Music Beyond Gameplay: Motivators in the Consumption of Videogame Soundtracks

Juan Sebastián Díaz Gasca

Bachelor of Popular Music
Bachelor of Popular Music with Honours

Queensland Conservatorium of Music

Griffith University

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Abstract

This study seeks to present the motivators behind the consumption of videogame soundtracks outside of the gameplay environment. This dissertation proposes a three-part consumption model that describes these different motivators and the interactions between these imperatives. At the heart of this study is the intention to demonstrate that videogame music has become a very important part of a videogame’s concept, design, and marketing; it not only plays a significant role within the game, it has also transcended the medium and is enjoyed by audiences beyond the game. This media migration generates questions regarding its effects and the motivations why people listen to videogame music outside of the game, and the ramifications of this consumption at the personal, social, and game industry levels. Why are people listening to videogame music, one that is designed for an interactive medium, in a linear medium (such as a CD, an audio file, or a re-interpretation)? In what ways does the game experience and the music create associations that affect the audience at a personal level? How did game music become this consumable object and what is its value for consuming audiences? How does the consumption of OSTs affect future game music composition and what is the role of the audience in this? And what does this mean for the shelf-life and marketability of videogames?

This dissertation explores the role of videogame music during gameplay, including the creation of the diegesis through music and the impact of the interactive nature of videogames on musical memorability, and how they play a part in the creation of associations through interactions. Game music history is also explored as a factor in the current perception of videogame music in the broader social scale.

The proposed consumption model for videogame soundtracks consists on the experiential, social, and industry-driven imperatives behind this phenomenon.
Experiential motivators are explored through the concepts of nostalgia and associations, which are generated at a personal level. Sociocultural imperatives are born from the experiences of several individuals and their mutual identification through game elements, particularly in the concepts of singularity and following. The third approach is the marketing imperatives of the videogame industry, in their push to create brands and commodities out of game music, and the reaction of audiences to this practice.

The study is complemented with an online survey which serves as a confirmation of the different imperatives proposed in the consumption model. The analysis of this data and the findings of this survey clearly point at the interaction of these three forces at the time of consumption and recollection of game music.
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Statement of Authenticity

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the dissertation itself, the main text, and appendices (including a confidential appendix where appropriate).

Ethical approval QCM/12/12 was granted for this dissertation in accordance to the ethics panel of the university.

Juan Sebastián Díaz Gasca
Chapter 1: Introduction

After spending countless hours immersed in virtual worlds, solving puzzles, grinding through dungeons, and outmanoeuvring opponents, I was enthralled with the sounds, locations, and stories contained within them, I found myself with earworms, songs that I listened to in my epic journeys to worlds unknown. To my surprise, I could find this music outside of the game on the internet and in concert halls, mobile phones and pop songs; the videogame soundtrack was not solely confined to the gameplay experience. And it did not end there, as I began to notice the release of published soundtracks and events that surrounded game music, and the clear push of the game developers to promote their game with their music. It was clear that I was not alone. I remember the first time that I watched ‘Play! A Videogame Symphony’ perform the theme to my favourite game of all time, Chrono Trigger (Squaresoft, 1995) for the Super Nintendo, I realised that game music had not only evolved with technology, but it had found its way outside consoles. Videogame music, a category that did not denote any particular sound or genre, just the use of it in a videogame, had become something more than the background sound of digital adventures and virtual escapism through computers and consoles, it had become something bigger that represented the experiences of groups of individuals as well as the endeavours of artists and skilful marketing teams.

Hence I set myself to write this dissertation, which starts with a dedication to all those who had a Final Fantasy song as their ringtone, to all the cosplayers that waited in the queue to a concert dressed as their favourite characters, to all who thought that it would be nice to listen to that song again, and to the parents of children everywhere who had to endure that repetitive music from the games their kids’ played. This is a study that looks at why we listen
to game music, and why we want to remember stories, places, and the people that joined us in those journeys, and what that means for those composing, licensing, and promoting game soundtracks.

**Rationale**

Videogame music has become a very important part of a videogame’s concept, design, and marketing. The videogame experience through the immersion in a virtual world has allowed the player to fantasise, to be someone else, and to explore a new world and unravel its stories through the active participation and interaction with the game world (Compton, 2004; Mactavish, 2002; Perron & Wolf, 2008). Videogame music (henceforth referred to also as game music) has not only played a significant role within the game, it transcends its medium and is enjoyed by audiences beyond the game in the form of orchestral concerts, live performances, fan covers, and reinterpretations, as well as music CD purchases and downloads, including the inspiration of musical genres such as ‘chip tunes’, which borrow sounds from vintage game consoles (Belinkie, 1999; Collins, 2008b; Compton, 2004; Kohler, 2005; Pidkameny, 2002). The media migration from the interactive environment of videogames into linear, non-interactive media (i.e. CDs, performances, digital audio files), prompts questions of why audiences choose to listen to music that was originally intended to be appreciated during gameplay, what this means for these individuals and the videogame industry, and what this consumption means for the future marketing of games. There is relatively little research that explores videogame music. Some examples of those that do are the works of Belinkie (1999) and Pidkameny (2002), however, their papers do not explore further the relationships between game music and its audiences, the social aspects of these migrations, and the place of soundtrack consumption in the US$24.75 billion dollar game industry (Entertainment Software Association, 2013). However, it is also worth mentioning
the work of Kiri Miller (2007) and her studies on the musical perception of players through racially and socially charged characters in the *Grand Theft Auto* series, and the creation of location through musical style in soundtracks as valuable in the understanding of the interactions between player and avatar.

**Research Problem**

This study is based on the premise that videogame music has transcended its original, interactive medium and that this transmediation should result in a change of aural experience and music meaning. These changes would be rooted in the lack of interactivity of music audio files and live performances, and mostly originate from associations and nostalgic memories that are found in the gameplay experience or in the context surrounding gameplay. This forms the hypothesis of this study which proposes that firstly, there must be a personal connection to the music with gamers and non-gamers if they listen to game music; that, second, a social component would be required for audiences to listen to game music whether or not having played the game; and third, if there is OST\(^1\) publication by publishers there have to be industry and marketing imperatives that fuel this practice from a commercial and development standpoint. This study will only consider the consumption of videogames from a Western standpoint and will not elaborate on the Japanese OST case beyond mentions and minor contrasts, as the case of game soundtracks in Japan differs due to the higher acceptance of videogames and wider availability of OSTs in mainstream retail.

\(^1\) Original Soundtracks are referred to in this study as OSTs: an acronym that is widely accepted socially. The term OST or soundtrack or original soundtrack will be used in this study to refer to game music that has been made available outside of the gameplay context, unless otherwise stated.
Research Questions

There is one primary question behind this study: what are the motivations behind the consumption of videogame soundtracks outside of the game? To achieve this, there are three questions that will be used to approach them:

- First, what are the personal relations that are created between an individual that consumes game music and the game music itself?
- Second, what are the social motivations that fuel the consumption of videogame soundtracks outside of the game?
- Third, what are the industry’s marketing imperatives that drive the consumption of videogame soundtracks?

