaping consumers' understanding, perceptions, and attitudes towards a brand. They influence how consumers interpret and evaluate a brand's offerings, differentiate it from competitors, and form emotional connections with the brand. These associations can be formed through various brand-related stimuli, such as advertising, product experiences, or word-of-mouth. Effective brand management involves careful management of these factors to create a favorable and distinctive brand image. (Keller, 1993; 2009.)

When it comes to digital advertising and CGAM, the choice of ad format, placement, and environment plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' associations with the brand (Keller, 2009). Digital ads have the potential to create brand associations by delivering specific messages, visuals, and experiences to consumers (Keller, 2009). Keller (2016) expresses, that content and creative elements of digital ads can influence how consumers perceive the brand and what attributes or benefits they associate with it. Besides the content he stresses, the type of environment where the ads are presented play a significant role affecting the brand associations. Different ad environments can be in example social media platforms, websites, TV, radio, or casual games. Placing ads in a certain environment allow brands to align themselves with the interests, values, or contexts of that specific ad environment (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). For example, a brand that advertises on innovative and modern websites may create associations with innovativeness and modernity.

Briefly said, the form of the digital ads and the ad environment contribute to shaping consumers’ brand associations. Brands are able to affect consumers’ perceptions and brand associations by strategically selecting ad formats and ad environments that align with their values and desired brand associations. Due to its severe communications and marketing acts towards men in the past, the environment of gaming and casual gaming has still strong associations with hardcore gaming, which is heavily linked to young men

and their values, even though casual gaming environment attracts all demographics and therefore encompasses several different values (Willson & Leaver, 2016). This misperception about the brand associations conveyed from CGAM might be one of the key reasons why marketeers still do not consider CGAM as a relevant ad environment to invest in for their brands.

2.3.2 Audience perspective

Audience analysis is a theoretical marketing concept used by marketeers (Hicks, 2021), which usage or rather the lack of usage, is strongly linked to the same problem of misperception of casual gaming environment's associations with hardcore gamers and the perceived target audience that is possible to be reached from casual gaming environment. Audience analysis is a critical process in marketing and communication that involves the systematic collection and interpretation of information about a specific target audience or group of individuals (McQuail, 1997; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). The primary goal of audience analysis is to gain a deep understanding of the audience's characteristics, preferences, needs, attitudes, behaviors, and communication patterns (Hicks, 2021). By conducting audience analysis, marketeers can gather valuable insights about the target audience's needs, motivations, and attitudes, which can inform brand positioning, messaging, and communication strategies (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

An effective audience analysis also considers the mediums and platforms through which the audience prefers to receive information (McQuail, 1997). It helps in determining whether the audience is more receptive to traditional media, social media, email, gaming, or other communication mediums (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). This knowledge informs media planning and medium selection.

At an early point in the study of media audiences, it became apparent that media use was closely correlated with other social demographic characteristics (DeFleur, 1970). The more choices that became available, the more selective people were in their attention,

guided by differences of interest or need (Sears & Freedman, 1971). These innate tendencies were emphasized by media's attempts to appeal to various social groupings. As a result, the social profiles of various media's audiences display strong and consistent trends. Other media (or specific channels) have audiences with socially diverse demographics, whereas others can occasionally appear to have very homogeneous and picked composition. McQuail (1997) identifies two main forms of audience diversity, corresponding more or less to the heterogeneous and homogeneous distinction. He calls one *internal diversity* and the other *external diversity*.

When a medium draws in a socially diverse (and frequently sizable) audience and provides a wide variety of content to meet the many tastes, interests, and viewpoints of the available public, internal audience diversity is present. This internal diversity is present in the context of casual gaming environment, based on the earlier mentioned facts. Casual gaming environment appeals wide range of people, not just young men, and offers variation of content to meet many tastes.

The external diversity, in contrast, presupposes a channel or media with its own editorial line or specific selection of content created with a particular audience in mind, based on politics, religion, lifestyle, cultural choice, or some other factor. Although the audience for the media system as a whole will be diverse, the audience attracted is likely to be homogeneous according to the relevant dimension of content. Like mentioned, the mainstream gaming industry has strongly marketed the past generation of gaming to young men (Willson & Leaver, 2016), and therefore gaming could be seen to have an external audience, according to the definition of McQuail (1997), and his statement that there seems to be a high degree of agreement on what characterizes and differentiates the main media types. Hereby this perception of external audience diversity of gaming and casual gaming seems to be predominant also today, although casual gaming has significantly heterogeneous audience (Kinnunen, Tuomela & Mäyrä, 2022). Although marketeers would have done their brands audience analysis precisely and know exactly

who their target group is, they tend to not be aware of the fact that most often their target group is found also from the casual gaming environment.

The trend of over targeting target groups in the sphere of digital marketing (Fou, 2020) can also have its part in the reluctance of investing in CGAM or any other new advertising medium that evokes unclarity or misunderstood information about the users of the medium. McQuail (1997) also represented: “The dominant model of effect research or "planned communication" still calls for precise knowledge of who is targeted and reached by which channels and messages, as a condition for estimating effects and evaluating success”. This thinking model of precisely knowing who to target has been present in digital advertising for over the last ten years (Fou, 2020) and clearly affects perceptions and attitudes of marketeers towards advertising mediums.

2.3.3 Marketing communications strategy perspective

When marketeers think about different advertising mediums today, they have a wide range of different mediums to choose from. The immense increase of different mediums options has obligated marketeers to think more strategically which mediums they use. This shift has led to Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), which is a strategic and holistic approach to marketing communication that combines several aspects of promotion and communication to convey a coherent and consistent brand message to target audiences (Belch & Belch, 2018).

In brands’ IMC programs several factors and characteristics are considered when deciding which medium to utilize and integrate into brand’s IMC program. Firstly, marketeers want to know if the medium aligns with their target audience and if it offers a wide reach to their desired demographic (Keller, 2016). The *coverage* and reach of the target audience in choosing advertising mediums is associated with the previously discussed audience analysis and its importance. Since audience of casual gaming environment is often misunderstood, it was necessary to elaborate the audience topic

more profoundly for the purpose of this study, as understanding the audience demographics that engage with casual gaming is crucial. Audience coverage and reach is part of IMC program choice criteria, hence important factor to acknowledge also in this comprehensive context.

Keller (2016) introduces, in addition to *coverage,* six other characteristics of marketing communication options that form the choice criteria for the brand's IMC program: *cost, contribution, commonality, complementarity, cross-effects, and conformability.* These "Seven Cs", like Keller calls them, consider a wide range of communication program factors, such as how communication alternatives function independently as well as jointly and cooperatively to enhance communication impacts. These factors could be said to be substantial aspects that also casual gaming ad sellers should consider more profoundly, especially in Finland, in which marketing budgets tend to be from the lower end compared on other developed markets, and therefore, being fitted into brands' IMC programs is generally more challenging as the market budget tends to be allocated for the most used mediums such as Google and Meta. This challenge highlights the importance for casual gaming ad sellers in Finland, to understand different aspects and benefits of casual gaming ads from the point of view of IMC program choice criteria.

According to Keller (2016) *cost* of an advertising medium is key factor in evaluating the financial efficiency of the medium. Like it was stated earlier in this study, in the realm of casual gaming, marketeers often have a perception that advertising within games is considerably costly (IAB, 2023; Smartclip, 2023). This perception can be linked to the early stages of gaming advertising, characterized by a fragmented media landscape that posed challenges in efficient procurement, aligning with Keller's (2016) emphasis on cost considerations in IMC program planning.

Contribution represents the concrete results and effects on communication objectives (Keller, 2016). In this category falls the earlier discussed brand equity objectives such as brand awareness and brand recall objectives but also the brand safety aspect that has

concerned many marketeers about the gaming environment (Smartclip, 2023). Marketeers want to evaluate if the medium aligns with their brand values and the image they want to pursue (Belch & Belch, 2018). Moreover, advertising mediums effects on communication objectives, in example engagement goals, as well as effects on sales such as conversions and the return on investment (ROI) are parts of the Keller's contribution category that should been taken into account when creating the perfect IMC program. To measure the results of advertising mediums, enough data and analytics is needed for marketeers to measure the impact of their campaigns accurately (Belch & Belch, 2018). Marketeers look for mediums that provide comprehensive data on user behavior and campaign performance. Evidence about successful marketing campaigns with concrete results give reliable credibility for marketeers to fulfil their concerns about advertising medium's contribution (Belch & Belch, 2018; Keller, 2016).

Commonality, Complementarity and *Cross-effects* criteria encompass the combined effects of different advertising mediums (Keller, 2016). These are aspects that get marketeers to think about how elected advertising mediums overlap and reinforce each other and the desired communications objectives (Keller, 2016). Like mentioned, in Finland marketing budgets tend to be smaller compared to other developed markets. This naturally could be said to increase marketeers' emphasis especially on the evaluation and comparison of different advertising mediums compared to more developed markets, in which marketeers have bigger marketing budgets in their use, thus more opportunities to invest in. Particularly, choosing a new or not so used medium into the IMC program is usually affected by the marketing budget decrease (Belch & Belch, 2018).

Essentially, marketeers should be "media neutral" when creating the best IMC program and assess each communication channel's performance and efficiency (Keller, 2016). In the end, marketers simply care about accomplishing their communication goals and enhancing consumers' decision-making processes. Thus, according to Keller (2016) any communication method that can enable those objectives effectively and efficiently

should be considered. Mixing communication and advertising mediums is the process of selecting several communication options based on their various strengths and potential benefits on brand equity and sales.

Certainly, CGAM has unique advantages that can significantly enhance an IMC program, but if marketeers are not informed about these advantages, they may overlook or underestimate the potential of this medium. To mitigate the lack of awareness concerning the strengths of casual gaming in advertising, a multi-faceted approach is vital, which includes for example education, workshops, events, promotion, success stories, data sharing etc.

2.4 Adoption of CGAM

Based on the facts about underutilization and lack of awareness on CGAM (IAB,2023; Smartclip, 2023; Kantar, 2022) it is necessary to delve into the diffusion of innovation theory and view CGAM from the perspective of marketeers' adoption process, due to CGAM's obscurity. According to Gartner and Riis (2019) CGAM can be examined as an incremental innovation in the media and marketing industry, as it involves making gradual improvements to existing practices, products, or services, and in the case of advertising, embracing new platforms or channels like casual gaming. Hence, the popular diffusion of innovation theory by Rogers deepens understanding of the adoption process and can be applied in the context of CGAM.

Developed by E.M. Rogers in 1962, the diffusion of innovation theory explains, how an idea or product spreads throughout a particular population or social system over time (Rogers, 2003). People eventually adopt a new idea, behavior, or product as a part of a social system as a result of this dissemination. Adoption is the act of changing one's behavior from what it was previously in example using a new product or service or learning a new habit. In a social system, adopting a new concept, behavior, or product

does not occur all at once. Rather, it is a process in which certain people are more likely to accept the innovation than others. According to research (Rogers, 2003), those who adopt innovations sooner than those who acquire them later have different traits. Rogers identifies five established adopter categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Although it is simultaneously important to acknowledge the impact of different characteristics of the different adopter groups, is the five stages of innovation adoption process more substantial as a whole in understanding the adoption of CGAM.

The Diffusion of Innovations theory, proposed by Everett Rogers, classifies individuals into five adopter categories based on their responses to new innovations. Innovators, the first category, are characterized by their adventurous nature, high social status, and a propensity for risk-taking (Rogers, 2003). They play a crucial role in the innovation process by being the early adopters who embrace change and introduce new ideas to the market. Following them are the Early Adopters, who, while also early in adopting innovations, are more discreet and serve as opinion leaders within their social circles (Rogers, 2003). Their influence is significant in encouraging others to follow suit, building momentum for the innovation.

The Early Majority represents a larger segment of the population and adopts innovations more cautiously, observing the experiences of innovators and early adopters before deciding to adopt themselves (Rogers, 2003). This category is pivotal for the widespread acceptance of an innovation, bridging the gap between early adopters and the broader population. The Late Majority, similar to the early majority, adopts innovations after they have become more established and widely accepted (Rogers, 2003). Their more skeptical approach contributes to the saturation of the market, marking the innovation's acceptance by a broader range of users.

