The Benefits and Nuances of Reaction Videos: A Study of the Effects of User-Generated Content When Marketing Video Games During Pre-Release

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AbstractIII

Video games have become a massive industry that is constantly growing, with its market value being an estimated worth of 245.55 billion USD in 2022. Further, with modern developments in social media and video streaming platforms, user-generated content has become a principal means of marketing video through content creators and influencers. One of the prominent genres of user-generated content on video platforms is the Reaction Video. With these videos being such a relied upon means for spreading and marketing for video games before they release, a better understanding of the benefits and nuances of these videos and their audience would be beneficial for marketers.

Data was collected from 623 undergraduate students at Middle Tennessee State University using a Qualtrics survey. The survey consisted of two sections and included a Reaction Video of a trailer for a recently released video game. Students were asked to watch this trailer and respond with their thoughts on the game and the content creator involved. The results from each question were broken down into individual tables to examine differences in means and responses.

The research questions were developed by examining the change in viewer's opinions and purchase intentions for the video game before and after having watched the reaction video. Results indicate little change in opinions from watching the reaction video. However, many respondents answer that the content creator's reaction and interjection of personality had a positive effect on the trailer, improving audience impressions. While reaction videos do not appear to be decisive in convincing customers

to purchase the game, there is potential in their benefit to the video game trailer watching experience.

Table of Contents

I

Introduction

The video game industry has grown absurdly high in scale, valued in 2022 to be worth a market value of 245.55 billion USD (Fortune Business, 2023). Alongside it, the modern state of social media has also expanded to a scale beyond comprehension. 56.8% of the world's population is estimated to be users of social media, and 72.3% of Americans use social media in particular (University of Maine, 2021). And all of it, every website and mobile app, can be attributed to a root belief: that "content is king," and that content creation is the key to generating success from the internet as a whole (Müller, 2019). Websites like YouTube and Twitch.TV are jammed and crowded with enough creators to fill many niches and appeal to many audiences. Marketing through these creators is the undeniable, rule-of-thumb means for publishers to grab customers' attention (GameIndustry.biz Staff, 2020). Hiring or sponsoring them to create advertisements is not even necessary, and videos that disclose any sponsorship have been shown to be perceived less favorably against independently produced UGC (Müller, 2019). This system of mutual benefit is the basis of marketing through User-generated content, and the kind of exposure it can bring to products.

For video game publishers, marketing through user-generated content is nearly a necessity (GameIndustry.biz Staff, 2020). Because of it, numerous games with otherwise minimal marketing, especially games developed by independent developers that lack the necessary budget to advertise their game on a large scale, have been able to find highly fortunate strokes of success in sprawling and competitive video-game marketplaces. Examples of these unpredictable breakout successes occur because of significant creators

featuring games to their personally massive audience. Such a thing resulted with the 2014 horror game hit *Five Nights at Freddy's*, which was developed and published completely independently by one man, Scott Cawthon. One of the first notable names to feature the humble game was YouTube "Let's Player" Markiplier. Markiplier, whose real name is Mark Fishbach, uploaded his first episode playing the game just four days after its release. It is an episode which, as of the time of this writing, currently has been viewed over 113.1 million times (Markiplier, 2023). The franchise skyrocketed in popularity ever since then, selling millions of copies and spawning massive lines of merchandise, a book series, as well a 2023 Hollywood film distributed by Universal Studios (Andric, 2023).

With such unlimited potential in user-generated content for publishers, developers can apply this exposure during a crucial time for marketing of a game's lifespan: the pre-release era. Publishers often inspire creators to spotlight their games through grand reveals from the publisher, ensuing explosive reactions that are recorded and uploaded by creators. These styles of UGC (user-generated content) are simply referred to as Reaction Videos (Bhat, 2021).

The potential of these Reaction Videos is what deserves to be studied. Despite the phenomenal scale of the video game industry, there is a disappointingly little amount of academic research done regarding the impacts of User Generated Content when it refers to video games. The clear reason is to investigate how successful these videos are in terms of affecting an audience's impression of a game, and whether their intent-to-purchase is positively boosted. Ideally, that is what would be the use of this study: to benefit publishers and marketing teams who are gauging market attitudes toward their upcoming games. However, even more potential benefits lie in data and reception that

can possibly be gathered from these early impressions, such as particular elements that were found favorable or unfavorable or what successfully generated excitement. Researching the nuances of what can be taken from reaction videos may be used to mold future marketing, and even development, choices from then on. For UGC being such a central pillar of all modern marketing, and because of the amount of existing scholarly research on the subject matter being so scarce (Estrella-Ramón, 2017), the impact of UGC in the video game industry merits research.

II

Literature Review

User Generated Content

User-generated content refers to, but is not limited to, images, videos, and broadcasts specifically made and published by users rather than any company figure (Soylemez, 2021). In a time when traditional internet marketing has become increasingly expensive (Rockliffe, 2020), UGC and creators are a goldmine of free promotion and exposure that are proven to be successful in the video-game industry (Estrella-Ramón, 2017), with reports having shown that 54% of social media users browse sites and content when researching products (Singh, 2020). Successful content creators have already cultivated their own brand community, which refers to a "social space where information and experiences about a specific brand are shared among users, or between users and the brand" (Estrella-Ramón, 2017). Creators design around their personal interests; which for video game content creators, this usually means their favored genres of games. They then cultivate their audience through mutual preferences, and the creator's thoughts and opinions become naturally respected and valued by their audience

(Gameindustry.biz Staff, 2020). When a creator gives favorable impressions to a game, the audience's impression is improved, and these positive impressions have been shown to increase sales (Müller, 2019). This holds especially true for niche creators, who often devote more videos to specific series or genres as opposed to more variety-focused content creators.