Videogames as a social practice. In the journal *Games and Culture*, there were three propositions made as to why games were an important object of study regarding society and culture. Henry Lowood (2006) affirms that the study of videogames contextualises games as a consequence and an element of impact in society and culture. According to this view, videogames emerged as a response to the creation of online and digital spaces. This same idea is shared by Frans Mäyrä (2006) and Dmitri Williams (2006) who also see videogames as a consequence of social change. Williams furthers this thought and states that games should be studied because of the social migration that is taking place towards online and gaming spaces, a migration which has seen a change in the social ‘playground’, a phenomenon seen in the growing number of children involved in play that occurs in virtual environments. Another point of view is presented by Constance Steinkuehler (2006) who believes that videogaming (particularly online gaming) presents an opportunity for the creation and rise of sustainable indigenous online cultures, referring to the communities that are created in virtual spaces which present strong commonalities and traits that foster ongoing
practises within these groups (e.g. blogging, reviewing, group raids, clans, factions, micro-economies, and political in-game structures of power). These spaces will also, according to Steinkuehler, reveal more about an increasingly globalised and networked world, thus proposing that the study of games will be important to understanding their influences on cognition and human thought processes.

**Videogames as an economic powerhouse.** Wolf (2006) believes that the videogame is a cross media phenomenon that creates new design approaches that can be assimilated by other forms of media and art. Furthermore, Kline et al. (2003) also describe a merging of culture, technology, and marketing that is the by-product of a Post-Fordist economy that shapes the current digital technologies market. This study also acknowledges that the size of the videogame industry is too big to ignore, particularly when comparing it to other entertainment behemoths such as the Hollywood film industry (Entertainment Software Association, 2013).

**Videogames as a studied art.** James Gee (2006) states that videogames, as a new artform, present a challenge to academics to develop new analytical tools to study videogames as well as other arts. As Wolf describes:

> It took a while for both film and television to attain the status of an artistic medium, and likewise the video game has been slow to gain recognition as an artistic medium, even after almost thirty years as a commercial industry and forty years of its existence. (Wolf, 2001, p. 1)

Furthermore, Lowood (2006) believes that the academic research and study of videogames will not hinder the medium. He explains that those who oppose game studies claim that academic research will only slow the process of game creation in the same manner
that the scientific community once rejected the research of scientific history in the 20th century. Lowood uses this same example to show how the study of scientific history did not doom the practice, but improved it. This belief was then translated into videogames calling for more research and study that could probably impact future game development, with practices such as ‘Rational Game Design’, which stem from the collaboration between researchers and developers.

**Proposed model.** The three part approach used in this study is grounded in the types of connections that audiences have with a soundtrack, based on the above three approaches proposed by game research. The personal approach resides in the fact that for there to be a relationship between the audience (or in this case a member of the audience) and the soundtrack there has to be a connection made by the individual at a personal level. This relationship will be with either game elements or real-life experiences that elicit memories connected to a game’s music, regardless of whether these memories were generated at the moment, space, or context of play. The social approach is based on the dedicated participatory culture found in videogames. Audiences that have played the game can share the musical experience with other people, and at the same time, those that have not played the game have probably been given game music by someone who has. The marketing approach uses the commodification of soundtracks and the marketing aspects of OST publication to understand why the industry responds to this demand and how audiences react to this push towards consumption, in some cases becoming producers themselves. In this study the combination of experiential, sociocultural, and marketing imperatives, as displayed in Figure 1, will be used as the grounding to understand the consumption of game soundtracks and propose the following OST consumption model, which is explored further in chapter 3.
Figure 1: OST consumption model. This figure shows the three imperatives that surround the paraludical consumption of game music and their interaction with one another.

Objectives

To understand the motivations behind the consumption of videogame music outside of the game this thesis proposes a three-part approach based on the personal, social, and marketing imperatives which form the proposed consumption model. A survey of 373 participants was conducted to assess the different emotions, associations, and relationships that are associated to game music. This is the first time a survey of this scale has been conducted to research videogame music consumption from the audience’s perspective.

Survey Method Rationale

At this point it is pertinent to mention the reasons behind the approach taken in the course of this research to contextualise the survey that is analysed in chapter 6. At the beginning of the study some aspects of game music consumption were self-evident due to my involvement with videogames as well as being a consumer of game music, which triggered this study and influenced the direction it took during the development of the consumption model. Many of my assumptions were confirmed through literature surveys as to the workings of the consumption of videogames by individuals, but there were aspects of gameplay, personal
aspects of the player, that stood out as being highly influential in the consumption decisions of audiences. It was then clear that a collection of data that was centred on the individual was essential to investigate the consumption decisions of audiences for the creation of the three part model, and decided to err on the side of surveys over interviews following a similar process as that taken by Sean Zehnder and Scott Lipscomb, which holds a theoretical resemblance to the study of game music outside of gameplay. Zehnder and Lipscomb used a verbal attribute magnitude estimation (VAME) scale, which steered away from semantic opposites, instead using true opposites to ensure their participants chose true values as rather than negative opinions on a certain values. What was evident from this study was that although their method revealed solid quantitative results, the social and personal components of the model required a qualitative approach that allowed for the respondents to express in detail cases in which more than one factor was triggering consumption. Also, since the survey was intended to highlight the main factors that elicited memories of the music or elements that gave way to the revisiting of the music, multiple choice questions with predetermined answers may have suggested or led respondents to certain answers, open ended questions were introduced.

Open-ended questions also voided the need for audience interviews, as they already provided a space for the participant to freely input their experiences and thoughts into their answers. As a result, multiple-choice questions were categorised to fit the different layers of the proposed model to determine the motivators driving the consumption of each respondent, and open-ended questions were analysed and categorised according to their content. The benefit of surveys was mainly found in the ability of being conducted online, where it was of easy access to online gaming communities and the potential yield of the response of the survey, which resulted in a satisfying number of participants.
Specific Objectives

1. To review the current literature of game music studies, sociology of gaming, to create a backdrop for the hypothesis that will be proposed by this study. A more elaborate definition of OSTs and soundtracks will be given in chapter 2.

2. Present the place of videogame soundtracks in the modern videogame, the gaming industry, and gaming communities in order to explore the commercial importance of videogame music and its cultural significance.

3. Propose an interdisciplinary approach to the consumption of videogame soundtracks, which will be the basis of the methodology used to explain the relationships of soundtracks in chapters 3 to 5 and supported with findings in chapter 6.

4. To present a consumption model for the consumption of videogame OSTs.

Background

Before moving on to outline the structure of the thesis, a background of videogames, their history, and their study is pertinent to contextualise the study of videogame OSTs. Scholarship broadly defines videogames as electronic interactive arts, however Jesper Juul provides a more pragmatic definition of a videogame in Half-real: A dictionary of video game theory: “[a videogame is a] game played using computer power and a video display. [It] Can be [a] computer, cell phone, or console game. Sometimes used to describe console-based games only” (Juul, 2005a). Videogame music and game OSTs are now products, merchandise that is released by the game industry reacting to a demand from audiences (Kline et al., 2003), a practice that was initiated by game fans. The commercialisation of videogame music has long been a part of game publishing and game publicity, such as the case of ‘Pac-man Fever’ by Buckner and Garcia in 1982, and is now also an important part of
the game development. Musicians are now responsible for the music in the game, unlike the
case of games in the early 1980s where non-musician engineers created the circuits and logic
that would eventually become the game’s soundtrack. The term ‘videogame music’ used in
this study to describe the music in a videogame, a moniker that stems from Claudia
Gorbman’s (1980) use of the term ‘film music’ as one used to describe any music that is used
in a film that serves a narrative purpose. This clarification may seem tautological, but it does
help dissipate a widespread misconception that I have personally found through the course of
my research: this is that the term ‘videogame music’ is widely misunderstood by the general
public as music that includes sounds similar to the 8-bit or 16-bit era of videogames.
Therefore, this definition will prove instrumental in the framing of the various concepts
discussed in this paper. Returning to the role of musicians in videogames, film and television
music composers have also been tasked with game soundtracks since the early 2000s.
Licensing agreements that were seen in the 1980s, for instance Michael Jackson’s
Moonwalker (Emerald Software, 1989) as well as early Star Wars games, or even the
inclusion of Star Trek clips during the gameplay of Astron Belt (Sega, 1983), were made to
create a transmedial migration of videogames to film and vice versa. The game soundtrack is
now tasked to a musician to create a soundtrack suitable for the game, a move that became
particularly commonplace with the advent of optical storage media which allowed for
composers to be more involved with the production process, but the migration of the
soundtrack into an OST is the generally responsibility of the marketing or music departments,
and sometimes that of the composer.