The last category is the Laggards, who are resistant to change, hold traditional values, and are the last to adopt innovations (Rogers, 2003). While slow to adopt, laggards play

a crucial role in the innovation's complete assimilation, signifying its widespread acceptance and the end of its lifecycle. Understanding these adopter categories is essential for marketers and innovators as it guides strategies for introducing and promoting new products or ideas, tailoring approaches to each category to enhance the diffusion of innovations across the population.

Awareness of the need for an innovation, choosing to adopt (or reject) the innovation, using the innovation initially to test it, and ongoing use are the processes by which a person adopts an innovation and wherefore dissemination is accomplished. Rogers introduced a five-stage model for the innovation adoption process, which stages are *knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation,* and *confirmation*. This adoption process of an innovation is influenced by five key factors, each of which is present in the five adopter categories to varying degrees. The five key elements are: *relative advantage*, *compatibility*, *complexity*, *triability*, and *observability*. (Rogers, 2003).

Relative advantage depicts the degree to which an innovation, program, or product is preferred to the one it replaces (Rogers, 2003). In the CGAM context it cannot be said that CGAM would completely replace some other advertising medium, although naturally if CGAM is implemented in the brand's IMC program it usually decreases some other advertising mediums' budget allocations. However, in order to have its share in marketing budget allocations, CGAM needs to be considered as an improvement to a certain extent and deliver relative advantage to brand's IMC program. Perceived advantage motivates individuals to embrace change and adopt the innovation (Rogers, 2003).

According to Rogers (2003), *compatibility* refers to how consistent the innovation is with the values, experiences, and needs of the potential adopters. He adds that an innovation that is compatible integrates effortlessly into the current framework of individuals' lives. In contrast, if a new innovation required a significant shift in behavior or preferences, it might face resistance due to a lack of compatibility (Rogers, 2003). In the context of

CGAM, one objection for the use of CGAM has been that it is difficult to buy (Smartclip, 2023) and therefore lacking compatibility. Nonetheless, today this is a misperception as casual gaming environment offers a wide range of different ad formats which are easily accessible for marketeers (Smartclip, 2023; IAB 2023). Informing about the easy access to casual gaming ads could improve the perceived compatibility and the adoption process of marketeers towards CGAM. *Complexity* associates strongly to *compatibility* as referring to how easily potential adopters can comprehend and use the innovation (Rogers, 2003). People may be reluctant to adopt innovations that are viewed as complex or difficult to understand (Gartner & Riis, 2019). Simplifying and reducing complexity of CGAM could facilitate adoption of it.

Triability relates to the extent to which an innovation can be experimented with or tested before making a full commitment to adopt the innovation (Rogers, 2003). Rogers highlights, that innovations that can be easily sampled and understood through trial runs encourage adoption by minimizing risk and uncertainty. Hence, letting marketeers to test CGAM with a low threshold could promote the adoption of it.

Observability, according to Rogers (2003), refers to the tangible results and benefits of the innovation to others. When the positive results of adopting an innovation are easily observable, it tends to create social influence and motivates more individuals to adopt, driven by the desire to achieve similar benefits (Kuan, Chong, & Chau, 2014; Gartner & Riis, 2019). References and case examples could be great way for casual gaming ad sellers to create social influence by sharing success stories and KPI achievements.

The influence level of these five innovation attributes can vary based on the context, industry, and target audience. However, research often indicates that relative advantage tends to be one of the most influential attributes (Rogers, 2003; Gartner & Riis, 2019). Rogers (2003) states that people are generally inclined to adopt innovations that they perceive as providing a clear advantage. Nonetheless, it's crucial to acknowledge that relative advantage is frequently determined subjectively and can differ from one person

or group to another. Also, in the case of incremental innovation, the relative advantage may be more subtle compared to radical or disruptive innovations (Rogers, 2003). Still, the relative advantage, even if it's incremental, is a powerful driver for adoption (Gartner & Riis, 2019). Compatibility and trialability are particularly critical to ensure a smooth transition and acceptance of the incremental innovation.

2.5 Theoretical framework based on existing theory

The theoretical framework, based on established theories, examines the implementation and piloting of casual gaming video ads. Illustrated in the figure 2, the framework integrates various aspects explored in this study. It begins with factors shaping initial perceptions and attitudes towards CGAM, encompassing direct and indirect experiences (Sethna & Blythe, 2019), social influences (informative and normative) (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975), communication channels, and individual differences classified through Roger’s adopter categories (2003).

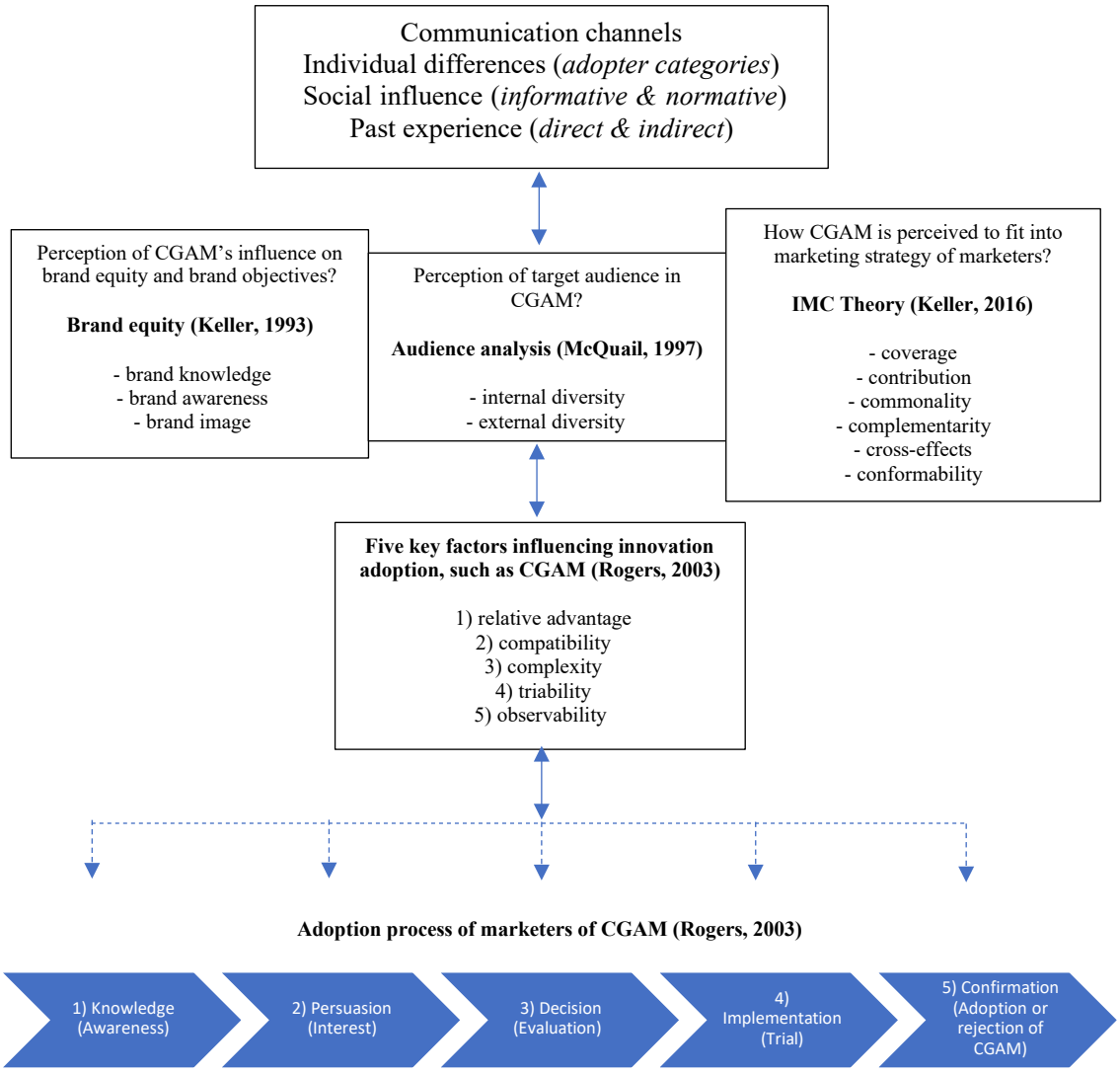

Figure 2. Theoretical framework based on the theory adapted from Rogers (2003).

Marketers, influenced by these factors, form perceptions and attitudes towards key aspects of CGAM, emphasizing brand equity, target audience considerations, and marketing strategy perspectives gleaned from existing literature (Keller, 1993, 2016; McQuail, 1997). Within this framework, marketers evaluate the five crucial elements of

CGAM as incremental innovations (Rogers, 2003). The culmination of these evaluations determines marketers' willingness to implement and pilot casual gaming video ads. Importantly, the interrelationship of formed perceptions and attitudes towards CGAM is dynamic, evolving throughout the decision-making activities.

3 Research methodology

This section addresses the methodology of this study. The research methodology serves as a guide, providing a structured approach to investigate the intricacies of the chosen topic. As advocated by Saunders et al. (2009), the study adopts a constructivist epistemology, aligning with an interpretivist ontological stance. This philosophical underpinning lays the foundation for the subsequent layers of the research onion, influencing choices in terms of research approach, strategy, and method selection. The subsequent sections delineate our path through the research onion, detailing our chosen research approach, strategy, method, and techniques, all finely attuned to address the research objectives and capture the essence of the phenomenon under study.

The research onion, introduced by Saunders and others (2009), is a methodological framework that helps researchers understand the various layers of research design and how they build upon each other. In this part of the study, the research onion is introduced and exploited to illustrate the research methodology part for the reader. According to Saunders and the others (2009, p.106–109), the research onion consists of six layers: research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, choice of method, time horizon, and techniques and procedures.

The research onion begins with the research philosophy, representing the fundamental beliefs guiding the study, whether they are positivist, interpretivist, or constructivist. Moving outward, the next layer encompasses the research approach, which can be deductive or inductive, signifying how data is collected and analyzed based on the chosen philosophy. The subsequent layer is the research strategy, delineating the overall plan for conducting the study, such as experiments, surveys, or case studies. Further out, the research choices concern methods, encompassing specific techniques like interviews, observations, or questionnaires. This follows with time horizon, either cross-sectional or longitudinal, addressing how data is gathered over time. Finally, the outermost layer involves the specific tools, techniques, and procedures used to collect

and analyze data based on the chosen research methods for instance how interviewees are selected and how questions are phrased. (Saunders et al., 2009 p.107-110).

In the figure 1 below, the research onion is illustrated and complemented with this study's points, thus providing a structural framework for the methodology part. In the context of this study, these sections are discussed more thoroughly to support the choices as the methodology part progresses.

Figure 2. Research onion adapted from Saunders and the others (2009, p.106-109).

3.1 Research design

3.1.1 Research philosophy

Regarding the research philosophy, a constructivist epistemology is elected due to its suitability for this study. This study delves into the perception and adoption of CGAM and focuses on understanding the varied perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making activities of Finnish non-gaming marketers. It is about interpreting and making sense of their subjective views and behaviors (Conrad & Serlin, 2011). A constructivist approach allows for the exploration of multiple realities and interpretations (Azungah, 2018), which is vital in a multifaceted context and field like media and digital marketing. Moreover, a constructivist philosophy embraces the idea that reality is socially constructed, and individuals' interpretations are shaped by their experiences and interactions (Conrad & Serlin, 2011).

3.1.2 Research approach

A deductive research approach is adopted in this study, as the focus is on exploring existing theories and using them as a base for the research method and data collection techniques. The deductive approach is anchored in existing theories, shaping the qualitative research design in alignment with these theories (Azungah, 2018). In contrast, an inductive research approach involves initially gathering data and subsequently formulating theory based on the findings and analysis of the collected data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012, p. 548). Given the nature of this study, it begins by thoroughly exploring existing theories related to the topic. Subsequently, these theories serve as a foundation for devising the research methodology and techniques for data collection. The deductive research approach is deemed more suitable in this context. Following this, the collected data is analysed to ascertain the congruence between the established theories and the empirical data obtained in the study.