The Reaction Video Genre

Video and audio content, specifically, has been shown to be more attractive to a viewer's attention than text (Rockliffe, 2020). Other forms of UGC that serve as exposure to video-game products are video reviews and discussion-focused content such as podcasts. However, in the sphere of content creation and especially with sites like YouTube and Twitch.TV, Reaction Videos are one of the top "genres" of content (Bhatt, 2021). It is a simple framework that involves a creator watching another video and expressing their reactions and opinions over what they are watching (Bhatt, 2021). It could be a recorded event posted online or even just another watching something that another creator made.

During the pre-release era of a game, high-quality trailers for hotly anticipated games become the high-quality material for reactions. Even after watching the trailer, the creator may rewatch it several times to analyze and further discuss any notes. For live streamers, they will also have an audience chatroom sharing their own impressions with them to initiate further discussion (Maximilian Dood, 2023). Niche creators in particular also tend to create videos around smaller publisher-released content, like press releases, news articles, and interviews to discuss with their audience (Maximilian Dood, 2020). Many major video game industry events are massively popular for showcasing numerous

major announcements, trailers, and other news. These include the Summer Games Fest, the Nintendo Directs, Playstation's State of Play, and in the past the E3 (or the Electronic Entertainment Expo) trade event, all of which are popular for generating reaction videos from content creators – which can be seen from a search on YouTube.com (YouTube, n.d.).

Thesis Statement and Research Questions

This honors thesis researches a facet of marketing in the video game space that has scarcely been studied academically. Gaining a fuller grasp on the benefits of UGC in the video game industry is an important mission, as developers and publishers already rely so heavily on it as a crutch to support a game's reception from audiences. Having a clear understanding of what to leverage in Reaction Videos can help companies find more tremendous success in designing a marketing strategy. This research was performed through the use of a survey of MTSU students who play video games. Specifically, the thesis explores two research questions:

1. What are the typical impressions left on viewers from Reaction Videos and UGC?
2. How do Reaction Videos and UGC affect consumer purchase behavior?

III

Methodology

In this thesis, a quantitative research project using the survey software, Qualtrics, was employed. The survey was sent to 20,109 currently enrolled Fall 2023 MTSU students via their MTSU email address. In this email, an embedded link took the student directly to the survey. Further, to increase the response rate, one reminder email was delivered through Qualtrics to individuals who have yet to complete the survey. Survey

questions focused on a variety of aspects that relate both to video game playing behavior as well as attitudes and behaviors towards video game-based UGC. The recruitment email and the full survey are available in Appendix A and B, respectively.

Because this survey is targeting video game players, only students who regularly play video games were included in this study. Due to this inclusion requirement and the fact that no honorariums, such as money or prizes, will be given, it was expected that only a 2-3% response rate would be achieved. Of the 20,109 emails sent out, 1,057 students started the survey. After removing respondents that did not provide consent, were under the age of 18, who were not willing to provide their best answers, who failed the attention checks, or who did not complete enough of the survey for analysis purposes, there were 623 usable responses. This represents 58.9% of those that started the survey.

The data was then analyzed through Excel and SPSS, a statistical analysis software. The primary statistical techniques used is simple statistics such as frequencies and means. However, a comparison between means based on gender and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) by hours played per week was also utilized.

Measures

The scales used in the survey were all taken from extant literature. These scales were unidimensional. Attitudes toward video games ($\alpha = 0.908$) was measured using a modified three-item, five-point Likert scale by Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon (2006). Source credibility was measured using two components from Ohanian's (1990) scale. These components included five-items on trustworthiness ($\alpha = 0.881$) and five-items on expertise ($\alpha = 0.877$). Both of the source credibility components used a semantic differential five-point scale. Attitudes towards the Reaction Video ($\alpha = 0.940$) was

measured using a nine-item semantic differential scale from van der Veen and Song (2014) while attitude towards Tekken 8 ($\alpha = 0.959$) was measured using a five-item semantic differential scale adopted from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989). Finally, purchase intentions ($\alpha = 0.828$) were measured using a 3-item, 5-point scale.

IV

Results

Respondent Demographics

All of the 623 respondents were over the age of 18, with 72.9% being the traditional college age between 18 and 22 years of age. The average age of respondents was 22.3 years of age. Of the participants, 54.3% (N = 338) identified as Male while 36.3% (N = 226) identified as Female. Most of the participants were white (80.3%, N = 500) or African American (12.7%, N = 79), with 90.5% (N = 564) being non-Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino. A majority (66.4%, N = 401) were single and never married. When examining the school classification of the respondents, 29.9% (N = 186) of participants were freshman, 12.8% (N = 80) were sophomores, 21.5% (N = 134) were juniors, 23.8% (N = 148) were seniors, and 12% (N =75) were graduate students. Participants were also asked to provide the number of credit hours they typically take per semester with 82.5% (N = 514) being considered full time students who are taking at least 12 credit hours. Next, 49.9% (N = 309) stated they work a part-time job while only 15.4% (N = 96) work full-time and 33.7% (N = 210) stated they were not currently working. Lastly, 54.7% (N = 341) of students made below $10,000 a year and another 22.3% (N = 139) earned between $10,000 and $19,999.

Video Game Background Information

To better understand video game attitudes, respondents were asked how many hours, on average, they played video games per week (See Table 1). Based on the results, it appears that the majority of respondents are likely "casual" video game players since 43% ($N = 268$) only played video games between one and five hours per week. However, 31% ($N = 193$) played video games between six and ten hours per week. The remaining 26% ($N = 162$) played at least 11 hours per week.