With the growing importance of game music in the release, development, promotion,
and commercialisation of a title there are more concerns about the role of the music in the
game and what it means for audiences (Marks, 2001). As a product, videogame soundtracks
carry out particular roles in sociocultural relationships between gamers and popular culture,
roles that will be described later in chapter 3. The commercialisation of music, the marketing approaches, sub-cultural representations, genre, and playlist are factors that will determine the consumption of music outside of the game and the instances where audiences will choose to share these experiences and music in social environments.

The place of videogame music has changed, that is, the physical space where the videogame is played has moved from computer labs and pinball parlours to the living room and portable audio devices. This transition is due to two factors: the technological advances of game systems and the longevity (though short in comparison to other media) of videogames. Changes in technology meant that videogame consoles could turn into an all-in-one entertainment unit and affordable alternative DVD and Blu-ray devices; whilst the kids that used to play videogames in the 1970s and 1980s grew up to be adults that are more acceptant of the presence of a game console at home. This evolutionary process means that the medium has seen changes in its platforms, its commercialisation, and its audiences.

Videogames were initially studied by Chris Crawford (1984), a game designer seeking a deeper understanding of videogames and the art behind their design, as well as why people played videogames. Various elements, such as aesthetics and music, were later studied by researchers and academics since the early 1990s. Thus, as the grounding for the understanding of the medium has been set, it is pertinent for this research to briefly peruse the studies of games and how they have developed in time, as this will form the basis for many of the frameworks used in this study towards the understanding of the motivations behind the consumption of game soundtracks.

The Importance of Studying Videogames

With the appearance of academic journals and other publications on videogames, such as ones by authors like Chris Crawford and Raph Koster who wrote extensively on videogames
from an insider, game designer standpoint, the need arose to ‘justify’ the emergence of such a field. The first issue (published in 2006) of *Game and Culture* was themed around the importance of studying videogames, the authors encouraged to write around the question ‘Why game studies now?’ Although earlier publications regarding this topic had already been published, this first edition of the journal provides six examples that summarise the motives behind videogame research. The articles published in this first edition discussed the study of videogames due to the sociocultural implications, economic benefits, and the discussion of the videogame as an artform. The questions proposed by these authors are the essence of the study of videogames and the pragmatic considerations of making games beyond the production environment: they are a driving cultural force, they have their own narratives, they are a key player in today’s economy, they promote literacy and education through gamification practices; and they are a key element in popular culture (Berger, 2002; Duncan, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Kline et al., 2003; Kohler, 2005).

**Videogame Studies**

That the study of videogames is still an emerging field of research is partly due to the social stigmatisation of videogames as agents of cultural corruption that “make or furnish no utility” (Plato, 2008). Most academic research that involved videogames prior to 2000 was dedicated to the study of negative aspects and effects of gaming on society, particularly in the field of psychology. Media reports would also add to this paranoia linking criminal activity to videogames, seeing videogames as corruptors of youth and society. These studies ignored the potential for the use of traditional game elements in a digital context to enable the capability of play to anyone, corroborating initial expectations about the potential of the medium. The artistic, sociocultural, economic, and technological implications that move both the videogame industry and the gaming community have recently become the focus of
researchers who have realised that, in Poole’s words, “[v]ideogames are not going to go away” (2000, p. 11).

Videogame studies began to take shape at the beginning of the 21st century. In 2001, *Game Studies* was published, the first journal dedicated for computer game research, along with the first videogame studies conferences. Publications such as *Trigger happy: videogames and the entertainment revolution* by Steven Poole (2000), Aaron Marks’ (2001) *The complete guide to game audio: for composers, musicians, sound designers, and game developers*, and *The medium of the videogame* by Mark J. P. Wolf (2001) marked a growing trend in the academic study of videogames. These three publications steered away from their academic predecessors, particularly those in the field of psychology, which portrayed videogames as “a threat looming over our youth and society” (DeMaria, 2007, p. 5). Poole’s publication focused on the emerging social culture that surrounded videogames and the narratives embedded in them; Marks investigated production processes and business structures in regards to game audio, whilst Wolf curated a series of edited books which presented the videogame as a new medium, with aesthetic attributes and cultural responses, building frameworks from already established mediums.

Due to the nature of the medium, videogame studies encompass many different sub-fields of study. As Espen Aarseth, editor-in-chief of *Game Studies*, explains, many videogame researchers have their origins in fields other than the field of games itself, which is only until recently building its own methodologies without depending on other areas, such as film and television. Aarseth claims “2001 can be seen as the Year One of *Computer Game Studies* as an emerging, viable, international, academic field” (2001).

Poole’s (2000) *Trigger Happy: Videogames and the entertainment revolution* set the scene for the development of game studies by identifying several aspects of videogaming, most of which are pertinent to this research:
• Videogames are a big business.
• Videogames have a social role.
• Videogames are made by a number of different elements: stories, images, music, and polygons.
• Videogames are transmedial.
• Videogames create a personal space of interaction with a fabricated environment for the gamer.

Aarseth had already been studying videogames since 1984 alongside several other authors, long before Poole’s publication. However, the importance of *Trigger Happy* was that the book was solely devoted to videogames, which had proven problematic in the past, as game studies required ‘validation’ from an already established field. Aarseth acknowledged that this diversity in videogames was the greatest challenge for building a new field of study, one that was not tethered to other academic subjects such as film, television, or literature as had happened in many cases when a new area is introduced. In his first article on *Game Studies* he continues by saying:

Computer games are perhaps the richest cultural genre we have yet seen, and this challenges our search for a suitable methodological approach. We all enter this field from somewhere else, from anthropology, sociology, narratology, semiotics, film studies, etc., and the political and ideological baggage we bring from our old field inevitably determines and motivates our approaches.

(Aarseth, 2001)

Aarseth’s observations were true. In that same, first issue of *Game Studies* there were three articles that observed and compared videogame through narratology and film. While Selmer Bringsjord (2001) was comparing videogame immersion and emotional connections to *The Matrix*, Marie-Laure Ryan (2001), and Jesper Juul (2001) focused on game narratives.
Juul would later declare that the videogame was to be studied as a part of ludology, or the study of play, but the concept did not fully convince the research community. This diversity of approaches is exemplified in the ludology versus narratology debate, believed to have been sparked by Gonzalo Frasca with his article *Ludology meets narratology* (1999). According to Frasca “ludologists are supposed to focus on game mechanics and reject any room in the field for analysing games as narrative, while narratologists argue that games are closely connected to stories” (2003, p. 1). A ludologist understands games as sets of rules that the gamer must abide by in order to complete a task. Narratologists claim that videogames are stories, much like film and books, and that the rules of the game are not the focus of the experience (Aarseth, 2001; Juul, 2005b).

