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BRAND STRATEGIES IN THE GAMING INDUSTRY: Evolving Approaches to a Dynamic Market

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ABSTRACT

The video game industry, bolstered by the post-pandemic context, has emerged as one of the most dynamic and resilient sectors of the global economy. In Spain, with over 20 million players, the market ranks third in the European Union, following Germany and France. Brand strategies have shifted from traditional advertising to more personalised and authentic approaches, including in-game advertising, advergaming, eSports, influencer marketing, and immersive technologies such as the metaverse. These strategies reflect an adaptation to a demanding and diverse consumer base. This analysis examines how companies are harnessing gaming environments to differentiate themselves within a competitive market, redefining their strategies in order to meet evolving expectations and to foster meaningful connections with their audiences.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis brought many sectors and industries to a standstill, including the entertainment industry. However, one sector not only withstood the pandemic but emerged stronger: the video game industry. Video gaming became one of the most popular pastimes during the global lockdown period, as evidenced by studies conducted by *Games Industry*, *Global Web Index*, and the *Wavemaker Live Panel* (Lapublicidad.net, 2020).

Video games evolved from being a mere distraction to serving as an escape and a means of socialisation. This context stimulated a growing market, benefiting companies in the video game sector the most, as confirmed by experts and investors, who noted that video game firms were better positioned than other companies (Sebastián Morillas et al, 2022)

Currently, the video game industry has consolidated its position as one of the most dynamic and resilient sectors following the pandemic. Advertisers must consider their role within this ecosystem, recognising that consumers have changed not only their habits but also their perceptions of brands. This diverse and increasingly demanding audience exceeds 20 million in Spain (AEVI, 2023). These figures place the country as the third largest market in the European Union, behind Germany and France (Forbes, 2024).

The interaction between brands and gamers has evolved towards strategies prioritising personalisation and authenticity. Campaigns are no longer confined to traditional advertising; instead, they aim to create immersive digital experiences through gamification, collaborations with specialised influencers, and the use of emerging technologies such as the metaverse. These tactics respond to a new reality in which consumers value social connection, quality entertainment, and brand engagement with their interests.

This study explores how brands are leveraging the gaming sector to stand out in a highly competitive market. In a context where video games serve as a key entertainment channel, companies must redefine their strategic approach to attract and engage gamers, adapting to their evolving expectations.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Current State of the Video Game Market

The video game sector has experienced spectacular growth, surpassing market expectations. In Spain, consumption within the video game industry reached €2,339 million in 2023, representing a total growth of 16.29% (AEVI, 2023). Globally, the video game market is projected to generate $187.7 billion in 2024, with the number of players reaching 3.42 billion. Although the average time spent gaming worldwide has decreased since the peak observed during the pandemic, gamers continue to play, albeit for fewer hours, while revenue per gaming hour has increased. In fact, the total market is expected to reach $213.3 billion with an estimated 3.76 billion players by 2027 (Newzoo, 2024).

Video games have become one of the primary platforms for advertisers seeking innovative ways to communicate their messages. New advertising strategies are increasingly accepted by users, who are growing weary of unoriginal content, impersonal messaging and constant intrusion. In Spain, more than 20 million people play video games regularly, representing nearly half of the population aged between 6 and 64 years (AEVI, 2023, p. 24), across smartphones, consoles, PCs, and tablets. This figure continues to rise and reflects a new type of consumer with unique characteristics, demanding greater attention from brands, which must adapt strategically and specifically to engage effectively with this audience.

The video game sector in Spain has acquired strategic importance both from an economic standpoint and in its role as a promoter of language and culture. Video games possess the capacity to reflect cultural diversity, encourage critical thinking and transmit fundamental values of democratic society, such as solidarity, cooperation and gender equality. Furthermore, the recognition of the industry's rise and relevance extends beyond national borders, reaching an international scale. José Luis Escrivá Belmonte, Minister for Digital Transformation and the Civil Service, asserts that the video game industry is unstoppable at a global level and is growing considerably year after year within Spain (AEVI, 2023, p. 7).