Table 1: Hours Played Per Week

Hours Played Per Week	N	%
1-5	268	43%
6-10	193	31%
11-15	84	13.5%
16-20	40	6.4%
20+	38	6.1%

To gain some background information on the common video game platforms respondents use, they were asked to answer what platforms they owned on which video games can be played (See Table 2). Unsurprisingly, the most prevalent systems were mobile phones (51.4%, $N = 320$) and computers (54.9%, $N = 342$), as these are common pieces of technology for the average person. Strictly speaking in terms of video game consoles, the Nintendo Switch was the most likely to be owned (41.9%, $N = 261$), followed by either a PlayStation 5 (18.5%, $N = 115$) or PlayStation 4 (20.7%, $N = 129$). The lowest usage was for the Xbox series of consoles, where it was surprising to see that more respondents reported still owning the older Xbox One (15.1%, $N = 94$) rather than the more recent system, the Xbox Series X (10.9%, $N = 68$).

Table 2: Video Game Console Usage

Video Game Console	N	%
PlayStation 5	129	20.7%
PlayStation 4	115	18.5%
Xbox One	94	15.1%
Xbox Series X	68	10.9%
Nintendo Switch	261	41.9%
PC Digital Distribution Service	342	54.9%
Mobile Phone	320	51.4%
Other	46	7.4%

Since many of the video game platforms offer subscription services, respondents were also asked which ones they currently subscribe to (See Table 3). Based on the information on video game console usage above, it is not surprising that many did not subscribe to any of these services (41.9%, $N = 261$). The three most commonly subscribed to services included Xbox Game Pass (21.6%, $N = 138$), PlayStation Plus (21.3%, $N = 133$), and Nintendo Switch Online (26.3%, $N = 164$).

Table 3: Subscribed Gaming Subscription Services

Subscription Service	N	%
Xbox Live/Game Pass	138	21.6%
PlayStation Plus	133	21.3%
Nintendo Switch Online	164	26.3%
Apple Arcade	22	3.5%
NVidia GeForce Now	18	2.9%
Other	16	2.6%
None	261	41.9%

Besides subscription services, the survey asked respondents about the average number of video games that were purchased within a year (See Table 4). Most respondents purchased either 1-2 video games per year (38.5%, $N = 240$) or 3-5 video

games per year (31.8%, $N = 198$). Only 69 respondents (11.1%) stated that they purchased zero games in the year; however, there could be a variety of reasons for this including the fact that they played predominantly free downloaded games, games were purchased by others (e.g., parents), or games available as part of their subscription service.

Table 4: Number of Video Games Purchased Per Year

Video Games Purchased Per Year	N	%
0	69	11.1
1-2	240	38.5
3-5	198	31.8
6-9	67	10.8
10+	49	7.9

Respondents were also asked to provide their attitudes towards video games (See Table 5). Collectively, respondents generally held positive attitudes towards video games. However, considering only respondents who played video games at least once a week were included in the survey, this result is not surprising.

Table 5: Attitudes towards Video Games

Attitude	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean (SD)
In general, I have a strong interest in video games.	3.5%	6.3%	8.2%	34.3%	47.7%	4.16 (1.050)
Video games are very important to me.	5.9%	12.7%	18.9%	33.7%	28.7%	3.67 (1.187)
Video games matter a lot to me.	5.6%	11.2%	17.7%	35.8%	29.7%	3.73 (1.165)

Social Media Usage for Video Games Information

Since this study focuses on respondents' attitudes and opinions towards watching reaction videos available on social media channels, understanding current social media usage is important. First, respondents were asked which social media platforms they regularly use (See Table 6). Instagram was the dominant choice (74.3%, *N* = 463), followed by Discord (47.7%, *N* = 297), Snapchat (44.6%, *N* = 278), and TikTok (46.7%, *N* = 291). X (27.4%, *N* = 171) and WhatsApp (5.8%, *N* = 36) were the least used channels. Only 16 (2.6%) respondents reported using no form of social media.

Table 6: Social Media Channels Used

Social Media Channel	N	%
X.com (Twitter)	171	27.4%
TikTok	291	46.7%
Instagram	463	74.3%
Snapchat	278	44.6%
WhatsApp	36	5.8%
Discord	297	47.7%
Other	103	16.5%
None	16	2.6%

Second, in order to gain a better understanding of how respondents discovered new video games, a survey question investigated the frequency to which a variety of sources were utilized (See Table 7). Based on the mean, the most commonly used sources were online content creator videos (mean = 3.12), social media (mean = 2.98), or friends or family (mean = 2.91). The lowest frequencies included news websites (mean = 1.57) and TV advertisements (mean = 1.69).

Table 7: Methods of Discovering Video Games

Sources	Never	Sometimes	About Half the Time	Most of the Time	Always	Mean (SD)
Online Content Creator Videos	12.8%	24.4%	16.4%	31.0%	15.4%	3.12 (1.293)
Social Media	11.4%	30.5%	17.8%	29.2%	11.1%	2.98 (1.224)
News Website	56.8%	33.5%	6.4%	2.8%	0.8%	1.57 (0.785)
Online Advertisements	16.4%	47.4%	18.9%	13.8%	3.5%	2.41 (1.029)
TV Advertisements	52%	33.9%	8.5%	4.5%	1.1%	1.69 (0.889)
Friends or Family	9.8%	36.1%	18.8%	24.2%	11.1%	2.91 (1.197)

Respondents were then asked more specifics regarding video game contact viewing for websites such as YouTube or Twitch.tv. Using a 5-point scale where 1 = never and 5 = very often, a majority of respondents (58.2%, *N* = 363) watched video game content either very often (4) or often (5) via websites while only 7.1% (*N* = 44) never watched content in this manner (mean = 3.65). In addition, using the same scale, respondents were asked the likelihood of following video game content creators on social media. Respondents were less likely to follow video game content creators as 20.5% (*N* = 128) answered never while 30% (*N* = 187) answered very often or often (mean = 2.78). This shows that most respondents do not use social media to further absorb video game content unless it otherwise appears on their feed.