Later publications also revealed a similar pattern of variability in approach such as Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska’s (2002) book *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, which shows an underlining trend in the analysis and study of games, where game design trends are those that will largely determine the focus of academic studies. King and Krzywinska’s publication aimed to outline the mergence of media and transmedial migrations such as a *Star Wars* videogame or a *Tomb Raider* movie, and the differences between both mediums and the limitations of film methodologies when applied to videogames. *ScreenPlay* included articles that revolved around film and narratology, which was a common theme in early videogame writing. In the first half of the 2000s, videogame literature was limited to scholastic articles and books that defined videogames and contextualised their existence through other media such as film, videogame history books, and narratology papers. There were, of course, a few exceptions, such as Kline et al.’s book *Digital play: The interaction of technology, culture, and marketing* (2003) and Wolf and Perron’s *The video game theory reader* (2003). The Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) was also created in this early half of the decade, an association made up of industry
professionals and academics, following suit of similar research initiatives from game
developers and designers with well-established institutions such as the Games Developer
Conference (GDC) founded in Chris Crawford’s living room in the late 1980s.

The second half of the 2000s showed a research community that veered towards the
social, cultural, and experiential (or rather ‘personal’) aspects of videogames. Henry Jenkins
(2006) published *Fans, bloggers, and gamers which explored fandom and following*. Other
publications on the social aspects of gaming were Williams and Smith’s (2007) *The player’s
realm: Studies on the culture of video games and gaming* and *Gaming lives in the twenty-first
century* by Selfe and Hawisher (2007). The social and aspects of videogames became
important academic issues with the growth of gaming subcultures and the propagation of
casual as well as online gaming. The medium was no longer a novelty, but a practice that a
significant percentage of the population had experienced directly or indirectly, since the birth
of videogames in the 1970s. Game music and audio had also become an area of interest, but
one that did not receive as much attention as graphics or production. Karen Collins (2008b)
would release her book *Game sound*, introducing the history of game audio, the role of audio
in videogames, and its comparison with film audio, following her Ph.D. dissertation in 2002.

Historically, the videogame had become a large-scale social phenomenon,
revolutionising the entertainment industry, and prompting a deeper understanding of the
implications and workings of this new medium. Game studies is still a nascent academic field
that began by relating videogames to other media and other fields, however, game developers
and industry professionals were already discussing and writing about games long before the
topic reached university halls. Modern game studies are continuously branching out from
other fields of study and dedicating themselves solely to videogames and their components.
However, the existing literature in the field of videogames (and game music) at the time of
writing this dissertation is insufficient to address the topic of this thesis using studies from the
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Therefore, to investigate the motivations for OST consumption an interdisciplinary approach has to be used, as well as autobiographic remarks on my own videogame and soundtrack consumption. The latter refers to instances in which my own experience with videogame music has led me to the proposal of the consumption model presented in this study.

Notes on anecdotes and autoethnography.

There are a number of books and articles on videogame studies that take into account the experiences of players and audiences, particularly looking at the sociocultural aspect of gaming and how it has evolved through the lifespan of the medium. An example of this is Shanna Compton’s (2004) *Gamers: Writers, Artists, and Programmers on the Pleasures of Pixels*, includes a number of essays in which different authors discuss their experiences and their interactions with videogames, from biographic and auto-ethnographic perspectives.

Another example of the inclusion of biographic and personal considerations in game studies is the work of Kiri Miller (2004), who in her writings incorporates her own experiences in gameplay and performance, adding a different layer of understanding of how she draws her conclusions, when analysing the embodiment of the player in the role of the avatar. Anecdotal approaches are useful tools when it comes to videogame studies because in an emerging field of study it is important to create connections between what is a growing social phenomenon and the readers’ understanding of the significance of what for them can be a hobby, profession, and form of entertainment during the daily commute. Such approach could be likened to autoethnography, however, it only borrows certain elements that allow for a better contextualisation and understanding of some aspects that are presented here. In the field of autoethnography, authors such as Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams, and Arthurt Bochner (2011) and Diana Raab (2013) agree in the use of reflexive and experiential biographical accounts to aid in the personalisation of data, as well as the juxtaposition of anecdotes to
contextualise research and theory-driven conclusions. Ellis et al. write that “layered accounts use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection to “invoke” readers to enter into the “emergent experience” of doing and writing research, conceive of identity as an “emergent process”, and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analyses” (2011, pp. 278-279). In this study, my own, personal experiences serve to connect theories with real-life situations, but they are not the sole material used in this research to analyse theory and draw conclusions: in this study this is the role of the surveys that were conducted, setting aside autoethnography.

I believe explaining the relevance of certain theories in the context of my experience, much like in the works of Miller and Compton, adds a different layer of reality to the research bringing the theory and literature into our own plane of existence, without the need of focusing analysis on my own experiences and perspectives. Thus, this dissertation includes anecdotal content from my experiences with game music to introduce, explain, contextualise, and exemplify several aspects of this research at various points throughout the following chapters.

**Chapter Overview**

As noted in the aforementioned outline, this thesis has specific objectives that will be covered in the course of the four subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 describes the journey of interactive videogame music from the game to its linear paraludic manifestations. In this chapter, the consumption of soundtracks is understood as a phenomenon that takes place first in the videogame with the description of game music and what it does in the game, how it behaves with the interaction of the player. A new proposal for the analysis of game music consumption is proposed digressing from the path of traditional game studies, which branched out to the ludology discourse after asserting that games were a medium that was
completely self-sufficient and independent following comparison with film. Details on this transition will be discussed in this chapter. The soundtrack ultimately finds its way outside of the game, and the implications in terms of distribution, licensing, platforms, and the relationship between audience and producers are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3 introduces the first element in the methodology proposed in this study, which consists of a three-part, multidisciplinary approach to the consumption of soundtracks outside of the game. This methodology is also the consumption model proposed in this study, which is explained throughout chapters 3 to 5 and supported in chapter 6 with the data analysis. The model is comprised of three main imperatives: experiential, sociocultural, and commercial. These approaches are derived from the literature surveys in chapter 2 and a more in-depth literature review on the individual approaches which is contained in chapter 3. The chapter is also focused on the experiential aspects of musical consumption, and how the experience of gameplay and the associations created with memories help audiences feel identified with the music outside of the game. The motivations to consume soundtracks at a personal level and the relationships and associations created by the audience explored in this chapter build the foundations for the first point of contact with music: the individual, a premise that is the cornerstone of the survey analysed in chapter 6. This chapter visits the concepts of memory associations and nostalgia as contributors to experiential consumption.

The motivations that arise from the social aspects of listening to game music are the focus of chapter 4, where game music acts as a cohesive element within cultural groups and is also the common denominator in social interactions. Two main sociocultural imperatives are explored: the singularity of game music in the social context, that is, the way in which soundtracks are seen as items with cultural capital; and following, which refers to the way in which audiences familiarise with the works of particular franchises or composers and celebrate these in public spaces. Further considerations regarding the heterogeneous nature of
the gaming community and the considerations made in study when analysing the choices made by this diverse community will also be discussed further in this chapter.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the study of marketing imperatives, and the role of the game industry in the metaludical consumption of soundtracks. These are imperatives that are driven by the industry’s marketing strategies and the role of the game soundtrack as a commodified, consumable product, as well as the branding and marketing practices of the videogame industry and the role of music as a part of brand identity. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the interaction between the three approaches that make up the consumption model for game soundtracks.