The incorporation of video games has sparked an authentic digital revolution that, according to experts, is significantly impacting the country's economy and transforming traditional business models.

Globally, the video game industry has established itself as one of the technological sectors with the greatest potential for expansion.

Consequently, video games have emerged as a key advertising platform, offering advertisers the opportunity to connect with gamers and raise brand awareness. This phenomenon has driven the adoption of strategies such as advergaming, in-game advertising and, more recently, gamification and eSports, which have become effective tools to convey brand messages, products or ideas to a wide audience of gamers. For this reason, José María Moreno, Director General of AEVI, emphasises that 2023 'has been a year in which the video game industry has continued to grow in business figures as well as in projects and initiatives that position it as a cutting-edge sector committed to its users' (AEVI, 2023, p. 15).

2.2. Strategies Used by Brands to Interact with Gamers

Gaming has become fully integrated into popular culture, with an increasing number of people of all ages playing video games. The term 'gamer' refers to anyone who plays video games, regardless of device or game type. In Spain, 69.2% of the population aged between 14 and 55 engage in video gaming. Given this data, it is unsurprising that advertisers are increasingly considering investment in this sector. Furthermore, female participation has risen, now representing 49% of gamers, while the age groups with the greatest increase in video gamers are those aged 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 (Borondo, 2024). According to a study by the consultancy Newzoo (2024), the age groups playing at least once a week are primarily those between 25 and 44 years old, accounting for 72% of the global market, as well as 46% of individuals over 55 years.

These figures reflect a growing interest among advertisers to invest in less intrusive advertising strategies, such as advergaming, in-game advertising, and eSports to connect with gamers. In recent years, brands have sought original methods to reach their target audiences, one of which is the advergame, which is creating a video game to promote a brand. This advertising tool is favoured by many advertisers due to advantages including increased website traffic, enhanced brand awareness, capturing 100% of the user's attention, since the user voluntarily chooses to play, generating viral effects and providing enjoyment (Sebastián Morillas and Carcelén García, 2012). Subsequent studies reinforce these benefits not only because of their multiple advantages (Lee and Cho, 2017) but also because the player is actively involved, generating engagement, which brands aspire to achieve. Additionally, as these games become increasingly accessible via mobile devices (Tuten and Ashley, 2016), they represent an ideal tool to maintain user exposure to the brand at all times, thereby increasing recall and recognition.

In advergames, players are motivated to play continuously, resulting in the advertising message being repeated far more effectively than in traditional forms of advertising. Additionally, contact time with the brand is extended (Waiguny et al, 2012), while typically requiring less investment than conventional advertising. The brand is remembered positively, fostering a predisposition to purchase (Sebastián Morillas and Rodrigo Martín, 2016). Brand familiarity has also been identified as a key factor in enhancing the effectiveness of advergames. Several studies support this view, concluding that familiar brands facilitate the storage of information in memory more effectively than less familiar brands (Aliagas et al, 2021).

Therefore, advertisers should implement campaigns to raise brand awareness and foster consumer identification with the brand. This approach allows them to use advergames to cultivate a favourable attitude towards the brand and capture the target audience's attention (Catalán and Martínez, 2020). If one were to highlight the primary benefit of advergaming for advertisers, it would undoubtedly be the extended contact time between the brand and the target audience (Sebastián Morillas and Carcelén García, 2017).

Taking the above into account, research focusing on the case study of the *Pepsiman* advergame, created by Pepsi, demonstrates that continuous exposure to the brand through product information and features generates positive memories in the player's mind, as well as increased familiarity (Mullo-López et al, 2024).

Another notable tactic for advertisers in the design of their broader strategies is the use of in-game advertising, which has proven effective since its inception. However, various factors must be considered, including the game genre, target audience, and the appropriate placement within the game. These variables will ultimately determine the success or failure of in-game advertising (Sebastián Morillas, 2013).