To investigate how credible respondents generally find video game content creators to be, they were asked a general credibility question using a 5-point scale where 1 = very uncredible and 5 = very credible. Most respondents (66.6%, *N* = 415) found content creators to be somewhat or very credible, which supports that content creators are a credible source for information (mean = 3.68). Even though respondents deemed content creators credible, they did not frequently watch reaction videos or reaction

livestreams. A majority of respondents (54.4%, *N* = 339) watched these videos either very rarely or never (mean = 2.52). Furthermore, respondents did not search for reaction videos when new video game trailers were released, as almost 50% (*N* = 310) of respondents stated that they never searched for this type of content (mean = 1.93).

Attitudes and Behaviors towards Tekken 8 and Social Media Content Creators

One of the goals of this thesis is to understand the attitudes and behaviors toward reaction videos for upcoming video game releases. To do this, it was important to find a currently published reaction video for a video game that had yet to be released. Because of this, the video game Tekken 8 was used. This video game was not released to the public until January 26, 2024. Prior to showing respondents the reaction video, familiarity with the video game was assessed. Most respondents (58.4%, *N* = 364) were not familiar at all with Tekken 8 and 25.2% (*N* = 157) were slightly familiar with the video game. This highlights that the video game selected for this study was not well known to respondents. A single item question also asked about the purchase intentions as it relates to this new game. Most respondents (69.3%, *N* = 432) were extremely unlikely to purchase Tekken 8 once it was released while only 4.4% (*N* = 27) were somewhat likely or extremely likely to purchase this video game. This is not unexpected considering respondents were not familiar with this game prior to this study.

After asking Tekken 8 familiarity and purchase intentions, respondents were then asked familiarity with the video content creator named Unroolie. The primary reason this question was included was to gauge prior awareness of this content creator since it could impact future results. An overwhelming majority of respondents (95%, *N* = 592) were not

at all familiar with Unroolie. This is not surprising since this particular content creator was selected because he currently has a relatively low number of subscribers (48.9k) on YouTube.

Respondents were then shown a reaction video by Unroolie for the Tekken 8 game. To make sure respondents had not seen the video previously, after viewing the video, respondents were asked if they had watched this video previously. As expected, 94.7% ($N = 590$) had not.

After watching the video, respondents were then asked about the source credibility of Unroolie, focusing on the trustworthiness and expertise components (See Table 8). Overall, Unroolie's credibility was mostly neutral to mildly positive with averages ranging from 2.94 to 3.81, on a 5-point scale. Looking at the individual items, the lowest mean score related to Unroolie's persuasiveness (mean = 2.94) while his highest mean score was based on his experience (mean = 3.81). Essentially, respondents did not find Unroolie highly credible nor did they perceive him as being uncredible.

Table 8: Credibility of Unroolie After Video

Attitude	1	2	3	4	5	Mean (SD)
Trustworthiness						
• Not Dependable - Dependable	3.5%	6.7%	55.2%	26.8%	7.7%	3.28 (0.840)
• Dishonest-Honest	3.2%	3.2%	36.8%	32.3%	24.6%	3.72 (0.976)
• Unreliable-Reliable	3.4%	7.5%	54.1%	27%	8%	3.29 (0.848)
• Insincere-Sincere	5.1%	6.3%	23.9%	33.2%	31.5%	3.80 (1.108)
• Untrustworthy- Trustworthy	3.4%	5.5%	52.3%	29.7%	9.1%	3.36 (0.852)
Expertise						
• Not an Expert-Expert	5%	11.1%	44.8%	31%	8.2%	3.26 (0.938)
• Inexperienced-Experienced	3.5%	3%	27.8%	40%	25.7%	3.81 (.970)
• Unknowledgeable-Knowledgeable	3.9%	3.4%	29.1%	41.4%	22.3%	3.75 (0.966)
• Unqualified-Qualified	3.5%	4.8%	44.1%	36.4%	11.1%	3.47 (0.883)
• Unskilled-Skilled	3.9%	4.2%	57%	26.8%	8.2%	3.31 (0.833)
• Unpersuasive-Persuasive	15.9%	16.4%	34.3%	25%	8.3%	2.94 (1.175)

Furthermore, respondents were then asked to provide their attitudes towards the Reaction Video based on eight different items, using a 5-point scale (See Table 9). Again, attitudes were mostly neutral with averages ranging from 2.82 for the video being informative to 3.48 for the video being believable.

Table 9: Post-Video Attitudes towards Reaction Video

Attitude	1	2	3	4	5	Mean (SD)
Uninformative-Informative	14.9%	23.3%	33.7%	21.3%	6.7%	2.82 (1.132)
Unbelievable-Believable	5.3%	8.3%	35.5%	35.3%	15.6%	3.48 (1.023)
Ineffective-Effective	14.3%	15.1%	31.8%	27%	11.9%	3.07 (1.21)
Unconvincing-Convincing	11.1%	14.4%	35.6%	28.1%	10.8%	3.13 (1.133)
Bad-Good	6.3%	7.9%	38.5%	32.4%	14.9%	3.42 (1.038)
Unpleasant-Pleasant	6.1%	10%	38.2%	30.7%	15.1%	3.39 (1.052)
Unappealing-Appealing	11.9%	17.8%	29.7%	28.7%	11.9%	3.11 (1.186)
Unlikeable-Likeable	8%	11.6%	30.8%	32.1%	17.5%	3.39 (1.142)

Respondents were then asked how likely they would watch more of Unroolie's videos after watching this video in order to investigate the benefit that these reaction videos may have on the content creator for garnering new fans. Results were largely negative with 68.7% ($N = 428$) stating that it was extremely unlikely or somewhat unlikely that they would watch more of his videos (mean = 1.97). Only 12.2% ($N = 76$) stated that they were somewhat or extremely likely to watch more of his videos. This means that the video still could pose a small benefit to the content creator in comparison to the majority.