Chapter 6 analyses the results of a survey conducted in the light of the theoretical framework discussed in the three previous chapters with the aim of testing the proposed method to prove its validity. The 373 responses are analysed by looking at the different multiple-choice and open-ended questions on how and why the participants listen to videogame music and what genres and games they favour. The results of the survey are then contextualised within the proposed model to support the methodology.

Chapter 7 concludes the study with a summary of the model and the findings. In this chapter, further research is also encouraged for future studies that can use this consumption model as a framework in a field that is currently short on tools for analysis.

**Significance of the Study**

Videogame music is a crucial part of the promotion, marketing, and advertising of games, which, in a billion dollar industry worldwide is an element that should not be overlooked by academia. Contemporary game music does not have the limitations that it had in the past, on the contrary, game music is now performed by bands, orchestras, and can see the creation of million dollar licensing deals for the inclusion of popular artists. Despite this, the general focus of videogame music has been on the game music within the game, and
developers and publishers have only recently begun to take full advantage of the power of music outside of the game, and the economic benefits generated by ‘long tail’ sales after games are taken off the shelves (Anderson, 2004). The growing availability and consumption of videogame music beyond the original medium of the videogame by fans and music lovers is growing and the need to understand what brings audiences to the music beyond the game experience is necessary. The understanding of these motivations is not only of use to the game industry in the publication of soundtracks, but it also helps composers, developers, and music directors better understand their approaches to music and how they will affect the prolonged listening of their music.

This study also adds to the growing area of game music studies. Videogame music studies are at a stage similar to that at which game studies research was in the early 2000s. This study aims to propose a tool, a method of analysis that is detached and separate from comparative analysis of videogame music from the point of view of film soundtracks. The crucial differentiation of game music and its audiences allows for different approaches that will help further develop studies that focus on interactive music, emergence, linearity of music, and music for interactive interfaces. Since there are very few tools for analysing the relationships between the music and the audiences, the consumption model proposed by this study proposes a different path that does not veer towards the mechanics of music in games, rather the creation of associations between individuals and groups that wish to relive events, or simply listen to good music, from an experience they had somewhere in a digital world.
Chapter 2: The Videogame Soundtrack

A soundtrack is the compilation of music that commonly accompanies a narrative audiovisual medium, such as film, videogames, or television. Videogames use a variety of different musical styles and sounds that vary from game to game, decade to decade, platform to platform. For example, the sounds used in Pokémon Red (Game Freak, 1996) on my Game Boy in 1997 are very different from the sounds of Wing Commander 3: Heart of the Tiger (Origin Systems, 1994), which are both games that I played in my childhood, both with very different and specialised music. Pokémon boasted a memorable soundtrack which creatively used the available sounds of the Gameboy’s sound card, with very distinct location music for every city and in-game locale visited and battle music was dependant on your opponent, be it a wild pokémon or a gym leader. Wing commander 3, on the other hand, a 1994 PC space simulator game, had a less colourful musical soundtrack and stark contrasts between the MIDI instruments used during combat and the space music used during live action cutscenes. In these two games, the genres and platforms are distinctly different, but the role the music played within the game gave the player a unique experience while traversing the game world. Thus, the uses of the soundtrack and the evolution of the role that they play in the course of gameplay are the focus of this chapter and a major contributor to our understanding of videogame music.

A soundtrack can be used to describe or interpret elements in a narrative, it can immerse the audience in the narrative, or it can also create narratives itself (Collins, 2008a; Diaz Gasca, 2009; Prendergast, 1977; Zehnder & Lipscomb, 2006). Since soundtracks are usually composed of linear formats (i.e. sound files), there is an apparent conflict that emerges when, in an interactive medium such as videogames, there is the use of emergent
narratives in the game. Emergent narratives are those that arise when the player interacts with the game world with these actions resulting in new choices that were not necessarily those that were initially intended by the game developer (Sweetser, 2008). As a consequence, music is affected by the emergent narrative as the music needs to be reactive to changes in narrative events, and this will be discussed later in this chapter. The emergence of game music outside of the videogame is a phenomenon that is closely related to the memorability of the music, the game, or both, and the consumption of this music is cemented in the memorability of the experience and the way in which the music is presented beyond the game. *The Legend of Zelda, Super Mario Bros., Halo, Sonic the Hedgehog, Tetris*, among many other games have music, sounds, and textures that are the object of consumption and reinterpretation at the hands of publishers, fans, orchestras, and bands. Examples of the latter two are the orchestral performances of Play! A Videogame Symphony, *Video Games Live!*, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, which have taken videogames to concert halls worldwide; bands and artists have also taken up the task of recontextualising game music such as Anamanaguchi, Powerglove, The Black Mages, and Mega Ran. This transcendence from the medium of the videogame to become the object of consumption of various audiences, and the consumption itself are the objects of study in this thesis. This chapter describes:

- the development of the game soundtrack through game history, and the evolution of the perceptions of the soundtrack in society to exhibit the current standing of OSTs in a social context.
- the role of the soundtrack in the game as a means to create links to the game, the music, and the audience.
- the soundtrack as a product and its consumption in order to provide grounding for the approaches proposed in chapter 3.
Leaps of Musical Development in Videogames

The development of videogame music and its uses over time explains the current standing of the soundtrack in its technological and social statuses. Evidence of this is the perception videogame music between different age groups of gamers, with young gamers quick to associate game music with orchestral or recorded music, whilst older gamers will find that game music sounded different to radio music in their time (Yabsley, 2007). To the latter audience, videogame music is largely associated with 8-bit and 16-bit compositions that were typical of titles that were released before the mid 1990s, a time when videogame sounds were only as versatile as the sound card that the hardware of the platform allowed. This music is evidence of the technological constraints of the games of that period, where these types of sound files were not only a feature but were a necessity. The history of game music reveals how different age groups and different audiences perceive the soundtrack and whether they would deem it music to be listened to at any time or limit their consumption to gameplay. In this section this study will present a brief précis of significant games and particular uses of game music that transformed the use of music and audio into what we perceive today as staple, recorded music, as opposed to a concise history of game audio development.

Games with Music

The first major development in the use of music in videogames was the appearance of music itself: ever since Space Invaders (Taito, 1978) introduced the use of a rudimentary soundtrack, music became an essential element in the gameplay experience. Space Invaders was the first game to have ‘music’, though it was a combination of sound effects that was diegetic, yet abstract; the soundtrack was ‘performed’ by the aliens as they moved, working as the sound effect and game music at the same time, as opposed to PONG (Atari, 1972)
which was the first game to have sound limited to simple beeps that served as sound effects as opposed to music. The basic, diegetic music in *Space Invaders* had a simple, pulsating bass line which got faster as the invaders descended to the bottom of the screen, but it nonetheless served as music, as a rudimental soundtrack, something that was new to videogames. The sound of game music at this stage consisted of synthesised sounds that came from the device’s sound chip, a sound that would become typical of videogames, providing the iconic 8-bit and 16-bit sound associated with videogames, especially in contemporary retro culture (Jenkins, 2006; Reynolds, 2011).