Another important aspect to consider is that programmatic in-game advertising is essential for exploring new formats and anticipating the forthcoming advertising revolution of the metaverse. This approach will differentiate itself from other types of digital advertising, as the brand will be integrated into game environments through billboards, product placement, and similar methods. Furthermore, the attention span for these ads increases to 28.2 minutes per thousand impressions, compared with 5.3 minutes in alternative mobile display formats (Marketing Directo, 2022).

Additional studies confirm that positioning a brand within video games close to the player's line of sight enhances brand recall, recognition, and attitude, especially when the brands are congruent with the game's theme (Alabau-Tejada, 2021). More recent research has found that gaming environments generate higher rates of visibility and attention, as well as greater cost efficiency (Seara, 2024).

Authors such as Schwart et al. (2019) emphasise that in-game advertising, as an integrated and non-intrusive strategy, is more readily accepted by young people than conventional advertising methods. This is corroborated by Hernández Hernández and Cortés Hernández (2024), who argue that coherently integrating brands within games can positively impact gamers, highlighting cognitive factors such as relevance, integration, non-intrusiveness, emotion, attention, memorability, attitude, credibility, playability, and context. Collectively, these elements contribute to the advantage brands gain by advertising within video games compared to traditional media. This is reflected in investments such as Netflix's commitment of $1 billion to its video game business since 2022 (Warc, 2024).

Several studies have also explored how brand attitude and purchase behaviour can be influenced by in-game advertising. Certain games, such as *Fortnite* and *Star Wars Battlefront II*, demonstrate that the correct integration of brands enhances the effectiveness of this advertising format (Freire-Sánchez et al, 2024).

This research is highly relevant for advertisers aiming to reach this audience. Although many perceive video games as an effective branding tool, investment remains cautious. Indeed, interest in in-game advertising peaked during the pandemic; however, according to a study by Warc (2024), since 2021 the proportion of advertisers considering increasing their spend on games has declined from 72% to 52%, despite the majority of advertisers surveyed by the IAB agreeing that games represent a safe channel for brands.

Successful in-game advertising depends on branding being integrated into playable features of the game in a brief and non-invasive manner, that is, blending seamlessly with the content consumers already engage with. Finding this perfect alignment and ensuring players are exposed to brands related to their interests is crucial. A pertinent example is *Fortnite*, where Amazon Ads and Twitch developed a series of innovative games within the platform known as The Glitch. In these games, brands are integrated as part of the experience itself, not merely as visual elements but functionally, motivating players to interact with the brand. This strategy enables advertisers to connect with users in a relevant and unobtrusive way, thereby enhancing brand recognition. Bill Young, head of gaming at Amazon Ads, states, 'We want to help branded games break out of their monotony. We want to redefine the expectations of both brands and gamers' (Kirkland, 2024).

Another strategic tool that advertisers are using is eSports, also known as electronic sports, which are professional competitions that form part of the field of entertainment. Spain is the second country in Europe with the highest penetration of eSports and is growing. It is expected to reach 53 million euros in 2026. Sponsorship revenue plays an important role as it is expected to reach €33 million between 2021 and 2026 (PWC, 2022).

Given this data, it is indisputable that eSports serve as a lever to enhance brand image for firms committed to this sector, enabling them to achieve a high level of recall. Furthermore, various studies indicate that eSports spectators exhibit a higher purchase intention towards products sponsored at these events (Gwinner and Bennett, 2008; Lacey and Close, 2013). Additional research corroborates that eSports fans demonstrate stronger identification with brands, display more positive attitudes towards them, and tend to make greater purchases of their products (Calapez et al, 2024).

Moreover, further studies have confirmed that when consumers perceive the sponsor as congruent with the activity being performed, it acts as a stimulus that activates cognitive processes and increases purchase intention towards the sponsor's products (Polyakova et al., 2024). This aligns with previous literature suggesting that matched sponsorships evoke more mental associations in consumers

(Wolfsteiner et al, 2015). The growing interest of advertisers in the gaming sector is due, on the one hand, to the evidence from these studies demonstrating advertising effectiveness and, on the other, to the increasing professionalisation of the industry.