To determine if this reaction video had an impact on Tekken 8, multiple survey questions were posed. First, respondents were asked how the YouTuber's commentary impacted the trailer for Tekken 8. Over half (50.8%, N = 316) thought that this video either somewhat or very positively impacted the game (mean = 3.45). Second, respondents were asked how the YouTuber's commentary impacted interest in Tekken 8 itself. Respondents had a more neutral response to this question with 59.6% of respondents ($N = 371$) answering "Neither positively nor negatively." However, 30.8% ($N = 192$) believed the video somewhat or extremely positively impacted Tekken 8 while only 9.7% ($N = 60$) felt it somewhat or extremely negatively impacted Tekken 8. This shows that although the impact was relatively neutral, there were some respondents who believed reaction videos, such as the one presented, would have a positive impact on the video game. Next, respondents were asked about their attitudes toward Tekken 8 after watching the reaction video, using a 5-point scale (See Table 10). Again, results were generally neutral to somewhat positive as mean scores fell between 3 and 4.

Table 10: Attitudes Toward Tekken 8 Post-Video

Attitude	1	2	3	4	5	Mean (SD)
Bad-Good	2.6%	6.3%	47.4%	30.8%	13%	3.45 (0.888)
Dislike-Like	3.7%	10.4%	48.2%	26.3%	11.4%	3.31 (0.935)
Unpleasant-Pleasant	3.2%	6.4%	50.1%	29.9%	10.4%	3.38 (0.875)
Negative-Positive	2.7%	7.4%	45.4%	33.5%	10.9%	3.43 (0.881)
Unfavorable-Favorable	4.3%	10.4%	48.3%	26.6%	10.3%	3.28 (0.937)

Finally, respondents were asked about future behaviors as it relates to purchase intentions and word of mouth (See Table 11t). On each of these items, respondents were very negative as the majority answered that they were extremely or somewhat unlikely to engage in the behavior. However, when you compare the purchase intentions prior to watching the reaction video to after watching the reaction video, purchase intentions were statistically higher afterwards ($t = -8.308$, $p < .001$; Mean Pre = 1.56 vs. Mean Post = 1.86). This shows that watching the reaction video did indeed lead to higher purchase intentions, which should have a positive impact on the video game company.

Table 11: Likelihood of Future Behaviors

Attitude	Extremely Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Neither Likely nor Unlikely	Somewhat Likely	Extremely Likely	Mean (SD)
Purchase Tekken 8	55.1%	17%	17.2%	8.5%	2.2%	1.86 (1.117)
Recommend Tekken 8 To Friend or Family	51.7%	14.6%	17.7%	13.2%	2.9%	2.01 (1.217)
Share Tekken 8 on Social Media	70.1%	11.1%	13.8%	4.3%	0.6%	1.54 (0.929)

Comparison in Attitudes and Intentions

To investigate if there were differences in attitudes and intentions, a series of analysis of variances (ANOVAs) and comparison between means were completed. Differences were examined based on two aspects: gender and the video game hours played per week. In addition to the individual survey questions related to familiarity and frequency, differences were also examined for the scales related to attitudes towards video games, reaction videos, Tekken 8, source credibility, and purchase intentions. Because these scales were deemed unidimensional and reliable, each scale was summed for analysis purposes. For gender, only males and females were considered. For the video game hours played per week, three groups were used (1 – 5 hours played per week, 6 – 10 hours played per week, and More than 10 hours played per week). For any differences found based on hours played per week, a Bonferroni analysis was used in order to determine what specific differences existed.

For gender, there were four significant differences found. Males exhibited significantly stronger attitudes toward video games than females ($t = 24.848$, $p < .001$). Males were also more frequently to watch video game content on websites such as YouTube or Twitch.tv ($t = 21.850$, $p < .001$) as well as discover new video games through watching content creators ($t = 7.523$, $p = .006$) than females. Finally, males were more familiar with Tekken 8 than females ($t = 49.007$, $p < .001$). There were no significant differences between males and females for any of the remaining constructs.

For the video game hours played per week, there were five significant differences found. Similar to gender, there were differences in means based on frequency of watching video game content on the web ($F = 19.225$, $p < .001$) as well as discovering

new video games through watching content creators ($F = 8.170$, $p < .001$). In both cases, respondents who played video games more than 10 hours per week were more likely to watch video content and discover new video games through watching content creators than those who played less than 10 hours per week. There were also differences in the means for how often individuals follow video game content creators on social media ($F = 6.732$, $p = .001$). Respondents who played video games more than 10 hours per week would more frequently follow video game content creators on social media than those who only played 1-5 hours per week. Furthermore, familiarity of Tekken 8 also was impacted by the number of video game hours played ($t = 10.744$, $p < .001$). Respondents who played video games for more than 10 hours per week were more familiar with Tekken 8 than those who played video games less than 10 hours per week. Finally, statistically significant differences were found for the construct, attitudes towards video games ($t = 61.344$, $p < .001$). Respondents who played video games over 10 hours per week had stronger attitudes towards video games than respondents who played video games less than 10 hours per week. Respondents who played video games for 6-10 hours per week also had stronger attitudes than respondents who only played 1-5 hours per week. No other significant differences were found.

V

Discussion and Implications

Results from the study aligned with many of the pre-conceptions and expectations in terms of what the modern marketing landscape of young people and video games looks like. Unsurprisingly, most respondents indicated they discovered new video games through means like social media as well as friends or family. However, the most

frequently used method to discover new video games was via Online Content Creators, indicating that video game companies may desire utilizing content creators as part of their marketing strategy. These content creators were also deemed as a credible source of information. While other means of marketing, like news websites or television commercials, still have limited value, online forms of user-generated content are the most beneficial methods for marketing, likely because of their wide reach, their free cost (unless a video is otherwise sponsored by a company), and the trustworthiness of the online content creators. It is important to note that respondents were less likely to follow specific content creators on social media or search for reaction video content; therefore, video game companies and content creators would need to find ways to get this content on respondent's social media feeds by using marketing techniques like sponsored ads or posts.