3.1.3 Research strategy

This study employs an exploratory qualitative research strategy, aptly suited for exploring a novel phenomenon that has not yet been extensively investigated (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 5) such as CGAM, with the aim of obtaining a profound understanding of the topic (Carson, 2001, p. 65). This research method enables to construct a comprehensive portrayal of the phenomenon under investigation, drawing insights from the participants' unique experiences and elucidating how they construct meanings (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 5). Within this study, the exploratory qualitative research method is employed to enhance comprehension of the topic and derive fresh insights from diverse perspectives. An integral aspect of qualitative research involves comparing existing theories, prior data, and provide new research data (Gummesson, 2005).

A methodological approach is used, that marries deductive and exploratory principles. The deductive component of the research methodology is rooted in a review of existing literature, providing a theoretical framework derived from established studies in the field (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 5). This theoretical lens serves as a guide through which empirical data will be examined. The theoretical framework introduced earlier in the theory part serves as a deductive lens for looking the gathered empirical data. Based on the theoretical framework three thematic divisions or lenses are established.

The first thematic division which through the empirical data is looked at is the theme of participants' overall awareness, experiences, and initial attitudes about casual gaming and the whole gaming in general. This dimension establish a base of fundaments for understanding in which stage in the adoption process they are, and how factors derived from the existing theory such as past experience, social influence, individual differences and communication channels have affected their stage in the adoption of CGAM.

The second thematic division delves more deeply into the context of casual gaming specifically as an advertising medium (CGAM), and not looking casual gaming or gaming sphere in general, like the first thematic division. In this second thematic division, existing theories, such as brand equity, audience analysis and IMC theory, concerning characteristics of CGAM are used as lenses to better understand participants' perceptions specifically about CGAM from different theoretical perspectives.

The third thematic division delves more deeply into the adoption or more specifically piloting of CGAM, and the factors behind the decision-making activities to pilot this underutilized advertising medium. Theory used as a lens in this third thematic division is based primarily on literature surrounding Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation theory.

Once the deductive framework is established from these three dimensions, the research transitions into an exploratory phase. This stage involves collecting empirical data through five semi-structured interviews. Unlike the deductive phase, the exploratory phase allows for flexibility and openness to new insights and emerging themes that might not be fully captured by the deductive framework. The deductive component guides the initial inquiry, setting the boundaries and expectations for the study. As the study progresses, the exploratory element comes into play, enabling to delve into factors not explicitly covered by the initial deductive framework. Ultimately the combination of deductive and exploratory approach in this study increases the understanding of the factors influencing underutilization of CGAM among non-gaming brands' marketers.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Choice of method

Quantitative research utilizes numerical data, whereas qualitative research involves non-numeric data, encompassing elements like words, videos, and images (Gummesson,

2005). The collection of qualitative data typically revolves around interviews or other methods that yield non-numeric information (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 161). Various interview types exist, including structured, semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face, via mobile phones or computers, and either individual or group settings (Khan, 2014). The data collection is not rigidly standardized – questions and the overall process may naturally evolve during the research journey (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 163). Open-ended questions offer participants the freedom to delve into perspectives they consider vital, necessitating the researcher to adeptly uncover relevant themes and topics (Azungah, 2018). Hence, curiosity, creativity, and willingness to take conversational risks in dynamic interactions with participants are crucial (Corbin et al., 2014, p. 5).

Data is collected by conducting semi-structured interviews, which is a data collection method that encompasses asking questions within a predetermined thematic framework (George, 2022). Thus, key questions are framed around the main research issues (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 374), yet not set in any particular order or in phrasing (George, 2022). Occasionally, a semi-structured interview is called with the term thematic interview; in such cases in which the interviewer asks precise questions about certain themes but does not necessarily use exactly the same questions with all interviewees (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006). Semi-structured interviews give a flexible framework that lets to deviate off-course from the predetermined course as needed (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). The order of the questions can change depending on how the conversation is going, and the questions themselves can be modified to better serve the goals of the research (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 374–375). It is simple to compare responses when questions are asked in a specific order, but it can be restrictive. Less structure can nevertheless allow for comparisons between responders while facilitating the identification of patterns (George, 2022).

3.2.2 Time horizon

Moreover, a cross-sectional time horizon has been chosen as the most suitable approach for capturing a snapshot of the current state of adoption and perceptions regarding CGAM in marketing strategies among non-gaming brands' marketeers. The aim is to gain insights into the prevailing practices, attitudes, and challenges associated with incorporating CGAM into the broader marketing strategies. The cross-sectional approach allows for efficient data collection at a specific point in time, providing a valuable snapshot of the subject matter without the need for extensive longitudinal tracking (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 190). While this approach limits the ability to analyze changes over time or establish causality, it offers an expedient and resource-friendly means of understanding the contemporary landscape of CGAM integration (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 190).

3.2.3 Techniques and procedures

Saunders and the others (2012, p.191) describe the techniques and procedures layer in the research onion as focusing on the methods and techniques chosen for data collection and analysis, ensuring they align with the chosen research approach and strategy.
The primary technique in this study is semi-structured interviews, guided by predetermined themes and questions, analyzed using thematic analysis for comprehensive insights. Thematic analysis will be applied to analyze the interview data, identifying recurrent patterns, themes, and varying viewpoints. This analytical approach will aid in the synthesis and interpretation of qualitative data, providing rich and nuanced insights into the perceptions and attitudes of marketers regarding CGAM.

3.2.4 Choosing participants for the interviews

The participants for this study were chosen based on their wide range of marketing and media agency background. This how it was ensured that participants have extensive

marketing knowledge and broad experience level of different types of non-gaming brand clients, thus providing a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. For the same reason participants were chosen from different agencies. However, some participants have had previous experience from the same agency as Finland's marketing and media agency sphere is rather limited at least compared to the big markets abroad. The experience level on marketing and a background from a substantial agency in terms of market share in Finland were the main filters when choosing marketers to participate in the interview.

The experience level in casual gaming advertising was not used as a filter during participant selection, as the study aimed to explore perceptions and attitudes of marketers regardless of their experience. Like this, it could be analyzed more realiably the exact perceptions and attitudes in different states of awareness. Particularly, ad sellers struggle with understanding the true reasons behind of non-gaming marketers not piloting this substantially potential but unused marketing medium. Due to this reason the focus was not on gathering purely direct CGAM experienced non-gaming marketeers' thoughts, yet participants that are well-experienced on marketing, and are working or have recently worked in different substantial agencies, and thus relevant and leading non-gaming marketers in the media and marketing landscape of Finland.

The recruitment process commenced with an initial contact via email, wherein potential participants were just informed the main themes of the interview: casual gaming and marketing. Those who expressed willingness to contribute to the research were then scheduled for semi-structured interviews. The selection of participants with substantial industry expertise aimed to provide a rich and comprehensive understanding of non-gaming brands' perceptions and attitudes towards CGAM, aligning with the study's research objectives. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, personal names and company identities are withheld from publication. Consequently, only pertinent background information is presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1. Interviewed participants.

Participants	Occupation description	Gender
P1	Experienced Account Director and Marcom professional	Female
P2	Digital Media Specialist	Male
P3	Addressable Campaign Manager	Male
P4	Senior Digital Marketing Specialist	Male
P5	Digital Designer	Female

The interviews for this study were held via video call meetings, that were recorded for the transcription phase. All the interviews lasted minimally more than one hour, and maximally one hour and a half. Total amount of x interviewees were interviewed with semi-structured thematic framework that enabled conversation to have some structure but allowed also interviews to sparkle and try its limits.

The interview structure was divided into three different parts. The three parts were formed based on the three thematic divisions, which were introduced in the research strategy section, derived from the theoretical framework of existing theories. Briefly defined these thematic divisons included the awareness, experience initial attitudes about casual gaming and gaming in general, perceptions and attitudes towards CGAM, and decision-making activities among non-gaming brands' marketers. These three parts were the main thematic divisions which set the frame for the natural discussion. In the further paragraphs these three parts are explained more precisely.

The first part investigated firstly the participants' initial perceptions and attitudes towards casual gaming and gaming in general, and secondly the overall awareness and experiences about these concepts in general. Moreover, the participants' thoughts and associations that were raised purely from the terms casual gaming and gaming. This how it was examined how well the terms are known and what things they brought up in mind

as terms. After this the term casual gaming was defined and described, so there was a common knowledge, what things casual gaming represents. A follow-up question asked about different terms that the participant had heard before about the same subject and if there is some term that the participant prefers. Thus, the terminology of the subject and the potential asymmetry in this could be examined thoroughly.

The next theme incorporated open-ended questions about the earlier direct and indirect experience about casual gaming specifically as and advertising medium (CGAM). If there was experience the participant was asked to elaborate examples about previous experiences. If there was none direct experience the follow-up question asked to imagine an video ad in the casual gaming environment and what kind of thoughts and concerns, it brought up. This followed by showing an example of screen recorded rewarded video ad in the casual gaming environment (in Angry Birds) to concretize one of the most common ad formats in the casual gaming environment. After this the discussion was created around perceptions and attitudes towards video ads in the casual gaming environment. Discussion was focused on to enable as well as possible emerging associations and initiatives to avoid any kind of researcher bias such as by directing or leading the discussion to a certain way. Hence, the first sub-objective to understand the perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making activities of non-gaming brands' marketers towards video ads in casual games, was investigated.

Lastly the theme of decision-making activities was deepened more precisely by open-ended question regarding to the decision-making activities of participants and their experiences of client advertisers decision-making activities regarding CGAM, to understand the landscape of different decision-making activities inside of leading media agencies and their client advertisers in the context of casual gaming video ads. This how the second sub-objective could be investigated and answer, why and how marketers want to pilot in video ads in casual games.

3.3 Validity and reliability of the study

Validity in qualitative research mainly refers to the accuracy and reliability of the selected measures (Golafshani, 2003). In turn, *reliability* of the study evaluates if the chosen data collection techniques and procedures would generate similar results, when repeated in another situation or by another researcher (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 192). The importance of validity and reliability are crucial fundaments, when exploring non-gaming brands' marketeers' perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making processes in the context of CGAM.

Golafshani's (2003) notion of validity is substantially relevant to this study. The validity of this study depends on how well the methodology used captures the attitudes, perceptions, and decision-making processes of non-gaming brands' marketeers concerning CGAM. The research design, data collection techniques, and interview questions were precisely crafted to ensure that they measure what they are intended to assess. Moreover, validity extends to the researcher's ability to comprehend and accurately interpret the insights and experiences shared by the participants (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 382). For this study's objectives, this means that the interview process was designed to solicit authentic and unfiltered perspectives from marketeers, enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings.

Enhancing validity hinges on selecting a research method and approach best aligned with the research subject. The data analysis process underwent several stages to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and to measure the research objectives more accurately. Importantly, the research procedures and measurements were grounded in relevant literature rather than personal preferences, ensuring a lack of researcher bias and the adoption of the most suitable methods, thus augmenting validity.

For ensuring reliability this study used semi-structured interviews following a well-defined structure, allowing for flexibility and adaptation as required during the

conversations (Kallio et al., 2016). This approach improves reliability by providing a framework for consistency in data collection and facilitating meaningful comparisons between responses. Semi-structured interviews construct a balance between providing a flexible conversation framework and maintaining consistency, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the research. This approach allows participants to express their views authentically while ensuring that data collection is carried out systematically, eventually contributing to the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Furthermore, according to George (2022) semi-structured interviews are best used when the interviewer has prior interview experience. In this study, the interviewer has prior experience in conducting interaction and discussion around the subject of CGAM, hence supporting the choice of semi-structured interview, as the interview can be led seamlessly inside the thematic framework, which is formed based on the found theory. Moreover, George (2022) states, that semi-structured interviews are substantial method, when the nature of the research is exploratory – so when the primary purpose is to explore and gain insights into the research area like in this study.