The mid 1980s saw two important milestones in game history: the introduction of the programmable sound generator (PSG), which reflected the growing importance of audio in the minds of developers, and the release of some of the most famous soundtracks of all time: *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1985), *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo, 1986), *Tetris*, and *Final Fantasy* (Square, 1987). These soundtracks became important as they imprinted the sound of games onto popular culture with use of strong melody lines and themes. Although games like *Pac-Man* (Namco, 1980) and *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo, 1981) had already created a significant impact, these later titles took place not in the arcade but in the living room, where other family members could hear the soundtrack, defining the sound of videogames for non-gamers. These games, which were all released for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), had several technological limitations, but programmers/sound designers/would-be ‘composers’ cleverly used these limitations to their advantage, and used them to create music that would revolve around different themes depending at which stage the player would be.

The next major advancement in game music came with *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong*, when game music was used to establish the plot of the game through cut-scenes.\(^2\) (Kohler, 2004)

\(^2\) Cut-scenes “are linear [cinematic] clips in a game where the player does not have control or participation” (Diaz Gasca, 2009).
Donkey Kong shared another special trait, as it included music in gameplay with several themes that took the player from the beginning to the end of the story. Music in videogames had become an essential part of the game as a tool to entice players in the arcade when the arcade machines were set to ‘attract mode’ and to react to the players’ actions during gameplay; game music had also become a tool that helped in the establishment of narratives.

Music Licensing and Popular Music
The 1980s cemented two pre-existing practices regarding videogame music: music licensing and the emulation of popular music, the tracks people listened to on the radio and being able to sound like ‘regular music’. Since their inception, videogames had aimed to emulate reality and to seek realism in their visuals and sounds (Bryce & Rutter, 2002), but this was to be a long process of technological development. It is worth noting the irony in the early history of videogames, that began with the ‘space shooter emulator’ Spacewar! (Graetz, Russell, & Witanen, 1962), which due to technological constraints, and perhaps an unintended joke of realistic design, had no sound. A small step, though the greatest leap for gaming, was PONG!, in which sound effects were used to recreate the sound of a ball bouncing off walls and being struck by rackets. The early uses of popular music in games aimed at creating a sense of location and familiarity with the song, whilst bound by the technical limitations of the videogame platform. As a result of their technological limitations, the amount of notes and sounds that could be employed challenged the musical skill and ingenuity of the programmer (Poole, 2000), since consoles such as the NES 2A03, for example, could only play 4 monophonic voices, two triangle waves, one square, one noise, and one 1-bit DCPM sample track. Carnival (Sega, 1980) is probably one of the earliest examples of the use of pre-existing popular music as it featured the 1888 song “Sobre las olas” (“Over the Waves”)
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by Juventino Rosas. The song, already a known song associated with fairs and carnivals, was introduced in the game to create location ambience. Similarly, in Tetris (Pajitnov, 1985) programmer Alexey Pajitnov used the Russian folk song “Korobeinki” which also helped the player associate the game with a Russian atmosphere as well as create moments of tension and release with the variable tempo of the song. The primary example of early licensing deals was Emerald Software’s Michael Jackson’s Moonwalker (1989), a game that featured the pop star along with several song titles from his new album, Bad, with the release of the game coinciding with the release in the same year as Jackson’s movie Moonwalker, making it the first big multimedia tie-in.

The race towards realism also affected game music, with games that included songs that would be ‘more accurate’ with the locations where they were set in. Furthermore, with advances in technology videogame music and sound aimed to recreate realistic sounds, a practice that affected game music composition, repertoire, and musical genres. Starglider (Argonaut Software, 1986) is an early example of this changing sonic landscape, as the main theme included synthesised voice singing to a traditional 80s rock song. This trend continued, with games such as Streets of Rage 2 (Sega, 1992) featuring distinct and well-designed sounds of popular music genres. This emulation culminated in the growing licensing agreements between the game and music industries, and the technological capability of games to use recorded music with the rise in popularity of the CD format, giving way to Redbook audio, the name given to a “digital audio of CD quality” (Belinkie, 1999, p. 5). The use of CDs for games since the late 1980s made way for better graphics and the ability to store digital audio on the disc, as opposed to sound originating in the console. This meant that musicians could add music to games without the knowledge of programming, allowing for a ‘truer’ sound, yet one different from the traditional sounds of 8-bit and 16-bit games. Perhaps one of the most notable advances in game audio was the use of music in LaserDisc games,
which was the first technological format to allow real musicians to contribute to the music of a game due to the 30-centimetre disc’s storage capacity. As music was now something that could be added to a game more easily, Redbook audio allowed for publishers to tie in the music of games to their specific target audience. *Ridge Racer* (Namco, 1993) stood out for its Rotterdam hardcore themed soundtrack and the ability to select tracks during gameplay, which were then represented on screen as tracks from a CD (e.g. ‘Track 1 – Disc2), and *Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater* (Neversoft, 1999) was also knows for its use of ska music, both games aiming at a specific target audience.

Game music also began to be the primary focus of games in the 1990s. Konami’s ‘Bemani games’ are a prime example of this trend, where the players danced in order to control the game. *Dance Dance Revolution* (Konami, 1998) consisted of a “combination of dance, physical exercise, music, and sophisticated graphics technology, united for the first time in a video game” (Demers, 2006, p. 401). The strategy behind *Dance Dance Revolution* was to create a game that could attract people with their music, and the confidence of Konami in this strategy led them to market the game’s soundtrack as one of the main selling points of the game. In arcades the game was a success, with the game inevitably marketing itself through the spectacle of gameplay for players and spectators alike, having crowds watching talented players and waiting to have a go when it was their turn. *Dance Dance Revolution* also offered downloads for new tracks that could be played along with new music, a feature that was a precursor to today’s practise of downloadable content. This feature was also made available for music games such as *Guitar Hero* (Harmonix, 2005) and *SingStar* (London Studio, 2004), games in which the player is supposed to ‘play’ or ‘sing’ the songs that are featured on the videogame. These games are heavily influenced by their licensing agreements, and the marketing of these games also revolves around the music itself and the artists involved, such as *SingStar ABBA* (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2008) and *The
**Beatles: Rockband** (Harmonix, 2009). With players allowed to purchase new downloadable content for the games, these new tracks would also contribute to the revenue of the music industry, bolstering the ties between both industries to make the most out of this new source of royalties (Cerrati, 2006). These games were also aimed at a broader, unskilled audience that played in a party/social environment, allowing the games to be known by non-gamers, refreshing the image of game music.