In this context, several brands have emerged and established themselves as leaders within the gaming sector. These brands have succeeded in creating a unique bond with gamers, distinguishing themselves through their focus on innovation, quality, and the gaming experience. Their impact and visibility within the gaming community have enabled them to strengthen their reputation and brand recognition. Brands such as Razer, Logitech, Corsair, and HP Omen have recognised the importance of adapting to the evolving demands and needs of gamers, offering products and services tailored accordingly. Meanwhile, brands including Red Bull, Monster Energy, Coca-Cola, and Nike have committed to sponsoring events and teams within eSports (Puro Marketing, 2023).

The aforementioned studies reflect a growing interest among advertisers in allocating resources to advertising tools such as advergaming, in-game advertising, and eSports to engage the gamer audience. This entails providing valuable and entertaining content that creates memorable digital experiences and reinforces brand identity. To achieve this, advertisers must carefully consider how best to connect with gamer audiences and understand their characteristics, as this group has become a critical segment for brands in recent years. Consequently, a primary objective of this research has been to examine how brands are developing innovative strategies to engage gamers.

Furthermore, a new challenge arises with the use of artificial intelligence, which is transforming and revolutionising the possibilities within video games and reshaping the gamer experience. As a result, advertisers face a novel scenario in which to develop new strategies for reaching this audience. According to recent studies, up to 54% of gaming fans in Spain believe that AI will continue to improve video game graphics (MCR Gaming, 2024). The question remains whether generative AI tools will ultimately revolutionise game development, marketing, and advertising. A Marketer's Toolkit 2024 report by Warc suggests that brands will seek to capitalise on the advent of accessible generative AI tools to foster broader creative development (Mut, 2023). While the future remains to be seen, the video game industry in Spain is already noted not only for being one of the most dynamic in Europe but also for leading the adoption of cutting-edge technologies.

3. Objectives and Methodology

3.1. Objectives

The present study aims to investigate several objectives within a sample of the video gaming population in Spain.

The main objectives are as follows:

1. To analyse whether the use and consumption of video games by gamers has changed before and after the pandemic.
2. To demonstrate how brands are integrating advergaming, advertising, and eSports as effective advertising tools to reach gamers.
3. To find out what kind of advertisers are using these strategies to reach this target group.
4. To provide information on future prospects in the world of gaming.

To this end, this article seeks to address the following research questions:

Q1. Have gamers' usage and consumption of video games changed since the pandemic?

Q2. Do gamers differentiate between the different advertising tools used by brands in video games?

3.2. Methodology

To analyse the new post-pandemic situation and examine how gamers have engaged with video games and their relationship with brands following confinement, two methodologies were employed.

The desk research, which involved analysing academic and professional publications related to the subject matter, revealed an increasing volume of literature on brand strategies used by advertisers in video games. However, fewer scientific publications on this specific topic were identified.

To strengthen the theoretical framework and enhance the validity of the research, a pilot self-administered online questionnaire was conducted. Developed using Google Forms, the questionnaire facilitated clear and straightforward data collection for subsequent analysis. Online surveys offer multiple advantages, including faster data collection, the possibility of incorporating audiovisual elements to improve participant interaction, and lower costs compared to traditional self-administered surveys (Díaz de Rada, 2012).

The questionnaire comprised 33 questions, each designed to address the research objectives and corresponding research questions. Table 1 presents the topics covered in the questionnaire alongside their relation to the research questions.

Table 1. Correlation between the research questions and the topics of the questionnaire.

Research questions	Questionnaire question guide
Have gamers' usage and consumption of video games changed since the pandemic? (Q.1)	How often did you play video games before, during, and after confinement? Were there any games that you played specifically because of the circumstances during confinement but stopped playing afterwards? Which eSports do you currently follow or play? When you are not playing video games, how do you spend your free time?
Do gamers differentiate between the different advertising tools used by brands in video games? (Q.2)	Do you recall any brand or advertisement present in the video games you play? Were you previously familiar with these brands? Would you consider purchasing any of the brands you see advertised in the games? Are you aware of the difference between in-game advertising and advergaming?