On the other hand, George (2022) points out that tree main disadvantages of semi-structured interviews are low validity, high risk of research bias, and difficultness to develop semi-structured questions. Firstly, semi-structured interviews' adaptability may potentially reduce their validity. Depending on how much the interviewer deviated from the specified set of questions, it can be difficult to compare responses amongst participants. In this study, the interviewer sets a timeframe for the interviews in order to not generate asymmetrical depth from the answers of the interviewees, thus maximizing the validity for the comparison of the interviews. Additionally, semi-structured interview’s open-ended format can tempt interviewers to ask questions that will influence the outcome, which can lead to observer bias. In this study, the interviewer acknowledges the influence of the bias he is influenced by. Certainly, excluding observer bias completely is not by all means possible, but by self-reflection and concentrating on framing questions using certain strategies reduce observer bias substantially, according

to Indeed (2023). The conduct of a study requires researchers to maintain objectivity, therefore the strategies represented by Indeed (2023) are applied in this study to minimize the chance of including observer bias.

All in all, the study employs a qualitative methodology, primarily utilizing semi-structured interviews as the central data collection technique. Semi-structured interviews are chosen due to their flexibility in steering the conversation towards the research objectives while allowing for unanticipated insights. The interviews will be guided by a set of predetermined themes and key questions derived from the research objectives, ensuring a focused exploration of marketeers' perspectives on integrating CGAM within their marketing strategies. Each interview session will follow a loose structure to facilitate natural conversation and gather in-depth responses. Thematic analysis will be applied to analyze the interview data, identifying recurrent patterns, themes, and varying viewpoints. This analytical approach will aid in the synthesis and interpretation of qualitative data, providing rich and nuanced insights into the perceptions and challenges of marketeers regarding CGAM in marketing.

4 Findings and results

The present chapter unfolds the findings and results garnered from an in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives CGAM. Anchored in the thematic content arising from the participant interviews, participants 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 the analysis herein aligns with the overarching objectives of the study. The primary objective of this study was to increase the understanding of the factors that influence non-gaming brands' marketers' underutilization of video ads in casual games, thereby elucidating the nuances of their perceptions, attitudes, decision-making activities, and experiences within CGAM. Each participant's interview serves as a unique data, contributing to a broader comprehension of the factors influencing the underutilization of CGAM in the context of video ads among non-gaming brands' marketers. This chapter's structure is divided into three parts based on the derived thematic divisions from the interviews.

The first thematic division derived from the interviews includes participants' overall awareness, experiences, and initial attitudes and perceptions about casual gaming and gaming in general. This part's objective was to get familiar with the participant's background in gaming and casual gaming, and what elements the participant thinks first about the terms gaming and casual gaming. As a result, the overall awareness and initial perceptions and attitudes of participants about the sphere of casual gaming was acknowledged.

The second thematic division established and deepened discussion within casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM). This thematic division delves into the field of casual gaming specifically from an advertising medium perspective. One participant was not aware or familiar with casual gaming video ads, thus a rewarded video ad in casual gaming environment was shown, as it is the main ad format that casual gaming video ad sellers focus on in Finland and in the focus of this study. Moreover, it is the most commonly known format among non-gaming brands' marketers.

The third thematic division explores the decision-making activities of participants and their client advertisers. It focuses on understanding the decision-making activities regarding to piloting of CGAM and comprehending the factors behind the underutilization of it.

The three thematic divisions interplay between each other by connecting participants knowledge, experiences, thoughts as an advertising medium and decision-making activities to ultimately comprehend better the factors influencing. In accordance with the methodological underpinnings discussed in the chapter three, the thematic analysis approach was employed. By identifying recurring patterns, thematic units, and semantic structures within the participants' discourses, a qualitative synthesis of their experiences emerged.

4.1 The first thematic division: overall awareness, experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of participants in the realm of casual gaming and gaming

This section presents an exploration of participants' awareness, experiences and initial perceptions and attitudes concerning casual gaming gaming in general. Each participant's perspective is examined in light of their associations with the term 'gaming' and the emerging concept of 'casual gaming'. Understanding the participants' immediate thoughts and feelings on these subjects is vital, as these preconceptions can influence their overall perceptions, attitudes and experiences with casual gaming and its use as an advertising medium for video ads.

In essence, these initial thoughts and associations with gaming and casual gaming will serve as a foundation for comprehending the participants' subsequent perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making activities on casual gaming video ads, aligning with this

study's objectives. As we delve further into their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes, it is crucial to acknowledge the diversity and depth of these preliminary impressions. These introductory thoughts provide a fascinating backdrop against which we can explore how casual gaming fits into the broader landscape of marketing medium choices by non-gaming marketers. In the following paragraphs the results are presented in a more coherent manner, in the form of citations, expressing the key points from the interviews regarding to the thematic division of awareness and first thoughts on casual gaming.

4.1.1 Experiences of gaming and casual gaming in general

Participants had different backgrounds in terms of casual gaming and gaming knowledge and experience. Some of them have no experience at all on gaming, and some actively play hardcore games or casual games, or both, although none of the participants did identify themselves purely as a casual gamer. P1 declared that *"I don't play in general"* and describes herself as *"a former basketball player"* regarding to her as a gamer. P2 described himself as a gamer by saying "*I'm not a casual gamer. I'm not a nerdy gamer, but I'm a bit more hardcore."* About his experience on casual games, P2 stresses that *"I have a youth background about it"*, and *"I don't have mobile games anymore".* P3 says that he plays *"almost everything"*, and *"nowadays also on mobile to some extent"*. P4 stresses that: *"personally, I play on consoles and PC games".* P5 comments that she does not play with consoles or desktop by commenting that *"I don't play anything like Counter-Strike and stuff like that".* However, she continues by stating that she plays casual games: *"Duolingo and something similar ones".*

Moreover, some participants expressed that also in their social circle gaming and casual gaming is present. For example, P1 delves into his son's heavy gamer background by stating negatively: *"For my son it was just like a kind of a nuisance to some extent.",* and "…*he pulled the gaming so OVERBOARD!"*. P3 expressed that his mother and aunt are active casual gamers, and in his friend group there is a lot of general gamers. Also, P2

and P4 mention that majority of their friends play. However, P2 says that casual gaming among his friends "*is reduced a lot from the age of twenty onwards".* P5 says that her boyfriend is an active gamer focusing on hardcore gaming style.

4.1.2 First thoughts on gaming and casual gaming

First thoughts of participants on gaming and casual gaming differ a lot and both positive and negative feelings arise. P1 highlights a negative aspect of gaming, even though she also mentions couple positive things afterwards, by saying *"the negative is the fact, that the game addiction is real, you lose your social life, just like happened with our own son"*, and *"At the time, I thought that he would just be in a dark room with his underwear on."* By contrast, P2, P3, and P4 express more positive associations with gaming such as *"it's meant escapism, it's meant a quick good time"*, *"In the end, I would see gaming as a source of serotonin"*, and *"it is such a strong social aspect for me".* P5 has the most neutral stance and attitude towards gaming in general.

4.1.3 First thoughts of casual gaming audience

"The first thing that comes to mind is certainly Mindcraft, which many people start in primary school", "*young people - a hobby for young adults",* and *"you get the impression that gaming is perhaps for younger people",* indicate that the stereotype of typical gamer is more or less present in all participants' first thoughts on gaming, except P4's (P1–P3, & P5). However, also some participants acknowledge that all demographics play digital games and casual games by saying: *"Maybe the stereotype is a sixteen year old boy, but the reality is that everyone plays"* (P3). Precisely said on casual gaming audience: *"it's mobile gaming, which was played in school, it can be taken as something that grandmas and moms play" (P2)*

4.1.4 Awareness of gaming terminology

When asking about the term ‘casual gaming’ there seems to be different awareness of it. P1 states straightforwardly that she is not aware of the term. In contrast, P2, P3, and P4 express confidently to be aware of the term. P5 expresses awareness but more limited compared to P2, P3, and P4. P2 describes the use of the term inside of their agency:

> *I'm not quite sure when we started talking about 'casual gaming'. First it was ‘gaming’ and it's only been 4 years since then. Of course, people at work are a bit older than me and you, so maybe there wasn’t such a clear understanding of casual gaming and how big a deal it really is. So that's why we didn’t talk about casual gaming, we talked about ‘gaming’ in general.*

This description provides a great insight into the evolution of the term ‘casual gaming’ inside of a major media agency in Finland. Some participants share similar evolutions of the term (P2 & P4).

It can be noted also that there is asymmetry in the gaming terminology among the participants. ‘Mobile gaming’ is used significantly instead of ‘casual gaming’ in situations in which participants clearly talk about casual gaming (P1, P2, P3). A great example of this asymmetry can be clearly noted from the words of P2 when he thinks about clients’ willingness to try casual gaming environment: *“e.g. how willing they are to try out on mobile, or better said on mobile gaming environment… or actually said, casual gaming environment”.* However, P3 and P4 argue and point out that the terms ‘mobile gaming’ and ‘casual gaming’ can be separated today. Their use of the terms align consistently.

4.1.5 Conclusion of the first thematic division

The overall awareness of the concept of casual gaming and CGAM seems to vary among the participants. In the table 2 below, it is summarized the key points from the first thematic division concerning the awareness of participants on casual gaming and their past experiences from it. The scale is from one to five in the following order: *none, limited, some, moderate,* and *extensive*.

Table 2. Awareness and experience on casual gaming of participants.

Participant	**Past experience on casual gaming (1-5)**	**Past experience on CGAM (1-5)**	**Awareness of casual gaming opportunities (1-5)**
P1	**2**. Limited	**1.** None	**2.** Limited
P2	**3.** Some	**2.** Limited	**4.** Moderate
P3	**4.** Moderate	**1.** None	**2.** Some
P4	**2.** Limited	**5.** Extensive	**5.** Extensive
P5	**4.** Moderate	**1.** None	**2.** Some

4.2 The second thematic division: thoughts on casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM) in the context of casual gaming video ads

In this section of the study, participants' reflections specifically on casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM) offer a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities that this dynamic landscape presents for non-gaming brands' marketers. As the participants navigate the landscape of casual gaming as an advertising medium, their diverse perspectives converge on a second thematic division that focuses on the marketing and advertising medium perspective of casual gaming. These insights, together with the other thematic divisions lay a foundation for the subsequent exploration of participants' specific responses, shedding light on the intricate interplay between experience and knowledge of non-gaming brands' marketers', their perceptions on CGAM, and their advertising medium choices.

Consequently, the participants' reflections offer valuable insights into the research objective about the factors influencing the underutilization of video ads within casual games, by addressing the first sub-objective's part to understand the perceptions and attitudes of non-gaming brands' marketers towards video ads in casual games. This thematic division not only elucidates the intricacies of casual gaming advertising but directly contributes to achieving the study's overarching goal of enhancing comprehension regarding the influencing factors of non-gaming brands' marketers' underutilization of casual gaming as an advertising medium.

4.2.1 Experiences of casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM)

Experiences on casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM) is somewhat limited throughout the participants in spite of their presence in major Finnish media agencies and their broad experience in marketing. P1, P3, and P5 do not have earlier direct experience on CGAM. However, P3 states some limited indirect experience inside of his agency as follows: *"I have not been directly involved, but I think there have been ran some campaigns"*. On the other hand, he adds, in the context of advertising for gamers, to have earlier direct experience on Twitch (a live streaming platform primarily focused on video game streaming). In contrast, P2 has direct experience from CGAM, although it is limited only to one direct experience. He did not mention Twitch or other gaming associated mediums in his answers. P4 has the most extensive background from CGAM and says that *"there's probably a campaign going on right now as well".* In contrast to other participants, he has already used CGAM for several of his client advertisers (non-gaming brands).