**Interactive Music**

Another major development in videogame music was emerging music: a soundtrack that was reactive to the actions of the player, triggered by the player’s actions, and the consequent changes in the narrative. This relationship that is formed between the player and the music can create associations with the soundtrack and can bolster further listening outside of the game. In the early 1970s the Laserdisc, the optical disc that was primarily used for video to rival the VHS and Beta, was also used in for videogames and promised to be a step forward in terms of high quality visuals and audio. These Laserdisc games were known as interactive movies: games that reacted to the choices of the player by playing a pre-recorded cinematic that was the consequence of said choice. Titles such as *Astron Belt* (Sega, 1983), *Dragon’s Lair* (Advanced Microcomputer Systems, 1983), and *Space Ace* (Advanced Microcomputer Systems, 1984) gave players pre-recorded video and the option to make choices within a limited time as to what the character would do next. Since these pre-recorded cinematics also included pre-recorded music, the music that was heard every time that the player made a choice would be a direct consequence of that choice. Despite the initial positive reception of LaserDisc games, the games offered limited replayability and consequently the format went into decline.
Modern videogame design has veered towards adaptive audio, making it a part of the game code, where not only is the story created by the player but the music is also changing with the narrative. The concept of adaptive audio is based on music that changes depending on the actions of the player, the situation the player is in, and the ever-changing environments, through a music system that works alongside the game engine to react to or anticipate actions and consequently affect music. It could be argued that adaptive audio arrived as early as *Space Invaders* with the ability/ inability of the player to dispatch aliens affecting the overall descent speed of enemies and affecting the ‘music’ of the game, and that console games would much later adapt this practice largely due to the hardware constraints generated by ‘twitch based’ sound adaptation versus the patter memorisation techniques used in consoles. Adaptive audio is a technique that brings the player closer to the music by removing the linearity in music during gameplay and making it another extension of the interactive experience, however, it is very different from ‘interactive music’. The fundamental approach for the creation of adaptive audio for videogames according to Andrew Clark (2007) and Guy Whitmore (2003) lies in the malleability of the music, the file type that is used, the musical cues, the transition technique, the music system, and the game engine. Therefore, Clark makes the distinction between interactive music and adaptive audio on the basis that interactive music would require an interaction with the music itself, as opposed to the music system adapting to the actions of the player. The main challenge for the use of adaptive audio to become a standard practice in the videogame industry is the time and effort that is required to implement properly; however, the practice is growing among developers, publishers, and composers.

An important moment in game music came when games handed over music to players. Singing games were a great example of how a player could perform in a game, but it was Nintendo with its *Legend of Zelda* series that incorporated music into the objectives of
the game. In the series, Link, the main character, is handed an ocarina with which he learns songs that will be of use during the game, in a similar way as a key to an area or a special power. Early Zelda games simplified the ocarina by having the player choose the song to be performed in the pause menu and then execute it at the push of a button. However, in The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (Nintendo, 1998) the player had the ability to use the Nintendo 64 controller to play the ocarina with every button representing a musical pitch in the game (Pidkameny, 2002). The player was now able to learn and perform songs in the game that would be taught by different characters in the game world. The consequences of this use of music meant that players felt empowered to play this song outside of the gaming having learnt it for the game, as well as the worldwide rise of ocarina sales; thus, the experience of having real control over music in the game is different from the musical involvement of audiences in music games. While in music games the players memorise the music and try to achieve a maximum degree of ‘button-pressing perfection’, interactive audio and instrumental performances give music to the player in a way that they can appropriate as a part of their experience. Another example of interactive audio is Sega’s 2001 game Rez, with the player’s button inputs triggered sounds and melodies that would complement the underlying beat. Rez did not require metronomic perfection, yet it allowed for the player to truly create the soundtrack during gameplay. When game music consumption outside of the game comes into place, the relationships are not only different, but the music itself can be different, because with interactive music and performable music there is a lacking of linearity that is seen in the recorded audio file. These implications will be discussed in the next chapter.

The development of videogame music went through a metamorphosis from simple beeps to recorded music. The role of music in games grew and became more important as games became longer and more complex. No longer only a means to attract the attention of
potential players, the music in games began to tell the story of the game, and ultimately it was used to reach audiences and create an association with the player. This would have a significant impact on the consumption of soundtracks, as will be discussed in chapter 3.

The Role of Soundtracks

The consumption of videogame soundtracks can be traced back, in many cases, to the game experience. The soundtrack in a game plays different roles, where players interact with the game, the music, the diegetic world, the characters, their stories, and ultimately, their own experiences as a player, hence the importance of their study inside and outside the game. Thus, the role of soundtracks in games is a topic that merits a study of its own, where technical, compositional, and in-game usage considerations are taken into account. However, this section intends to contextualise how soundtracks are used in games and how they interact with the player inside the game, to be able to discuss the place of OSTs as a product and their consumption, as a more comprehensive study of music in games is not a part of this study.

Videogame soundtracks are often compared to film soundtracks in the role they play during gameplay. Since videogame music studies is an emerging field, interdisciplinary approaches are widely used to create analogies between media, a useful, yet detrimental practise in a field that is still building methodologies and tools of its own, as it could be seen as seeking validation from other fields. As mentioned earlier, the soundtrack serves as a sonic backdrop that complements the narrative that is being displayed in images, which in the case of a videogame, can also complement actions through cues that are triggered by actions, achievements, or as rewards (Collins, 2008b). To understand what a soundtrack does in a game it is necessary to also understand that:
- Videogame music has a meaning of its own, and this meaning, or representation, is also subject to change with the game narrative (Gorbman, 1980; Lipscomb & Zehnder, 2004).

- Videogame soundtracks are composed to concepts, as well as direct thematic approaches (Diaz Gasca, 2009).

- Videogame soundtracks can come from sources outside the game (Collins, 2008a; Kärjä, 2008).

**Incidental and Thematic Music**

One of the key elements that weave the player, the game, and the music together is the message that is given by the music, and this plays a key role in the subsequent consumption of soundtracks. Any musical piece conveys a message, either explicit through lyrics or by a combination of sounds that would semiotically relate to something else (Gorbman, 1980; Prendergast, 1977). Game soundtracks represent moments and aspects of a game musically through themes and motifs, and through the use of incidental music. Themes and motifs refer to music or musical lines that have been composed for a specific purpose and for a specific representation. These are mostly used for the purpose of representing characters or events of the game, and to accompany important narrative occurrences during cut-scenes, and contain high emotional value. For example, in *Final Fantasy X* (Squaresoft, 2001) the song ‘Suteki da ne’ (‘Isn’t it Wonderful) was used during an important romantic cut-scene where the two main characters embrace as they face the ominous fact that she has to die in order to save the world. The chorus of the song follows the melody of ‘Yuna’s Theme’, the character that is to sacrifice herself for the greater good.

Incidental music is that which is intended to give a specific message or represent specific themes (e.g. ‘danger’, ‘victory’, ‘town’), thus it can be reused in various areas of the
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game and is often used in lengthier games, such as RPGs. In *Chrono Trigger* (SquareSoft, 1995) the song ‘A Shot of Crisis’ is repeatedly used in the game at times where the story dictates a moment of haste and peril, which conditions the player to become alert, whilst musically adding to this sense of urgency with its fast-paced, minor key tune. The soundtrack also helps the immersion of the player in the game by creating the illusion of time and place through instrumentation and musical style, often creating tension and release moments that add a psychological and experiential component to tasks and actions. This can be seen in the case of the soundtrack for *Journey* (thatgamecompany, 2012). *Journey* begins in a vast desert, where the unnamed character is compelled to reach a mountain, the only landmark in the desolate landscape. The instrumentation and production of the soundtrack involves string sections, which play modal keys that give the impression of a desert somewhere in Asia, featuring other plucked string instruments while open chords and long reverbs with the addition of solitary gongs add to the sense of loneliness, desolation, and ultimately of being on a journey to the unknown.