In this study, an unknown content creator (Unroolie) for a video game not yet released to the public (Tekken 8) was used to gauge credibility, attitudes, and purchase intentions. Results showcase that even though Unroolie was not a familiar YouTuber, he was considered to be reasonably sincere, honest, experienced, and knowledgeable. In other words, he was deemed credible by respondents. This is important as it shows that even unfamiliar content creators can be viewed as a credible source. If a more popular or familiar content creator were used, it is likely that results would be even more favorable.

Since respondents were unlikely to search out reaction videos for new video games, the marketing benefits of these reaction videos might seem doubtful. However, after respondents watched the reaction video, respondents overall were still relatively positive. While many did not consider the reaction video to be informative, that could

also have been impacted by the trailer itself being one focused on visual gameplay rather than features or other game information. Overall, respondents seem to consider reaction videos to be fairly believable, good, and likeable. This may showcase how content creators need to be considerate of the topic area of focus in their video. It may be worthwhile for content creators to create different types of reaction videos based on the target audience for that specific reaction video. For example, reaction videos focusing on visual gameplay or technical specifications of a video game may have a different target audience from reaction videos focusing on the video game features. Some content creators may also want to specialize in a specific reaction video style, so they are viewed as someone with more credibility and expertise in that genre.

Respondents also generally agreed that Unroolie had a small, positive impact on their attitudes towards both the Tekken 8 trailer and Tekken 8. Amongst the average gamer, the enjoyment itself of the trailers may be enhanced when a creator is reacting to it alongside the viewer. Of course, the video presented was a YouTuber having an explosively positive reaction to the trailer they were watching for a game that they were excited about being released. Impressions may have been different had the YouTuber been somebody more critical or unenthused about what they were watching.

However, in terms of how likely the reaction video will be to affect future behaviors, results were less promising. An overwhelming majority of students stated that they were extremely unlikely to purchase Tekken 8. This was an unsurprising result considering how few students expressed having adequate knowledge of the game. Even though purchase intentions were still negative after watching the reaction video, there was a statistically significant difference between purchase intentions pre-reaction video

and post-reaction video. In other words, purchase intentions were slightly higher after watching the reaction video, which could positively impact video game sales, if only marginally. Fewer still expressed any intentions for sharing about Tekken 8 to family members, friends, or on social media. Overall, it appears that reaction videos are not necessarily effective in selling viewers on video games even when the reaction video is positive towards that video game. This does not mean that reaction videos can not be valuable or influential. Because of this, video game companies should still embrace these styles of user-generated content and experiment with ways to integrate them with marketing efforts, especially since these results did show marginal gains in purchase intentions. However, based on these results, video game companies should not focus exclusively on reaction videos to encourage purchase behavior but instead need to consider this as part of their overall marketing strategy.

VI

Limitations and Future Research

As with all academic research, a study's limitations are nothing more than opportunities for future research. First, this study was limited since all participants were Middle Tennessee State University students. In the future, it would be beneficial to collect additional data from a variety of demographics and geographic areas beyond university students in a single state to increase generalizability. In addition, this study focused on an unfamiliar video game that had yet to be released. Future research should compare these results to a video game that is more popular or familiar. Besides the unfamiliar video game, the content creator selected was also unfamiliar to respondents. Selecting a more familiar content creator may yield different results. In order to improve

response rates, the reaction video selected for this study was purposely short. It is possible a longer reaction video which enabled the creator to properly review the video game and explain their full, curated thoughts past their initial reactions might lead to different results. Furthermore, there was a large female response base in this survey. However, fewer females than males seemed to have knowledge or interest in Tekken 8, which could be perceived as a very masculine game. A different, more gender-neutral appealing game could have altered the survey results. Also, Tekken 8 could be considered a somewhat niche game within the broad scope that is the greater gaming marketplace. Responses may have been different had a game with more broad appeal had been used for this study.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Subject: Please take this survey so I can finish my honor's thesis

Body of the Email:

Dear xxxx,

My name is Trevor Golter and I'm working on my honors thesis. I need your help by completing this short survey. This survey is an extremely important part of my honors thesis. Without this, I will not be able to complete my honors program.

Study Description and Purpose: This online survey is designed to help examine attitudes and behaviors towards reaction videos for the video game industry.

IRB Approval Details:

- Study Title: Reaction Video Study for Video Game Industry
- Protocol ID: IRB-FY2024-112
- Approval Date: 11/28/2023
- Primary Investigator: Trevor Golter
- Institution: MTSU, Marketing; Jones College of Business
- Faculty Advisor: Diane Edmondson

Duration: Completing the study will take less than 12 minutes.

Target Population: MTSU students who play video games at least one hour per week.

Risks & Benefits: The risk to you by participating in this survey is no more than can be expected in daily life or normal use of the internet. **There are no direct benefits to you.** Nonetheless, the intention of the study is to provide insight regarding attitudes and behaviors towards reaction videos for upcoming video games.

Contact Information: If you have any questions you can contact Trevor Golter at ttg2s@mtmail.mtsu.edu or Diane Edmondson at diane.edmondson@mtsu.edu, (Marketing Department, College of Business, Middle Tennessee State University). Research at Middle Tennessee State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board.

You will be given a chance to read the entire informed consent to assist you make a final determination.

Please access the survey by clicking the Qualtrics link in the bottom of this email.

Thanks in advance for participating in this survey!

Appendix B

Honors Thesis Survey

Start of Block: IRB

Q1 Are you 18 years old or older?

- o Yes, I am 18 years old or older (1)
- o No, I am under 18 years old (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you 18 years old or older? != Yes, I am 18 years old or older

Q2 Thank you so much for your participation in this short survey!

Information and Disclosure Section:

Purpose: This research project is designed to help us better understand attitudes towards reaction videos in the gaming industry.

Description: This project involves the completion of an online survey. As part of this study, you will be presented with a series of questions. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. Please answer the questions honestly and thoughtfully; the value of this research depends on you. You must answer every question.