4.2.2 Concerns of casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM)

Participants' first thoughts on casual gaming video ads raise a lot of same concerns. P1, P2, and P5 point out as their first personal concern **the perceived annoyance of the**

video ads. However, P1 continues this by noting that rewarded video ad placements are good choice to reduce this as they are offered as an alternative option for the casual gamer to either watch the ad and get a reward for the game (in this case an extra life), or to start over the game. On the other hand, P2 is concerned on the rewarded video ads' likeability, as the video completion rate (VCR) does not legitimately measure this when the video ads are mandatory to complete in order to get the actual reward for the game. In summary, he declares **VCR metric to be misleading in this context** and raises this to clearly be his personal biggest concern on casual gaming video ads. Also, P4 comments that VCR is not the most important metric in the context of casual gaming video ads: *"It's not really that relevant. I don't need to see in the report that the VCR is 95% if I know that I had to finish watching the video. It doesn't really matter."* Others, such as P3, sees **the compatibility and scalability of CGAM** as problems, highlighting the importance of being able to seamlessly integrate the casual gaming video ads into their DSP (*Demand-side platform*, a software that allows an advertiser to buy advertising with the help of automation (Adjust, 2023)). He points out that seamless compatibility of the casual gaming video ads in DSP's would definitely help in the implementation and piloting of CGAM for the clients. Moreover, P3 together with P1 and P5 raise big concerns regarding to **the reach of target audience.** This can be derived from the participants answers to be the most dominating concern, therefore deepened in the following subsection.

From the clients' perspective, participants provide typical concerns on CGAM that they have discussed with their clients. **The target audience**, and **the *"risk of unknown"*** are concerns that all participants describe at least to some extent (P1–P5). Also, **the quality of the ad environment** is mentioned several times and emphasized (P1–P5), as well as **the nature of the context** (P1– P5), in which **the brand safety** is associated with (P1, P3), such as P3 points out: *"first of all the quality of casual gaming, but also the fact that it's safe".* In addition, besides the brand safety also the concern on **casual game inventory** is connected to the nature of the context (P1-P5).

4.2.3 Concerns of target audience are the most prevalent in the context of CGAM

If it is delved more deeply into the concerns related to the target audience, it can be gathered interesting insights. Many quotes of the participants indicate how the audience of casual gamers is perceived stereotypically – as a 15-30 year old man (P1, P2, P3, P5). Interestingly, P2 and P3 provide valuable and very substantial insights, how their earlier factual and well-aware notions about the casual gamers turn out to be completely wiped out by the stereotype. The following citation of P3 depicts how the stereotype overshadows his earlier comments and notions about broad audience of casual gaming:

> *Maybe there is not so much potential in my own clients… I don't see that they have a target group for such things. Maybe if there would be a client whose target group is like 15–30 years-old really clearly. (P3)*

The above quote was P3's expression when he started to talk about potential and suitable client advertisers to pilot and use casual gaming video ads. Little bit later he suddenly notices his controversial impressions and points out with self-reflection, the general target audience bias surrounding the casual gaming environment and himself:

> *Perhaps this reflects the bias towards casual gaming. Although I said at the beginning that in the casual gaming environment really a bit older women spend their time, so maybe this is now an indication of how the target group in the casual gaming environment in my own head is tossed from side to side and you can notice that it is the stereotype that 15-30 years old play – this stereotype is also my own, although I know that also active casual gaming players are e.g.my own mother and aunt, who play a word game. So yes, they can also be reached from casual gaming environment, even though immediately does not come to mind which product or brand would be such. (P3)*

P3 shows in a clear manner how target audience bias is influencing his thoughts about casual gaming as an advertising medium regardless his awareness of the factual broad audience of casual gamers.

In addition, P2 follows similar pattern by first expressing his awareness of the wide spread of casual gamers in general and substantial portion of older women dominating the casual gaming environment:

> *Casual gaming has been familiar in terms of work, of course, but if you think about it from a personal point of view, it's Facebook games, it's Candy Crush Saga, it's*

> *mobile gaming, which was played in school, it can be taken as something that grandmas and moms play, it's a quick pastime or kind of a quick break. This is how I see casual gaming from a personal point of view. But if I look at it in terms of work, it opens up a much broader data on what it really is, how much time people really spend on it (P2)*

He continues by highlighting older women to be usually on top statistics of casual games and noting their active appearance in casual games: *"It's then just cemented in my mind that those older women are just Candy Crush kings out there."* (P2.)

Although it can be clearly demonstrated that P2, like P3, is well-aware of the casual gamer demographics, he still follows the stereotype of young men later in the conversation by stating:

> *I feel that everyday products are good in a mobile environment unless you want to target more specifically to men, if you want to target young men, then there is room for a lot of different things such as shavers. (P2)*

Again, like P3, P2 demonstrates clearly the influencing factor of target audience bias regardless of his one direct experience of CGAM and knowledge about older women dominating the sphere of casual gamers.

4.2.4 For which type of client advertiser brands CGAM is suitable?

In addition, when asking participants about which brands they feel to be suitable for advertising in casual gaming environment, all the rest participants, except P4, point out that **products and brands targeting young me**n are especially suitable for casual gaming environment (P1–P3, & P5). More accurately P3 mentions in example **technology products and brands** such as Samsung. Several participants also see **snacks** to be suitable for casual gaming advertising (P2, P3, P5). **Sports and sports drinks** are also pointed out (P1) as well as **general products** such as coffee and groceries (P2, P3, P5). Below are some citations from the participants' thoughts on client advertisers' suitability to use CGAM:

> *A very mundane products like coffee would be good fit, but then again, my other clients might not work in my opinion, so that's why testing casual gaming as a marketing channel has been so rare. (P2)*

And there have been no target groups or segments or buyer personas that we would have wanted to target with marketing communications. (P1)

Then if we talk about what kind of brands have the potential for casual gaming, I see that the context is still quite narrow. (P3)

The kind of products that are a little bit cheaper. (P5)

From these citations it can be derived that the dominating perception among participants is that casual gaming ad environment is perceived not suitable for many brands (P1, P2, P3, P5).

On the total contrary, P4, the only one who is experienced in running casual gaming video ads for his client advertisers, declares confidently that: ***"I can see it for everyone."*** He continues: *"I think it's pretty clear, but I do notice that generally speaking people who are not so aware, feel that it's more for entertainment, for example."*

4.2.5 CGAM compared to other video ad mediums

Participants also compare casual gaming video ad environment to many other video ad environments. It is stated that comparing it to TV advertising is not relevant as the assumptions for digital video ads', including casual gaming video ads', metrics and measurability is different (P1, P2, P5). However, participants see relevant comparison to streaming service video ads, environments such as Ruutu and Katsomo (P1–P5). On the other hand, P3 compares casual gaming video ads to Twitch video ads, for instance he perceives both environments having targeting problems: *"it is not yet technically possible to break the larger player mass into smaller parts".* Moreover, he and the others (P1–P5) mention YouTube as a video ad environment in which the contextual targeting is made extremely accurate, and therefore it is in general use for all brands. In summary, participants state unanimously YouTube to be the best video ad environment at the moment and see streaming services to be the most comparable video ad environment for casual gaming video ad environment.

4.2.6 Conclusion of the second thematic division

In the table 3 below, participants' thoughts on casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM) regarding to video ads is presented. Participants' personal thoughts and concerns as well as the client advertisers comment on the topic are summarized. Moreover, participants' expressions on the type of brands or industries, according to them, that could be suitable for the use of CGAM are listed. This second thematic division fulfils the first sub-objective's part "*to understand the perceptions and attitudes of non-gaming brands' marketers towards video ads in casual games"*. In the following third thematic division the first sub-objective's remaining part, which is *"to understand the decision-making activities of non-gaming brands' marketers towards video ads in casual games"*, is investigated.

Table 3. Participants' thoughts on casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM) in the context of video ads.

Participant	**What thoughts/concerns on CGAM personally?**	**CGAM thoughts/concerns from clients' perspective?**	**For which type of brands CGAM is suitable?**
P1	Annoyance, influence on buying behavior, negative brand image, target audience, targeting options	Unawareness, target audience, risk of unknown, game inventory, nature of the context for brand, brand safety	Young men's products, snacks, sports stuff
P2	Annoyance, legitimation of metrics, target audience	Unawareness, target audience, risk of unknown, nature of the context for brand	Young men's products, everyday

			products (e.g. coffee)
P3	Compatability, scalability, targeting options, target audience	Unawareness, target audience, risk of unknown, game inventory, nature of the context for brand	Young men's products, snacks, drinks, maybe products for older women *(after realizing his audience bias)*
P4	No really concerns; talks about the positive aspects Interested in more data about casual gamers; challenges relevance of VCR	Unawareness, target audience, risk of unknown, game inventory, nature of the context for brand	*"I can see it for everyone"*
P5	Annoyance, target audience, targeting options	Unawareness, target audience, risk of unknown, game inventory, nature of the context for brand, price tag	Young men's products, everyday cheap products

4.3 The third thematic division: factors influencing the decision-making of piloting casual gaming video ads

The third thematic division delves into the decision-making of new marketing mediums in the context of casual gaming video ads. This thematic division tries to fulfill the remaining part of the first sub-objective *"to understand the decision-making activities of non-gaming brands' marketers towards video ads in casual games"*. Consequently, the participants' reflections offer valuable insights into the factors driving investment in video ads within casual games, addressing the 'why' and 'how' behind marketer preferences to pilot casual gaming video ads.

4.3.1 Influence of unawareness and nature of context

Unawareness of the client marketers is brought up and highlighted by all participants (P1–P5). They underscore the challenges in convincing clients to embrace CGAM, citing resistance to the unknown and a reluctance to invest without a clear fit for the target audience:

> *When I was talking about this age distribution, many customers may not know at all what casual gaming is all about. Then you have to be able to talk comprehensively about casual gaming. Clients ask a lot about what kind of game inventory is available, what kind of results, so these may sometimes be difficult to justify to the client. (P3)*

Nature of the ad environment context, either negative or positive, seems to be one of the key points many participants emphasize to convince unaware clients. In the above comment, similarly to the following comment, is brought up firstly, the unawareness of client marketers about the CGAM, and secondly, its influence on the fear of unknown and risk of advertising in a negative context:

> *No advertiser, certainly not all, has played, maybe the most common ones like Angry Birds etc. - but you need to know exactly what mobile games are out there and what's going on... Because the brand thinks very carefully about the context in which it will be seen, so that there is no damage to its reputation, thus the environment must be favorable for the brand. (P1)*

P2 adds to the clients' unawareness part that *"it is not just because they don't have the knowledge, but because they don't really want to leave from the old"*, and continues with an example:

> *For example, even an another big one, let's say XX, they have a way of saying they want to try something new, but then they still go back to the old way of doing things and don't try something new. It's just that the concept of "the old is better" is what I've personally noticed to play major role for clients. (P2)*

4.3.2 Influence of individual and organizational differences of marketers

On the other hand, about his direct experience on CGAM, P2 states that the former client, a major insurance company, has very aware and innovative marketers that actively seek new ways and mediums for their marketing mix, and thus had positive feeling to pilot CGAM. Also, P4, who is very confident about suggesting utilization of video ads in casual gaming for his clients, notices *"that some people are not so keen to experiment, they have a very big wall and threshold to try something new".* In summary, participants see individual differences of marketers to influence their willingness to pilot casual gaming video ads.

Continuing the individual differences of marketers, some participants argue that **the age of the marketer** is a factor that influences the openness for CGAM (P2, P3). P3 encapsulates it with:

> *Let's say that if your colleague is under 40 years old, you see casual gaming as an opportunity. Then when one starts to go over 40, they will see more disadvantages.*

P3 continues reflecting on individual differences of marketers and **organizations** pointing out human factor behind every opinion and decision:

> *Advertising in games is still very much in its infancy and there are a lot of opinions about it… we have to understand the human factor in the background, that people are a bit strange and different… we have as well our own biases in our agency about what works in marketing and what doesn't. No matter what kind of research is done, we will never reach a complete agreement.*

In line with the above, P1 describes different agencies' cultures and express how shocked she was about the internal resistance in some agencies that she worked:

> *I noticed it myself when I grew up in XX agency, that the level was much higher than in some other agency. It was so built-in, so I absorbed, from XX agency, that pioneering attitude. I curiously always poked and grabbed, that this is what is worth thinking about more and this could fit this and that, and I noticed that the other agency was much slower paced. I had to sell internally a new marketing medium with money: 'This is more money for us!', and only then I started to get interest from the others. But I had to sell it internally to OUR MARKETING PEOPLE and I was quite shocked that there was such an internal resistance. (P1)*

Although P1 sees differences in individual adoption behaviors and corporate cultures, she emphasizes the importance of the available information and data about CGAM in order to convince clients to test it: *"Even the people who get excited as a pioneer and immediately notice that this is a good thing, need that data, because then we start selling it for the client.*" In summary, she highlights how difficult the decision-making regarding to new advertising mediums can be in the network of media agencies and client advertisers, as the decision-making involves many parties to convince, even internally. This same notion was expressed also by P2, P3, and P4.