Source: Authors elaboration, 2025.

This technique was selected due to its capacity to collect and process data quickly and efficiently. Moreover, it is considered appropriate for gathering relevant information on the subject under study. The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain structured data related to the target audience and the variables analysed.

The research employed a non-probabilistic sample of individuals residing in Spain, comprising a total of N = 100 respondents who completed the questionnaire between 2 and 24 January 2025. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The sample consisted of 45% women, 52% men, and the remainder who preferred not to disclose their gender, with ages ranging from 18 to 64. 74% of participants held university-level qualifications. Regarding income, 31% of respondents reported earning less than €12,000 per year, followed by 21% with an income between €21,000 and €35,000 per year.

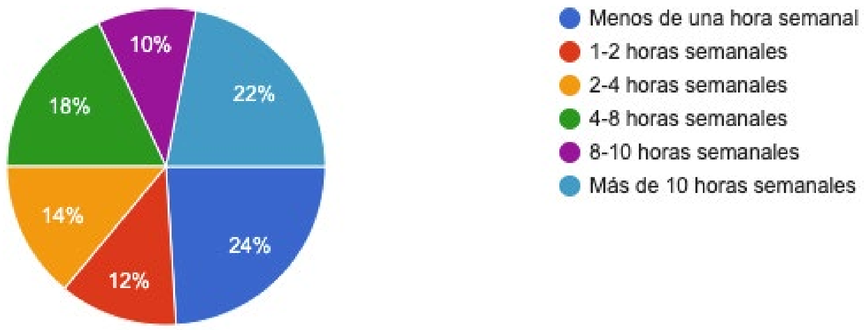
This sample ensures the validity of the approach to the research subject, enabling the collection of meaningful data to develop conclusions that can guide brands in connecting with this continually growing demographic.

4. Research Analysis and Results

4.1. Habits and Profiles of the Surveyed Gamers

In the initial set of questions, we aimed to differentiate respondent profiles based on their video game consumption habits. Participants were first asked how frequently they play video games. As illustrated in Graph 1, responses were fairly evenly distributed. The most common reply was playing for less than one hour per week, accounting for 24% of responses, closely followed by those playing more than ten hours per week at 22%.

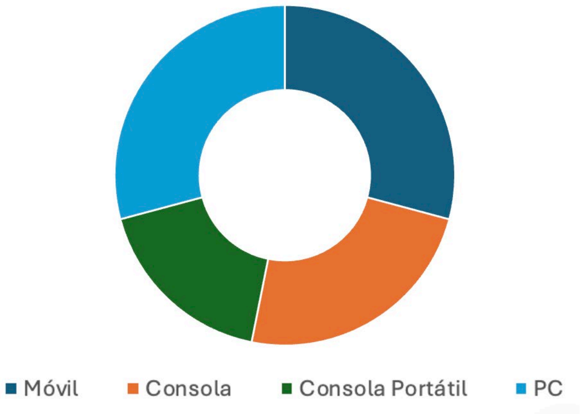
Graph 1. Frequency of video game use in hours per week.



Source: Graph extracted from the Google Forms platform based on the data collected, 2025.

The respondents' preferred gaming platforms, as shown in Graph 2, were PC and mobile devices, each selected by 54% of participants. This was followed by consoles, chosen by 46 respondents, and handheld devices, selected by 34 participants. To assess their familiarity with video games, participants were asked about the age at which they began playing. Some reported starting at a very young age, around four or five years old; however, the majority indicated they began between the ages of seven and ten, followed by those who started between fifteen and sixteen years old. Only two participants reported beginning to play around the age of thirty.