Duration: The whole activity should take less than 12 minutes.

Here are your rights as a participant: Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may stop the survey at any time. If you leave an item blank by either not clicking or entering a response, you may be warned that you missed one, just in case it was an accident. Some items may require a response to accurately present the survey.

Risks & Discomforts: The risk to you by participating in this survey is no more than can be expected in daily life or normal use of the internet.

Benefits: Although there will be no direct benefits due to taking part in this study, the intention of the study is to provide insight to the researcher regarding attitudes and behaviors towards the video game industry.

Identifiable Information: All responses are anonymous. You will NOT be asked to provide identifiable personal information. Your answers will not be tied to you in any way. Internet Protocol addresses will not be collected by the researcher. Responses will be reported only by grouping answers.

Compensation: There is no compensation by the investigators for participating in this study. Confidentiality: All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may

be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections, if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

Contact Information: If you should have any questions about this research study or possibly injury, please feel free to contact Trevor Golter by email at ttg2s@mtmail.mtsu.edu OR Diane Edmondson by email at diane.edmondson@mtsu.edu. You can also contact the MTSU Office of compliance via telephone (615 494 8918) or by email (compliance@mtsu.edu).

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. We greatly appreciate your help! Please mark the circle below to indicate you give your consent to using the information provided for this research.

THIS PAGE MAY BE PRINTED AND KEPT BY EACH PARTICIPANT Research at Middle Tennessee State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Middle Tennessee State University, 2269 Middle TN Blvd, Murfreesboro, TN 37132, Email: irb_information@mtsu.edu, Tel: 615 898 2400

Again, your participation is greatly appreciated, and thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

- o I give my consent to use the information provided for this research (1)
- o I wish not to participate in the above survey (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Thank you so much for your participation in this short survey! Information and Disclosure Section... = I wish not to participate in the above survey

Q3 We care about the quality of our data. In order for us to get the most accurate measures of your opinions, it is important that you thoughtfully provide your best answers to each question in this survey. Do you commit to thoughtfully provide your best answers to each question in this survey?

- o I will provide my best answers (1)
- o I will not provide my best answers (2)
- o I can't promise either way (3)

Skip To: End of Survey If We care about the quality of our data. In order for us to get the most accurate measures of your... != I will provide my best answers

End of Block: IRB

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q38 On average, how many hours do you play video games each week?

- o None (1)
- o 1-5 hours (2)
- o 6-10 hours (3)
- o 11-15 hours (4)
- o 16-20 hours (5)
- o More than 20 hours (6)

Skip To: End of Survey If On average, how many hours do you play video games each week? = None

Page Break

Q7 On which platforms do you play video games? (Please select all that apply)

1. PlayStation 5 (1)
2. PlayStation 4 (2)
3. Xbox One (3)
4. Xbox Series X (4)
5. Nintendo Switch (5)
6. PC Digital Distribution Services (Steam, Epic Games, Battle.net, etc.) (6)
7. Mobile Phones (8)
8. Other (Please specify). (7)
   _____

Q1 On average, how many video games do you personally purchase in a year?

- o 0 (1)
- o 1-2 (2)
- o 3-5 (3)
- o 6-9 (4)
- o 10+ (5)

Q2 What video game subscription services do you currently subscribe to? (Please select all that apply)

1. Xbox Game Pass (1)

2. Apple Arcade (2)
3. Nintendo Switch Online (3)
4. Playstation Plus (4)
5. NVidia GeForce Now (5)
6. Other, please specify: (6) _____
7. None (7)

Page Break

Q59 Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
In general, I have a strong interest in video games. (1)	o	o	o	o	o
Video games are very important to me. (2)	o	o	o	o	o
Video games matter a lot to me. (3)	o	o	o	o	o

Page Break

Q27 How often do you use each of the following methods to learn about new games?

	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	About half the time (3)	Most of the time (4)	Always (5)
Online content creator videos (1)	o	o	o	o	o

Social media (2)	o	o	o	o	o
News websites (3)	o	o	o	o	o
Online advertisements (4)	o	o	o	o	o
TV advertisements (5)	o	o	o	o	o
Friends or Family (7)	o	o	o	o	o
Other, please specify: (6)	o	o	o	o	o

Q26 Which of the following Social Media services do you frequently use?

1. X.com (1)
2. Tiktok (2)
3. Instagram (3)
4. Snapchat (4)
5. Whatsapp (5)
6. Discord (6)
7. Other, please specify: (7) _____
8. None (8)

Page Break

Q24 How frequently do you watch video game content on websites such as YouTube or Twitch.tv?

- o Never (1)
- o Very rarely (2)
- o Occasionally (3)
- o Often (4)
- o Very often (5)

Q25 How often do you follow video game content creators on Social Media?

- o Never (1)
- o Very rarely (2)

- o Occasionally (3)
- o Often (4)
- o Very often (5)

Q41 How often do you discover new video games through watching content creators on sites such as YouTube or Twitch.tv?

- o Never (1)
- o Rarely (2)
- o Occasionally (3)
- o Often (4)
- o Very often (5)
- o Always (6)

Q11 How credible do you find video game Youtubers for their opinions on video games?

- o Very uncredible (1)
- o Somewhat uncredible (2)
- o Neither credible or uncredible (3)
- o Somewhat credible (4)
- o Very credible (5)

Page Break

Q13 How often do you watch Reaction Videos or Reaction Livestreams?

- o Never (1)
- o Very rarely (2)
- o Occasionally (3)
- o Somewhat often (4)
- o Very often (5)

Q34 When you watch newly released trailers, how often do you search for Reaction Videos to those trailers?

- o Never (1)
- o Very rarely (2)
- o Occasionally (3)
- o Somewhat often (4)
- o Very often (5)

Page Break

Q8 How familiar are you with Tekken 8?