Continuing, some participants brought up the typical marketer personality that is more emotional and visual oriented, and reflected it influence on interpreting concepts and information about emerging marketing mediums through 'feeling' and illustrations:

> *"Because if you just present data as curves, diagrams and pies, it's not interesting, we're humans. People are in the end the buyers and often marketing people do not have an engineering background. For engineers, column diagrams are that thing, they can see things from it, but marketing people go more through feeling and they want that content" (P1)*

This underscoring of communicated **'feeling' through illustrations** can be noted from all the participants answers (P1–P5). In example, P2 expresses in line with P1 that diagrams about casual gaming audience does not seem to have huge impact when the feeling and contextuality is missing.

To the ‘feeling’ is associated strongly the earlier mentioned **nature of the ad environment context**, that can be derived from the participants’ answers (P1–P5). P3 talks about how ultimately the evaluation process, the interpretation of video ad metrics and the comparison between video ad environments and their effectiveness, is done through the positive emotions and perceptions, particularly in brand marketing, which video ads represent. He continues by telling an example of a client that suddenly stopped a running campaign based on bad ‘feeling’*: “We have had an unnamed client that stopped a campaign, because the person in charge sent a message saying that he had ‘the feeling’ that it wasn't working.”* Furthermore, P1 stresses that the positive feeling can be transmitted only from person to person: *”When you want to strongly influence a person's behavior, only a person can do it, because that's where the FEELING comes in!”*

Some participants point out **the size of the marketing budget** to be influencing factor for many marketers (P1, P2, P5). They also highlight, that marketers in Finland are not usually pioneers with a lot of money to test new mediums first, and thus affecting the openness to invest in CGAM:

> *It is in these, that the pioneers are the first to try these out. You have to think very carefully when you don't have millions in budget, thus you can’t throw a chunk of money here and there. (P1)*

However, participants assert that piloting CGAM is cost-efficient, and thus easy to suggest for clients to test:

> *I actively suggest casual gaming whenever they ask for suggestions, because it's so cost-effective to pilot it anyway, that there's no reason not to try casual gaming. (P2)*

None of the participants mention anything that could be associated to cost-efficiency problems of CGAM (P1–P5).

4.3.3 Conclusion of the third thematic division

In the table 4 below is summarized this thematic division’s points about factors influencing the decision-making of piloting casual gaming video ads. In summary, many of the participants comments are similar and align with each other.

Table 4. Stressed influencing factors in decision-making of piloting casual gaming video ads.

Participant	**Stressed influencing factors in decision-making of piloting casual gaming video ads**
P1	Unawareness Nature of the ad environment context Differences of marketers and organizations Communicated 'feeling' through illustrations The size of the marketing budget
P2	Unawareness Nature of the ad environment context The age of the marketer Differences of marketers and organizations Communicated 'feeling' through illustrations The size of the marketing budget
P3	Unawareness Nature of the ad environment context The age of the marketer Differences of marketers and organizations Communicated 'feeling' through illustrations
P4	Unawareness Nature of the ad environment context Differences of marketers and organizations Communicated 'feeling' through illustrations
P5	Unawareness Nature of the ad environment context Communicated 'feeling' through illustrations The size of the marketing budget

5 Discussion

5.1 Awareness, experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of marketers in the realm of casual gaming and gaming

This section conducts an investigation into the participants' awareness, experiences, and initial perceptions and attitudes regarding gaming, particularly in the context of casual gaming. Each participant's viewpoint is analyzed based on their associations with the term 'gaming' and the evolving concept of 'casual gaming.' It is crucial to comprehend the immediate thoughts and feelings of the participants on these matters, as these initial impressions can shape their overall perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with casual gaming, especially in its role as an advertising medium for video ads.

5.1.1 Different experiences form different attitudes

In the exploration of the realm of casual gaming, the study delves into the diverse experiences, both direct and indirect, of marketers as they significantly shape attitudes toward casual gaming as an advertising medium (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). By analyzing these, the study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the factors influencing marketers' perceptions and attitudes toward casual gaming, ultimately producing insights into piloting and adoption of CGAM.

The perceptions and attitudes towards gaming, as indicated by the interview data, vary among participants based on their direct personal experiences. According to Sethna and Blythe (2019), attitudes are acquired predispositions toward a specific behavior, highlighting a connection between an individual and an object, where neutrality in this relationship is elusive. P1 reflects a negative stance on gaming, expressing concerns like the absence of social interactions and feelings of isolation. In contrast, P2, P3, and P4

showcase a more favorable outlook, perceiving gaming as a serotonin booster, a means of social connection, and a platform to traverse diverse mental states. The genesis of these positive attitudes is predominantly rooted in direct gaming experiences (Sethna & Blythe, 2019), as evident in the experiences shared by P2, P3, and P4. Conversely, some participants' adverse attitude toward gaming at large can be traced back to an indirect experience and synthetic perceptions rather than first-hand encounters such as P1's perceptions through her son and external sources.

Limited experience with casual gaming is evident among the participants, with P1 lacking any substantial gaming experience and P2, P3 and P4 primarily engaging in hardcore gaming, despite P3 occasionally playing casual games on mobile. P3, interestingly, has active casual gamers in his social circle, namely his mother and aunt. P2 states that from his active casual gaming years in high school *"it is reduced a lot from the age of twenty onwards"*. P4 lacks direct experience with casual gaming but demonstrates a robust indirect experience gained through interactions with friends. Conversely, P5 mentions ongoing engagement with a casual game, though other direct gaming experiences date back to her youth. Willsson and Leaver (2016) assert that individuals who play casual games might not readily identify themselves as casual gamers. This assertion finds moderate support in the participants' responses, such as P3's and P5's, where individuals played casual games but did not explicitly identify as casual gamers.

The impact of identifying as a casual gamer becomes apparent in the level of engagement and involvement with casual games. Those who identify as casual gamers, according to King and the others (2010), likely possess a more nuanced understanding of the casual gaming experience, affecting their motivations, perceptions, and attitudes towards casual gaming. Attitudes towards casual gaming are subjective and can be influenced by self-identification (Sethna & Blythe, 2019; Hull, 2017a). This subjective point of view and aspect of perception influence in other contexts also (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). For instance, in the context of gaming, P2, who labels himself as a very active gamer, demonstrates a notably positive attitude toward gaming in general, extending to

positive attitudes in advertising within that domain, including CGAM, despite his lack of direct experience on casual gaming. The more positive attitude can be also noted to be prevalent in all the participants who self-identify themselves as active gamers (P2–P4).

On the other hand, P5 serves as an illustrative case of someone who refrains from identifying herself as a casual gamer, despite engaging exclusively in this form of gaming. Consequently, her overall attitude toward gaming lacks the same positivity expressed by P2, P3, and P4, and she demonstrates a notably more neutral stance toward advertising in any gaming context. The significance of self-identification in gaming emerges as a distinct influence on attitudes towards CGAM. Notably, this study's findings suggest that self-identification into gaming may be an even more influential factor than direct personal experience from casual gaming in shaping individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards CGAM. This conclusion can be supported by many studies (Sethna & Blythe, 2019; Hull, 2017a; King et al., 2010), as the literature corroborates the notion that self-identification is a potent factor in shaping attitudes, potentially overshadowing the impact of direct personal experience in certain contexts. Particularly this can be true in the context of casual gaming, that Willsson and Leaver's (2016) claim supports by noting that individuals who play casual games do not usually identify themselves as casual gamers, and therefore the direct experience on casual gaming can be easily overshadowed by self-identification into gaming. However, this finding must be comprehended to not include overshadowing the direct experience on CGAM – purely individual's direct experience on casual gaming.

Instead in the context of CGAM, all participants, except P4, had limited direct experience. P4 had clearly a positive attitude towards CGAM, as the other ones who lacked the direct experience, expressed more cautious attitude. However, P2 and P3 who had a gamer background expressed more positive attitude towards CGAM than the participants with no gamer background. In the formation of attitude, direct experience, is the most influential factor, according to Sethna and Blythe (2019). In the absence of direct experience, individuals, often rely on indirect experiences and synthetic perceptions,

which are constructed from various sources such as media, cultural narratives, and the opinions of others (Sethna & Blythe, 2019). Majority of the casual gaming information of participants come from synthetic perceptions as also the real indirect experience on CGAM is clearly limited based on their answers. Hence, social and cultural factors, including societal norms and stereotypes associated with gaming, can significantly influence one's perceptions in the absence of personal encounters (Blinka & Zabkar, 2015; Sethna and Blythe 2019). Therefore, the lack of direct experience may lead individuals to form attitudes based on the amalgamation of indirect sources, societal views, and preconceived notions prevalent in their environment.

5.1.2 Understanding of gaming terminology influences attitudes

Additionally, the participants' pervasive asymmetry and confusion surrounding the terms 'casual gaming' 'gaming' and 'mobile gaming' poses a challenge to the overall awareness and understanding of casual gaming. The interchangeability of these terms often leads to an amalgamation of their distinct meanings (Willson & Leaver, 2016). This conflation introduces a level of ambiguity that muddles the perception of casual gaming as a whole (Willson & Leaver, 2016). The consequences of such misalignment extend to the marketing and advertising domain, where a lack of clarity on what constitutes casual gaming can negatively influence its perceived characteristics and implementation. Clarifying the distinctions between these terms is vital not only for refining academic discourse but also for fostering a more nuanced and accurate awareness of casual gaming within both industry and public spheres.

5.1.3 Individual differences influencing attitudes

Individual differences play a crucial role in shaping the adoption and willingness to pilot CGAM. This broad concept encompasses various factors, and for this study, we can delve into individual differences using Rogers' (2003) classification of innovator types and their

reactions to innovations like CGAM. According to Rogers (2003), individuals who adopt innovations sooner exhibit distinct traits, leading to the identification of five adopter categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. While it may be challenging to categorize participants into specific adopter types based solely on interviews, certain expressions may hint at particular traits. Especially all participants' express many client advertisers tendency to fall into the late majority who adopt innovations after they have become more established and widely accepted (Rogers, 2003).

The key understanding is that people tend to have different adoption traits, and during the early stages of adopting a new innovation like CGAM, the majority typically falls into the categories of early or late majority, observing the experiences of innovators and early adopters cautiously (Rogers, 2003). Innovators and early adopters may respond well to messages emphasizing novelty and innovation, while the early and late majority might be swayed by messages highlighting the widespread adoption and positive experiences of others (Rogers, 2003). Acknowledging the cautious nature of the majority categories, casual gaming ad sellers can focus on building trust. Offering trials, case studies, and transparent information about the performance of CGAM can instill confidence in potential adopters.

5.1.4 Role of social influence in attitude formation

The genuine extent of social influences is challenging to precisely measure based on the insights gathered from the interviews. Nevertheless, a prevailing acknowledgment of the impact of social influences is evident. Expressions like P3's, *"after all, we have our own biases about what works and what doesn't",* highlight the recognition of inherent biases as a form of social influence within various marketing teams and agencies. People consider others' behavior as a trustable source of information, thus tend to act similarly (Saleem & Ellahi, 2017). A Moreover, the role of informational social influence gains prominence when individuals encounter limited knowledge, time constraints, noticeable

risks, or a reluctance to make independent decisions (Lee et al., 2011). These factors, to some extent, hold validity in the context of CGAM.

The social dynamics observed among participants and their client advertisers exhibit considerable variation, making a comprehensive analysis challenging based solely on these interviews. Organizational culture emerges as a key determinant, with some organizations fostering a more hierarchical structure where influence flows downward, while others with a collaborative and flat structure encourage bidirectional influence, as described by P1. Recognizing the significant role of social dynamics, especially in contexts where awareness is lacking, remains important for casual gaming ad sellers. For instance, identifying influential individuals, as noted by P4, within media and marketing agencies associated with casual gaming becomes pivotal. These influencers can wield significant impact on the perceptions and behaviors of their more cautious colleagues. The complex interplay of social influences, organizational structures, and individual biases underscores the intricate nature of decision-making within the realm of CGAM.