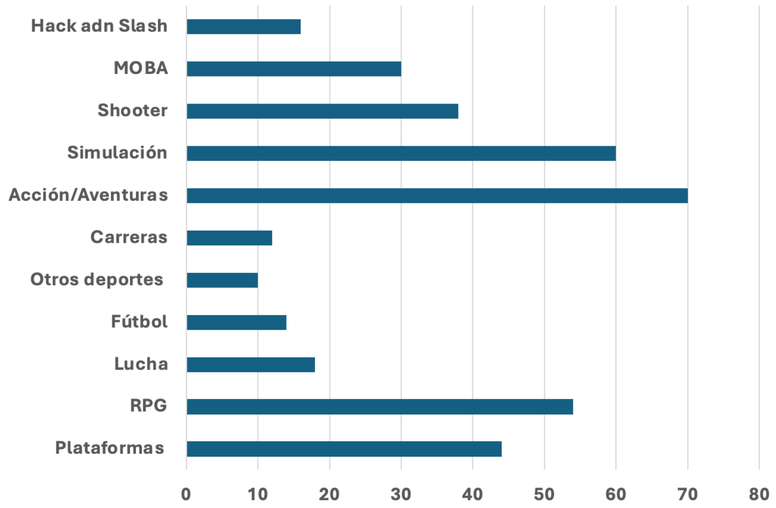
Graph 2. Respondents' preferred media.



Source: Graph based on data collected on the Google Forms platform, 2025.

Figure 3 presents the eleven types of games preferred by respondents. Action and adventure games ranked highest, followed by simulation and role-playing games. Less popular genres, including puzzles, online board games, and indie games, among others, were mentioned but are not displayed in the graph.

Graph 3: Respondents' favourite types of games.



Source: Graph based on data collected on the Google Forms platform, 2025.

In response to the question ‘Could you name a game you are currently playing?’, a wide range of answers was received. The games mentioned most frequently, in descending order, were Pokémon TCGP, The Sims, Minecraft, Fortnite, Red Dead Redemption 2, Hogwarts Legacy, GTA V, God of War: Ragnarök, The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom, Persona 5 Royal, Final Fantasy VII, Batman: Arkham Asylum, Animal Crossing, and Sudoku.

Participants were also asked their reasons for playing games, with ‘because it is my hobby’ emerging as the most common response, selected by 66% of respondents. This was followed by ‘entertainment on the move’ (32%) and ‘connecting with friends’ (22%). Regarding multiplayer gaming, those who play with others expressed a preference for shooters, role-playing games, and action titles. When playing alone, role-playing games remained among the favourites, followed by simulation and Japanese role-playing games (JRPGs). Nonetheless, responses indicated a wide variety of preferences chosen by participants.

Physical games remain popular, with 70% of respondents expressing a preference for them. Many participants also cited alternative hobbies, including spending time with family, friends and partners, reading, sports, socialising, watching series and films, dancing, crafts, and drawing.

This initial approach provides insight into the diverse profiles of participants, reflecting a range of tastes and hobbies, which enriches the study’s results by offering a broad perspective on different types of gamers.

4.2. Knowledge of the Different Advertising Tools Used by Brands in Video Games

The next set of questions, aligned with the research objectives, sought to determine participants’ knowledge of advertising tools used within the video games they play. In response to the initial question, ‘Can you recall any brand or advertisement present in any of the video games you have played?’, 30 participants responded negatively, indicating they did not remember any. However, among those who did recall, many demonstrated remarkable accuracy in naming brands they had seen, including *League of Legends* featuring Red Bull, Doritos, Burger King, and KitKat; Bwin in *Black Deck*; Booking and Temu in *Nonogram*; collaborations such as Marvel with *Fortnite*, Moschino for *The Sims*, Nike in *NBA 2K*, Regain in *Metal Gear Solid 4*, Temu in *Rummikub*, and Sony, Coca-Cola, and Nike in *Uncharted* and *Fifa*.