- o Not familiar at all (6)
- o Slightly familiar (7)
- o Moderately familiar (8)
- o Very familiar (9)
- o Extremely familiar (10)

Display This Question:

If How familiar are you with Tekken 8? != Not familiar at all

Q9 Have you seen the Tekken 8 - Reveal Trailer before?

- o Definitely not (1)
- o Probably not (2)
- o Might or might not (3)
- o Probably yes (4)
- o Definitely yes (5)

Q10 How likely are you to purchase Tekken 8 once it is released?

- o Extremely unlikely (1)
- o Somewhat unlikely (2)
- o Neither likely nor unlikely (3)
- o Somewhat likely (4)
- o Extremely likely (5)

Page Break

Q15 How familiar are you with the YouTuber Unroolie?

- o Not familiar at all (1)
- o Slightly familiar (2)
- o Moderately familiar (3)
- o Very familiar (4)
- o Extremely familiar (5)

Display This Question:

If How familiar are you with the YouTuber Unroolie? != Not familiar at all

Q35 Overall, how credible do you consider Unroolie to be?

- o Strongly disagree (6)
- o Somewhat disagree (7)

- o Neither agree nor disagree (8)
- o Somewhat agree (9)
- o Strongly agree (10)

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Video

Q53 Please watch the following short Reaction video before continuing with the survey.

End of Block: Video

Start of Block: Post Video Questions

Q40 Have you watched this specific Reaction video before?

- o No (1)
- o Yes (2)

Q54 Based on this video, how would you rate Unroolie on each of the following characteristics?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	
Not Dependable	o	o	o	o	o	Dependable
Dishonest	o	o	o	o	o	Honest
Unreliable	o	o	o	o	o	Reliable
Insincere	o	o	o	o	o	Sincere
Untrustworthy	o	o	o	o	o	Trustworthy
Not an Expert	o	o	o	o	o	Expert
Inexperienced	o	o	o	o	o	Experienced
Unknowledgeable	o	o	o	o	o	Knowledgeable

Unqualified	o	o	o	o	o	Qualified
Unskilled	o	o	o	o	o	Skilled

Page Break

Q57 Based on this video, how would you describe your attitude towards this Reaction Video?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	
Unpersuasive	o	o	o	o	o	Persuasive
Uninformative	o	o	o	o	o	Informative
Unbelievable	o	o	o	o	o	Believable
Ineffective	o	o	o	o	o	Effective
Unconvincing	o	o	o	o	o	Convincing
Bad	o	o	o	o	o	Good
Unpleasant	o	o	o	o	o	Pleasant
Unappealing	o	o	o	o	o	Appealing
Unlikeable	o	o	o	o	o	Likeable

Q37 After watching the video, how likely are you to watch more of this Youtuber's videos?

- o Extremely unlikely (1)
- o Somewhat unlikely (2)
- o Neither likely nor unlikely (3)
- o Somewhat likely (4)
- o Extremely likely (5)

Page Break

Q19 After watching the video, how do you feel the YouTuber's commentary impacted the trailer for this specific video game?

- o Very negatively (1)
- o Somewhat negatively (2)
- o Neither positively or negatively (3)
- o Somewhat positively (4)

- o Very positively (5)

Q22 After watching the video, how would you say the YouTuber's commentary impacted your interest in Tekken 8?

- o Extremely negatively (1)
- o Somewhat negatively (2)
- o Neither positively nor negatively (3)
- o Somewhat positively (4)
- o Extremely positively (5)

Page Break

Q56 After watching the video, how would you describe your overall attitude towards Tekken 8?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	
Bad	o	o	o	o	o	Good
Dislike	o	o	o	o	o	Like
Unpleasant	o	o	o	o	o	Pleasant
Negative	o	o	o	o	o	Positive
Unfavorable	o	o	o	o	o	Favorable

Q58 After watching the video, how likely are you to do each of the following?

	Extremely unlikely (1)	Somewhat unlikely (2)	Neither likely nor unlikely (3)	Somewhat likely (4)	Extremely likely (5)
Purchase Tekken 8 (6)	o	o	o	o	o
Recommend Tekken 8 to a friend or	o	o	o	o	o

family member (7)					
Share information about Tekken 8 on other social media sites (8)	o	o	o	o	o

End of Block: Post Video Questions

Start of Block: Classification Questions

Q29 What is your gender identity?

- o Male (1)
- o Female (2)
- o Non-binary / third gender (3)
- o Genderfluid (4)
- o Other (5)
- o Prefer not to say (6)

Q25 What is your year of birth?

▼ 2006 (1) ... 1959 or before (48)

Q26 What is your class standing?

- o Freshman (1)
- o Sophomore (2)
- o Junior (3)
- o Senior (4)
- o Graduate Student (5)

Q27 How many credit hours do you typically take per semester?

- o Less than 6 hours (1)
- o 6 - 11 hours (2)
- o 12 - 17 hours (3)
- o More than 17 hours (4)

Q31 What is your employment status?

- o Part-time (1)
- o Full-time (2)

- o Military (3)
- o Not currently working (4)

Q34 What is your marital status?

- o Single, never married (1)
- o Single, but in a committed relationship (2)
- o Married (3)
- o Widowed (4)
- o Divorced (5)
- o Separated (6)

Q35 Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino or none of these (select all that apply)?

1. Spanish (1)
2. Hispanic (2)
3. Latino (3)
4. ⊗None of these (4)

Q36 Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

1. White (1)
2. Black or African American (2)
3. American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
4. Asian (4)
5. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
6. Other (please specify) (6)

_____

Q3 What is your **personal** income?

- o Less than $10,000 (1)
- o $10,000 - $19,999 (2)
- o $20,000 - $39,999 (3)
- o $40,000 - $59,999 (4)
- o $60,000 - $79,999 (5)
- o $80,000 - $100,000 (6)
- o More than $100,000 (7)

End of Block: Classification Questions