5.2 Thoughts on casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM) in the context of casual gaming video ads

The second section initiated and enhanced the discourse on casual gaming as an advertising medium (CGAM). This segment delves specifically into casual gaming, examining it from the perspective of an advertising medium. The objective of this part is to fulfil the first sub-objective's part to understand the perceptions and attitudes of non-gaming brands' marketers towards video ads in casual games. This section explores this through the existing theories of brand equity, audience analysis, and IMC theory.

5.2.1 Brand perspective

From a brand equity perspective, certain participants underscore brand safety and the necessity of reaching the right target audience for brand awareness in casual gaming video ads. These concerns align with the issues highlighted by Smartclip (2023) and Jack Koch (2023), who emphasize marketers' apprehensions about brand safety and the challenges in achieving key brand awareness objectives with casual gaming video ads. Conversely, P4, an experienced individual in running casual gaming video campaigns, praises the exceptional brand awareness achieved by featuring only one video ad per ad break—an uncommon occurrence in today's video ad landscape filled with lengthy breaks and numerous advertising brands. Despite this, the predominant concern among participants revolves around reaching the right target audience, making brand awareness metrics such as reach a significant focal point. This aligns with Indeed's (2023a) observation that marketers typically express the most concern about reach what comes to brand metrics.

The more substantial apprehension within CGAM, concerning brand equity, is related to brand image. All participants acknowledge concerns among client advertisers about brand safety, especially when associated with violent or war-themed casual games, yet only P1 is concerned about it herself. However, the broader apprehension revolves around the overall positive nature of casual gaming advertising landscape and its potential impact on brand image (P1–P5). These concerns regarding a positive brand image resonate with the observations of Henning-Thurau and others (2013), who note that brands seek to advertise in environments aligning with specific interests, values, or contexts, thereby enhancing their overall brand image. This is further emphasized by P1's insight into advertisers' inclination to associate with sustainability, indicating that while brand safety is a prevalent concern, the impact on a positive brand image is even more substantial. The importance of positive brand image is not particularly a surprising finding, as countless studies suggest (Keller, 2016; 2009; Lienkova, 2013; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Fombrun & van Riel 2004; Kapferer, 1997). However, in the context of casual gaming in Finland, brand safety has been highlighted more than the influence on

positive brand image (Smartclip, 2023). This study challenges the current casual gaming industry to highlight more the influence on positive brand image to enhance Finnish marketers' and advertisers' willingness to pilot and implement casual gaming video ads into their marketing mix.

5.2.2 Audience perspective

Concern on casual gaming target audience is linked to many concerns. Hence this is a concern that connects to the brand part as well. However, the target audience part may be one of the clearest concern on the whole CGAM topic, therefore this must be discussed and analyzed more deeply. In the literature review, target audience aspect was introduced by audience analysis by McQuail (1997). McQuail (1997) identified two main forms of audience diversity, *internal and external diversity*, that in the context of casual gaming and based on the responses of participants are key concepts, that through responses should be discussed and analyzed.

Briefly described, internal diversity represents heterogeneous audience and external diversity homogenous (McQuail, 1997). Other media (or specific channels) have audiences with socially diverse demographics, whereas others can occasionally appear to have very homogeneous and picked composition (McQuail, 1997). The impression of external diversity in casual gaming can be clearly seen from many participants' answers and its predominant perception of casual gaming audience. Also the existing literature notes well the misperception here of the 'typical' gamer and the stereotype of young men (Smartclip, 2023), that the mainstream gaming industry caused in the past generation of gaming (Willson & Leaver, 2016).

Most of the participants' perceptions and attitudes on target audience in casual gaming environment are in line with the stereotype of typical gamer, a young male. Especially this is true with participants who lacked most direct experience on gaming and casual gaming. All participants, except P4, express casual gaming audience primarily as young

males. Expressions such as *“young people - a hobby for young adults”, “you get the impression that gaming is perhaps for younger people”,* and *“it's mobile gaming, which was played in school”* indicate associations with the stereotype. These citations are perfectly in line with the comments of Sethna and Blythe (2019) about the aspect of *categorization* of perceptions by simplifying complex information by associating it with pre-existing categories – stereotypes of gamers.

However, majority of participants (P2–P5) also note the wider demographic reach of casual games and seem on the surface level to be well-aware of the popularity of casual games, for example among older women (Kinnunen, Tuomela, & Mäyrä, 2022). Extremely interesting is that the expressed awareness of P2 and P3 with a comment like: *”maybe the stereotype is a sixteen year old boy, but the reality is that everyone plays”* follows with a problem related to categorization of perceptions, that Sethna and Blythe (2019) depict as individuals’ struggle to reconcile the new information with their pre-existing category. In this case information about casual gamers on the pre-existing category of what a ‘typical’ gamer looks like. The prevalent problem of categorization of perceptions can be pointed out clearly with the P2’s and P3’s citations, in which they demonstrate to fall on the bias of associating young males as the audience of casual gaming environment. An even more accurate demonstration of the problem is when even P3 himself notes his own controversy and the prevalent bias he is affected by.

This moment can be said to be one of the key findings of the study as it describes so well the implicit perceptions and attitudes towards casual gaming, and the influential effect of cultural and societal views over factual information absorbed from external sources. This highlights the need of casual gaming ad sellers to educate marketers and advertisers especially about the target audience that particularly is surrounded by societal views and stereotypes. To dispel stereotypes and foster a more accurate understanding of casual gamers, individuals need to engage in experiences that challenge their preconceived notions.

5.2.3 Integrated marketing communications perspective

Analyzing participants' responses through the lens of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) theory is vital as it analyzes the marketing medium choices from a more strategic point of view (Belch & Belch, 2018). Keller (2016) underlines that from this strategic IMC perspective the medium must offer a wide reach to their desired demographic and to align with the target audience. Again, the target audience is in the main role. However, there are many other characteristics of marketing mediums connected to the marketing medium choices and implementation.

Cost of the marketing medium is one factor, according to Keller (2016). In the articles of Smartclip (2023) and IAB (2023), a common misperception on the cost of CGAM was introduced. However, in this study the participants did not have perceptions that would have been in line with this misperception. Conversely, P2 clearly stated that "I actively suggest casual gaming whenever they ask for suggestions, because it's so cost-effective to pilot it anyway, that there's no reason not to try casual gaming." However, it cannot be declared, based on this study, that this is not a common misperception among Finnish marketers. Nonetheless, it can be argued confidently that this type of misperception is way easier to turn down than misperceptions that are more implicit and structural (Sethna & Blythe, 2019; Consalvo, 2017), thus not the most problematic factor to tackle by casual gaming ad sellers.

Keller's second introduced influencing factor on marketing medium choices is contribution which represents the marketers' need for concrete results, data, and effects on communication objectives. From participants' responses it can be drawn that data is mentioned quite frequently. If it is analyzed more thoroughly what kind of data they talk about – data encompassing the target audience. Majority of the participants that data about casual gamers and the buyer personas is the data they are interested in. Again, target audience is the subject that leads the interest and concerns from the perspective of data as well.

In the context of metrics of video ads in casual gaming, video completion rate (VCR) is mentioned by all to be a metric that in general is of course interesting in video advertising, but some participants highlight that in the context of casual gaming the good VCR results must be taken with caution as they felt that it is not really that relevant when they know that video ads shown to casual gamers are either non-skippable or skippable rewarded videos in which the casual gamer must complete the video ad to get the actual reward for the game. Hence, the participants emphasize in this context more the perception of casual gamers engagement with the advertiser brand due to the 100% share of voice by seeing casual gaming video ads to have good attention compared to many other video ad mediums. Hence, the feeling and the perception of a good engagement is overshadowing the actual concrete VCR results. This raises an idea for casual gaming video ad sellers to highlight more the brand visibility part and share of voice compared to other video ad mediums that usually have a lot of other advertising brands.

For the rest Keller (2016) notes commonality, complementarity and cross-effects being criteria that encompass the combined effects of different advertising mediums. These are aspects that marketers think about how elected advertising mediums overlap and reinforce each other and the desired communications objectives (Keller, 2016). Participants talk about these aspects indirectly by analyzing other video ad opportunities available. YouTube is mentioned by many participants and seems to get the most positive attitude among participants due to its cost-efficiency and reach of the target audience, which was highlighted to be extremely good. In contrast, streaming services raise varied opinions. Some participants clearly have very positive attitude towards them but others express concerns including cost-efficiency and brand visibility through the noise of long ad breaks.

5.3 Deciding to implement casual gaming video ads

In this study it is focused on understanding better the perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making activities on piloting video ads in casual gaming due to its underuse and potential in the media and marketing industry, hence understanding influential factors that push marketers towards the implementation stage in which they have the trial of CGAM, that can be, according to Gartner and Riis (2019), considered as an incremental innovation in the media and marketing industry. Before entering the implementation of CGAM stage, based on the Rogers (2013) diffusion of innovation theory, marketers must go through the stages of knowledge, persuasion, and decision.

In the context of implementation of CGAM, knowledge refers to the awareness of marketers, and therefore it is the crucial first stage of CGAM adoption. The awareness of CGAM exhibits a high degree of complexity due to the fragmented and confusing nature of perceptions, attitudes, associations, terminology, and information surrounding it (Smartclip, 2023; IAB, 2023; Willson & Leaver, 2016; Eklund, 2010; Juul, 2010; Kuittinen et al. 2007). The founded data in this study aligns and support this from many perspectives as it is discussed at this point. All the participants state that their clients, the advertisers of non-gaming brands, have not been aware of CGAM and its opportunities. Also among participants, who are working in different media and marketing agencies is diversity in the awareness level. However, seems that inside agencies people tend to be much more aware of CGAM than their clients, deriving from the fact that agencies tend to follow trends and innovations in the media industry more actively than in-house marketers. Differing awareness levels of participants demonstrate that there is still lot to due by the casual gaming ad sellers in this sense. However, it must be comprehended in this complex landscape of misperceptions that purely awareness of facts is not sufficient like it has discussed in example in the context of controversial comments on target audience.

After getting aware of CGAM, marketers move on the persuasion and evaluation stages in which they start to have interest to some extent and they start to evaluate the available options among varied marketing mediums to implement (Rogers, 2003). In this part all the discussed perceived characteristics of CGAM and influencing factors, like brand equity and most importantly target audience, start to influence marketers' evaluation process. In the Roger's (2003) theory model, five factors, *relative advantage*, *compatibility*, *complexity*, *triability*, and *observability,* are introduced to have critical influence in the adoption of an innovation, in this case CGAM. In this context, the data of this study aligns with the theory in terms of relative advantage to be on top influencing factors in the adoption of CGAM (Gartner & Riis, 2019; Rogers, 2003). P4 who has not really major concerns on CGAM, sees clearly the relative advantage of the video ads in the casual gaming environment: *"It's an incredible thing in casual gaming advertising at the moment that there's really just one advertiser per ad break" (P4).* In contrast, a clear relative advantage of casual gaming video ads is not expressed from other participants, although they express interest to some extent: *"there is cautious interest on behalf of media agencies" (P3).* From this kind of expressions it can be clearly seen that some of the participants are in the evaluation stage, and one participant, P4, clearly past that, all the way to the confirmation stage and adoption of CGAM. Interestingly, P2 represents an individual who has done trial of CGAM but has not totally adopted or rejected the medium. It can be seen from his answers that he is interested in it and sees relative advantage in it more than P1, P2, and P3, who don't have trial experience, but has still some concerns also and lack of total awareness for example in the target audience as discussed earlier.