The majority of respondents were already familiar with these brands prior to encountering them in-game. When asked whether seeing the brands in-game influenced their likelihood of purchasing them, responses indicated no clear positive or negative association. Only eight respondents correctly identified the difference between advergaming and in-game advertising, with the remainder unfamiliar with the terms.

Regarding opinions on in-game advertising, most participants reported that they did not find it bothersome, except when it interfered with the game’s plot or setting. Ten respondents expressed annoyance at encountering advertising within games regardless of its integration. Some responses were positive, noting that they found the integration of brands striking or intriguing.

With respect to advergaming, most participants had not played this type of game but generally did not view it negatively. Responses varied: some expressed dislike for this format; others would play only if the game was simple; some rated advergames low due to their commercial nature. Conversely, others appreciated the creativity involved in promoting brands through advergames, and some acknowledged having played and found them entertaining, albeit without strong attachment.

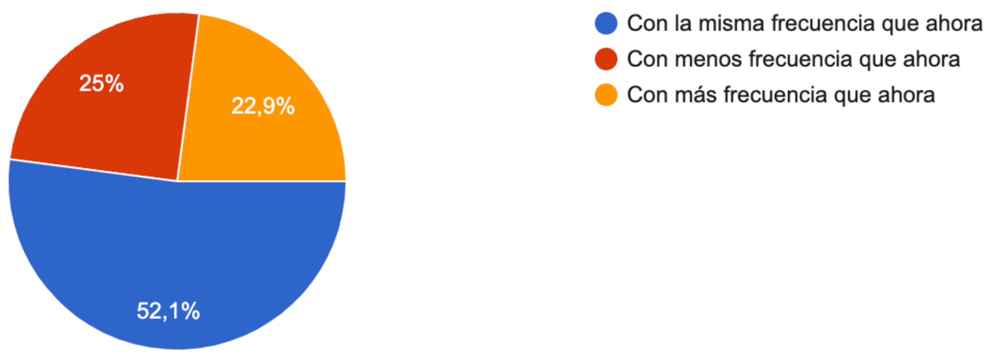
When asked to choose between in-game advertising and advergaming, the majority preferred in-game advertising, citing higher game quality and less brand influence. However, some valued advergaming for reasons such as the player's conscious choice to engage with the brand, brands offering more than simple advertising, or incentives like prizes or product discounts.

Regarding eSports consumption, most participants believed it was easier to reach specific communities through this channel compared to others, highlighting the effective segmentation and reach. Furthermore, participants generally considered eSports advertising to be non-intrusive, describing it as advertising that accompanies rather than interrupts their experience.

4.3 Post-Confinement Gaming Habits

With regard to play habits before, during, and after confinement, the following data were collected. As shown in Figure 4, 52% of respondents reported playing video games as frequently before confinement as they do currently, while notably, 22% indicated that they played more often before confinement.

Graph 4. Pre-confinement gaming habits.



Source: Graph extracted from the Google Forms platform based on data collected, 2025.

As noted in the theoretical framework, hours of play surged significantly during confinement. This study found that 77% of respondents reported playing more during that period than they do currently. This group includes those who began playing daily after previously playing only sporadically, as well as others who doubled or even tripled their gaming hours. The remainder claimed to have played at similar frequencies to those of today.

Participants were also asked whether they discovered any new games during confinement. While 36% responded negatively, some mentioned titles such as *The Sims*, *Monster Hunter World*, *Fortnite*, *Pokémon*, *Among Us*, *Fall Guys*, *Gartic Phone,* and *Call of Duty: Warzone*. Many of these games were also cited when participants were asked if they stopped playing any games after the pandemic, with titles such as *Animal Crossing*, *Among Us*, *Fifa*, *Catan*, *Risk,* and *Parcheesi* mentioned.

What appears unchanged is the preference for physical or digital games, which remained consistent throughout.