The perception of relative advantage is, based on this study's data, crucial influential factor of marketers' willingness to pilot and implement CGAM. It can be arguably connected to the participants' expressions about the overall concept of the positive *"feeling"* about CGAM as it corresponds to their perception that using CGAM offers advantages over some other advertising mediums. In contrast, negative *"feeling"* of the relative advantage can appear as follows: *"We have had an unnamed client that stopped*

a campaign, because the person in charge sent a message saying that he had 'the feeling' that it wasn't working." (P3). The relative advantage in this context is determined subjectively, hence a wide range of perceptions on relative advantage can be noted among participants and their agencies.

Besides relative advantage, also some of the other four factors introduced by Roger's (2003) can be drawn out of from participants' responses. *Compatibility* and *complexity* can be noted to be P3's one of major concerns as he is specialized in programmatic media buying, thus raises the compatibility of CGAM into their DSP as a crucial factor. He states to choose new mediums to the clients' media mix from mediums that are compatible, non-complex, and do not cause additional work. Moreover, he acknowledges and talks openly to have a bias about the overpower of programmatic advertising and suspecting it to have massive influence in his approach to new mediums. On the other hand, the compatibility and complexity factor do not arise from the other participants' responses, and therefore have more limited support for the found misperception of marketers to perceive CGAM to be difficult to buy (Smartclip, 2023). Thus, they are not seen as the most crucial influencing factors for the adoption of CGAM, although their influence should be acknowledged. However, it can be still argued based on this, that marketers specialized especially into programmatic buying could have similar thoughts and perceptions. This is an issue that could be investigated further in another study with the focus on marketers specialized in programmatic buying, particularly due to agencies tendency to focus on and prefer more and more programmatic media buying behavior (Rautiainen, 2023).

Moreover, *triability* does not raise any concerns among participants in the context of piloting CGAM. In the contrary, for instance P2 emphasizes the cost-efficiency of piloting casual gaming video ads and the low threshold in this sense. However, the discussed market size of Finland and the rather small marketing budgets of many clients are brought up by all participants. Participants reflect that this has a clear negative impact

especially on new marketing mediums and innovations. They refer to clients' tendency to think that "*old is better"* and that they *"can't throw a chunk of money here and there".*

While triability, as mentioned, does not raise concerns among participants, the perceived *observability* can be influenced by the economic context (Rogers, 2003). The smaller audience size of Finland may raise misperceptions of the potential reach and observability of the innovation. This aligns with the notion that innovations are more likely to be adopted in larger markets where the potential benefits, in terms of reach and impact, can be more readily realized (Bass, 2004). To address these challenges, ad sellers of CGAM in smaller markets, such as Finland, should focus on demonstrating the cost-efficiency and effectiveness of piloting casual gaming video ads, emphasizing how even with limited budgets, marketers can achieve significant impact.

All in all, the most influential factor based on the data is the positive "feeling" about CGAM that connects strongly to the perceived relative advantage of CGAM. This aligns with the Roger's claim that relative advantage is one of the key attributes that determines the rate of adoption of an innovation. This alignment between positive emotions and the perception of relative advantage is crucial for the successful adoption and implementation of innovations, as individuals are more likely to embrace new ideas when they anticipate positive outcomes (Rogers, 2003).

6 Conclusions

The primary focus of this study has been to unravel the research objective: "*To increase the understanding of the factors influencing non-gaming brands' marketers underutilization of piloting video ads in casual games.",* and the underlying perceptions, attitudes and decision-making activities. Through an in-depth exploration of their perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making activities, this research endeavors to shed light on the intricate dynamics guiding investment decisions in the realm of casual gaming advertising. The ensuing conclusions will synthesize the multifaceted insights garnered from the study, providing a comprehensive understanding of the driving forces compelling marketers from non-gaming sectors to venture into the arena of video ads within casual games.

The investigation into the factors driving non-gaming brands' marketers to pilot video ads in casual games revealed a nuanced landscape shaped by experiences, perceptions, and attitudes. The study identified direct and indirect experiences as fundamental influencers, emphasizing the impact of marketers' personal gaming history and their exposure to casual gaming environment. This aligns with existing literature underlining the crucial role of experiences in shaping attitudes and adoption decisions (Sethna & Blythe, 2019).

Moreover, individual characteristics of decision-makers emerged as influential factors, indicating that personal traits and preferences play a substantial role in the decision to invest in casual gaming video ads. This aligns with Rogers' (2003) classification of different adopter types, suggesting that the majority of marketers adopt CGAM cautiously, observing the experiences of innovators and early adopters. The early majority becomes pivotal for the widespread acceptance of CGAM, bridging the gap between early adopters and the broader population.

Social influence within agencies is also a notable factor, emphasizing the role of collaborative decision-making activities in marketing teams and agencies. Team-based biases and in-house guidelines about what works in marketing are prevalent actors. Although the level of social influence is challenging to measure precisely, its significance is highlighted when marketers have limited knowledge, face risks in action, and encounter time constraints (Saleem & Ellahi, 2017).

The brand emerged as a key dimension, with the perception of casual gaming video ads influencing positive brand image, a driving force behind marketers' decisions. This aligns with the broader understanding of the impact of advertising on brand perception (Henning-Thurau et al., 2013). The positive brand image aspect appears to have a stronger influence than highlighting brand safety. Additionally, the added value of casual gaming video ads, from the perspective of brand visibility where no other advertisers can be visible in the same ad break, is seen as a key point to emphasize further. However, a negative concern is also noted regarding the brand awareness metric reach, tightly connected to the concept and perception of the target audience, which is the most crucial factor influencing the piloting of casual gaming video ads.

Misperceptions about the target audience of the casual gaming environment stood out as the most notable barrier. The study underscores the importance of dispelling stereotypes and providing accurate information about the diverse demographic reach of casual games (Kinnunen et al., 2022; Willson & Leaver, 2016). As evidence of a very strong level of influence, participants who are well-aware of the broad demographic fell into the target audience bias, even though the factual information about them differed. Emphasis was also placed on the need for comprehensive data about casual gamers and their buyer personas. This lack of data emerged as a hindrance, suggesting that a robust understanding of the audience is crucial for appealing to non-gaming marketers to pilot casual gaming video ads (Willson & Leaver, 2016).

In terms of the adoption process, the study identified the perceived relative advantage of casual gaming video ads as a key influencer. This aligns with the Diffusion of Innovations theory, emphasizing that individuals are more likely to adopt innovations when they perceive them as advantageous (Rogers, 2003). Moreover, the Finnish market size was cited by all as having a clear influence on piloting efforts. This aligns with Bass' (2004) notion that innovations are more likely to be adopted in larger markets where the potential benefits, in terms of reach and impact, can be more readily realized.

Ultimately, Roger's (2003) introduced perceived relative advantage is connected to the participants' expressed positive "feeling" and the perception of good engagement and context, eventually overshadowing concrete metrics like video completion rate in the context of casual gaming video ads. This aligns with the idea that emotional responses and subjective perceptions can play a substantial role in decision-making, as noted by Sethna and Blythe (2019).

In conclusion, the decision-making activities of non-gaming brands' marketers in piloting video ads in casual games are a multifaceted interplay of experiences, individual characteristics, social dynamics, brand perception, target audience understanding, data availability, and the perceived relative advantage – the perceived positive "feeling." These insights provide a comprehensive understanding that can guide marketers and casual gaming ad sellers in navigating the evolving landscape of casual gaming as an advertising medium and enhance the piloting of video ads in this environment among non-gaming brands.

6.1 Managerial implications for casual gaming video ad sellers

In this section, the final subobjective, which is *“to provide managerial implications for casual gaming video ad sellers based on the research findings",* has been addressed and concluded. The implications outlined herein aim to enhance marketers' associations and

perceptions of CGAM, drawing on the most influential factors identified in this study and existing literature.

The outlined implications underscore the crucial necessity for casual gaming ad sellers to proactively educate marketers and advertisers, emphasizing the significance of dispelling societal views and stereotypes surrounding the target audience. To foster a more accurate understanding of casual gamers, it is imperative for individuals to engage in experiences that challenge their preconceived notions.

Casual gaming ad sellers can implement implications through strategic initiatives. Firstly, they should actively engage in **promoting and highlighting diverse representations of gamers in their materials** they create for advertisers, reflecting the varied interests and demographics within the casual gaming community. This approach aligns with Consalvo's (2007) suggestion to challenge stereotypes through media portrayals. Moreover, educational initiatives can involve **creating content that informs the advertisers about gaming habits and preferences**, thus dispelling misconceptions and promoting informed attitudes (Markey & Ferguson, 2017). Lastly, **encouraging direct interaction between advertisers and casual gamers** can be achieved by organizing events or discussions where casual gamers and ad sellers can interact, fostering mutual understanding and breaking down stereotypes (Burgess, Stermer, & Burgess, 2007).

Moreover, casual gaming video ad sellers should proactively **address concerns about brand image by emphasizing the positive aspects** of casual gaming environments. Aligning brands with positive contexts, values, and interests unique to casual gaming can create a distinctive brand image (Henning-Thurau et al., 2013). Implementing tailored game packages, such as a sustainability gaming package (P1), can provide advertisers with an opportunity get feeling of positivity and the perception of positive influence on their brand image.

Also, in the competitive landscape of video ad mediums, casual gaming video ad sellers should **focus on highlighting brand visibility and share of voice**. Emphasizing how casual gaming platforms offer a less cluttered environment compared to other mediums, where ads might get lost in a sea of competitors, can be a compelling selling point.

All in all, the overarching theme for casual gaming ad sellers should be to **communicate the feeling of positivity and the positive context** of the casual gaming environment. It is crucial to proactively foster awareness not only about the opportunities within the casual gaming sphere but also about the nuances that differentiate it from hardcore gaming. Addressing the widespread misperceptions surrounding casual gaming is paramount, emphasizing its distinct characteristics and broad appeal. Moreover, a concerted effort to communicate the term 'casual gaming' and its positive connotations is essential. Moreover, the ad sellers should articulate the growing significance and relevance of casual gaming as an environment that not only accommodates a diverse audience but is progressively gaining prominence each year. By actively shaping a narrative that underscores the positive aspects and expanding influence of casual gaming, ad sellers can contribute to a more informed and optimistic perception within the marketing landscape. This could be done by creating content and materials that evoke positive emotions and associations, reinforcing the idea that casual gaming is a space where consumers can engage with brands in a lighthearted and enjoyable manner. For instance, the use of narrative and storytelling in presentations can play a crucial role in creating a positive emotional connection with the audience (Escalas & Stern, 2003).

Furthermore, some participants see **case studies and success stories** serving as valuable tools in convincing advertisers about the feasibility and benefits of adopting CGAM, but some participants do not especially highlight them as branding video ads results do not really provide any tangible results to illustrate in the form of case studies. However, it can be argued that success stories in the adoption of new innovation can have positive influence on others as the success stories of early adopters influence the adoption of the rest (Rogers, 2003). The positive influence of direct experiences of others is also

supported by many aspects as discussed in this study (Saleem & Ellahi, 2017; Kuan, et al., 2014) and therefore final implication for the ad sellers to foster positive feeling and the positive context of the casual gaming environment.

6.2 Recommendations for future studies

As this study delves into the perspectives of marketers, future research could extend its focus by directly interviewing advertising clients, gaining more depth insights into their perceptions and attitudes regarding casual gaming advertising. Exploring the perspectives of clients could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the decision-making activities and considerations in adopting video ads in casual games.

Given the rising prominence of programmatic media buying in contemporary marketing strategies, a specialized investigation into programmatic marketers' perspectives on casual gaming advertising would be particularly insightful. This trend highlights the evolving landscape of advertising and understanding how programmatic marketers perceive and engage with casual gaming ads could provide valuable insights into emerging marketing practices.

Expanding the scope to explore other casual gaming ad formats presents another avenue for future research. Investigating formats beyond video ads, such as static ads, interactive elements, or branded integrations, would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the diverse advertising possibilities within the casual gaming environment.

Furthermore, future studies could focus on the confirmation stage and strategies for maintaining clients in the casual gaming environment. Exploring the post-adoption phase and strategies for client retention would offer valuable insights into the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of casual gaming advertising initiatives.

These recommendations pave the way for future research endeavors to deepen our understanding of the intricacies involved in the adoption and sustained engagement of marketers and clients in the realm of casual gaming advertising.

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