Regarding involvement in eSports, participants' interest and participation before, during, and after confinement remained broadly stable, with only a slight decrease in those reporting participation, from 22% prior to confinement to 10% afterwards.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

This study reinforces and complements many of the observations made in the initial desk research. Notably, the participant profile aligns with the broader trend of a growing female audience and a significant proportion of regular players aged between 25 and 34. Additionally, the diversity of habits and income levels among respondents stands in stark contrast to the stereotypical perception of gamers as 'isolated, infantilised, and obsessive' individuals, a description with which 86% of gamers do not identify (Arena Play, 2020).

In response to the first research question, 'Have gamers' usage and consumption of video games changed since the pandemic?', this study found no substantial changes attributable to confinement. It appears that the increased playtime during lockdown did not create a new cohort of dedicated players nor establish enduring popularity for many games; rather, numerous titles were abandoned once normality resumed. No radical shifts in gaming habits were observed compared to the pre-pandemic period. However, it is noteworthy that 22% of respondents reported playing more frequently before confinement than afterwards, an unexpected finding that warrants further investigation in future research to understand the reasons behind this behavioural change in some players.

Thus, the first objective of this study, 'To analyse whether the use and consumption of video games by gamers has changed before and after the pandemic' has been met.

In addressing the second research question, 'Do gamers differentiate between the different advertising tools used by brands in video games?', several interesting findings emerged. Notably, respondents demonstrated low recall of in-game advertising. However, those who did remember encountering brands during gameplay were able to identify the specific brands, the games in which they appeared, and even the context of their placement with considerable precision. Furthermore, most participants agreed that in-game advertising is not perceived as intrusive or annoying when it is well integrated and does not disrupt the game's environment or narrative. This finding supports the theoretical framework of this study, particularly Sebastián Morillas' (2013) assertion that the success or failure of such advertising depends largely on how seamlessly it is incorporated into the game and how well it aligns with the target audience. Poor placement not only risks damaging the brand in question but may also undermine the credibility of other brands featured within the same game as it can detract from the game's realism and consequently reduce players' engagement (Tapia Frade et al, 2009).

Regarding advergaming, the perceptions of respondents are noteworthy. Many considered that advergames, being created by brands, might lack the quality and appeal of games developed for non-commercial purposes. Nevertheless, they expressed willingness to engage with such games if they are sufficiently attractive. Some even acknowledged the brands' efforts to explore alternatives to traditional advertising. Mobile games in particular were highlighted as prevalent due to their ease of download and playability. However, they were also critiqued for encouraging brief attention spans and rapid disengagement compared to more complex formats. A notable example is the game developed by Netflix within the *Stranger Things* universe which fosters a meaningful connection and positive experience for the player (Reason Why, 2023).

In any case, after examining the results of both in-game and advergame advertising, the fact that users are not bothered by the presence of brands can be considered a success. This represents a far greater achievement than advertising in more traditional and saturated channels, which is often seen as intrusive. However, it is also important, as Tapia et al. (2009) points out, that this increase in brand insertion within games is carefully managed to avoid turning player tolerance into rejection of advertising messages. Brand coherence and legitimacy must be prioritised when working with entertainment content to prevent, as Alex Pallete notes, the phenomenon known as 'entertainmentwashing' (Reason Why, 2023).

Platforms such as Player WOM, which allow advertisements to be integrated into video games where users, in some cases, view advertising content in exchange for in-game rewards, may be perceived by many as somewhat intrusive. Conversely, video game streams featuring sponsored content attract advertisers due to the natural way branded content is presented to users and the generally positive reception that brands continue to receive (Reason Why, 2021).

Thus, the final objectives set out in this study have been achieved, as it has been possible to observe the effectiveness of these tools for advertisers, the benefits they can derive from them, and the direction in which the industry is heading. This direction could perhaps be summarised, following the desk research and the survey conducted, as a search for authenticity by users.

6. Acknowledgements

This text continues the research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic on how advertisers could connect with gamers through new branding strategies and how they are doing so today. We extend our thanks to all those who collaborated by completing the questionnaire, enabling analysis and comparison of the different strategies employed by brands during and after the pandemic.

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