The difference in the role of music in a game, whether it is used for incidental or thematic purposes, can describe the relationship that is formed between the player and the audience. The thematic representation of characters and music in games can represent the avatar controlled by the player, thus transforming the music into representations of the player, and incidental music the representation of the places and feeling felt during a certain chapter of the game. This involvement of the player with the music is further discussed in chapter 3, but essentially, the way in which music represents the characters of the game world and the environment and the narratives of the game translates into the type of engagement that would propel metaludic consumption of music.
Diegesis

Diegesis is the narrative of a particular medium, particularly film; in videogames and other audiovisual media, the term is used to refer to the virtual story world that is projected on screen, such as the Kingdom of Yamatai in *Tomb Raider* (Square Enix, 2013), Midgar in *Final Fantasy VII* (Squaresoft, 1997), and Pandora in *Borderlands* (2K Games, 2009). Events, places, sounds, and music that are located within these digital worlds are considered ‘diegetic’ (i.e. pertaining or originating from the digital world) and those elements that do not exist within the world but emanate from the screen as a parallel ‘meta-text’ are considered non-diegetic. The virtual, diegetic worlds created by videogames have their own narratives and stories, as well as their inhabitants and music (Egenfeldt Nielsen, Smith, & Tosca, 2008; Tong & Tan, 2002). In-game encounters with music that is ‘indigenous’ to the game world gives players a dimension of space and location that is different from incidental music, by allowing the game world to describe itself through music as opposed to giving it a musical label for the player to interpret. Zach Whalen (2007) describes the soundtrack as a diegetic and non-diegetic element that can retain its original meaning outside its original medium. However, I have found in previous research that the ‘original meaning’ of the music is highly malleable during gameplay, as a videogame’s lengthy narrative evolves along with the music (Diaz Gasca, 2009). For example, in the game *Portal* (Valve Corporation, 2010) and its sequel *Portal 2* (Valve Corporation, 2011) the player finds radios scattered around the Aperture Laboratories facilities, which can be carried to different locations or destroyed by various means, creating the estranged environment that is the uninhabited facility in which the games take place cementing the diegesis. Though these devices serve no real purpose in the game, the player has the ability to interact with the device and even put an end to the music should the radio be destroyed.
Another example of diegetic music is *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2008) in which the player is capable of tuning in to a variety of radio stations that broadcast around the Capital Wasteland. In the case of *Fallout 3*, the player can visit some of the locations where these radio stations are transmitting from and meet the DJs and learn the backstory of performers and radio shows, as well as receiving feedback of the ‘popularity’ of the character among the denizens of the Wasteland and extra missions through the airwaves. As discussed previously, in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* the gamer is required to learn musical pieces in order to progress in the game, creating user-generated, diegetic music. Several of the songs that are learnt are sung or performed originally by characters in the game, as is the case of ‘Saria’s Song’, ‘Song of Storms’, and ‘Zelda’s Lullaby’. In *Bastion* (Supergiant Games, 2011) the Kid finds a young woman in the aftermath of a cataclysmic event in the ruins of a city singing a song on her guitar, which later becomes her theme and a recurrent theme in the game: ‘Build that Wall (Zia’s Theme)’). Non-diegetic music is music that accompanies the game, but does not originate from the game world. This is the case for the majority of videogame soundtracks, with examples ranging from the diverse battle themes in *Pokémon* to the ‘Guile theme’ in *Super Street Fighter II* (Capcom, 1993). The difference between these two types of music lies in the use of the music in the game, and the role it plays, as a narrative tool such as a diegetic soundtrack is a direct representation of the current persona/scenario, whilst a non-diegetic soundtrack serves as an interpreter of space and events.

**The OST and its Consumption**

An original soundtrack (OST) is the metaludic manifestation of videogame music, and it has become a widely popular and almost mandatory element in the release of a videogame title (Collins, 2008b; Newman, 2008). OSTs are comprised of the sound files that
were originally embedded into the game, however, these sound files are in formats that are not interactive, such as CD or a digital file (.wav, .mp4, .aac, etc.). Like other forms of recorded music, OSTs are released in various formats dependant on the target audience, the size of the project, and other possible licensing agreements that could have been formulated during the production stages of the game’s development (Rabin, 2010). The migration of soundtracks from one medium to another (i.e. from the videogame to an OST) is a process that bears some semblance to the publishing of music. OSTs can be released independently of the game or as a collector’s item with the game; digital downloads can also be made available and the music purchasable from online retailers as extra features rewarding the purchase of the game. One must bear in mind that there is a difference between OSTs that are available and those that are officially published. Published OSTs are intended for sale whilst not necessarily making an immediate financial gain for the game publishers, as opposed to available soundtracks, whose popularity can lead to a future OST publication or be a means to ‘connect’ audiences to the game.

**Brief Origins of OST Publication**

It is not clear exactly when soundtracks transcended the gameplay environment. What is certain is that game music was referenced, both musically and thematically, in popular music in the early 80s with examples such as Jerry Buckner and Gary Garcia’s ‘Pac-Man Fever’ in 1982, and other band performances and remixes in the 90s when official remixes were released to accompany games such as ‘Killer Instinct: Killer Cuts in’ 1995, endorsed and distributed by Nintendo inside the game’s box, and the soundtrack to the 1994 game *Little Big Adventure* (Adeline Software International, 1994), which featured its soundtrack in Redbook audio format that allowed the music to be played in a CD player, trait that would become a selling point for several Mega CD games as well as Saturn games (Pidkameny,
2002). In the West, videogame soundtracks have only recently become a more mainstream part of popular culture, whereas in Japan the publication of original soundtracks is a tradition that dates back to the days of Super Mario Bros. According to Pidkameny (2002), game OSTs were initially releases of orchestral versions of the music, though the original game audio was included, to add a nostalgic element to the CD. In the West, videogame OSTs started to become available in the mid 1990s, and their publication was primarily as an item that complemented the game.

**The Publication of Soundtracks**

The publication of OSTs and their role in the release of a videogame directly affects the impact that they will have on their audiences. Videogames are an art form, a medium that creates dreams and characters that stir the imagination of players and give them the opportunity to be not only a spectator but also a participant in the story that is laid out before them. As games are created the personalities of characters are thought out and explored, traits that are then imaged by the programmers and designers to shape the characters and landscapes that will form a part of the game world. The sounds and music of a game represent the locations and enhance the challenges that are faced by the heroes and anti-heroes of these games. But videogames, like film, are art forms that are a part of the entertainment industry, an industry that is in the pursuit of profit. It is because of this that decisions made alongside the production of a videogame have to do also with the future marketability of the game, its contents, its message, and the paraludic references that it can have prior to its release and its subsequent shelf life. This does not mean that the art and creative design are taken out of the conceptual design process in favour of something that is more commercial, but this can certainly be the aim of some big developers to ensure the success of their game. This success is measured in sales. The profits that are derived from the
sales of games can originate from various sources: downloadable content (DLC), expansions, sequels, official walkthroughs, in-game purchases, and merchandising. Among this merchandise lies the original soundtrack. Some developers choose to release an official OST and distribute it through several retailers. There are those who choose to gift it to their fans and patrons by including a free copy of the music with the game, or those who distribute it for free on the internet with the aim of feeding game following and in turn getting more people to play the game. Another consideration is that the music in a game is important for the success of the game. Good music accompanying a good game will be likely to be imprinted in the player’s memory and expand to others through word of mouth, or other social practices. This is evident in recurring themes for several successful game series, such as *The Legend of Zelda* and *Final Fantasy*, where good, recurring themes aided in the creation of a strong music culture surrounding the game. Another example of the same effect triggered by music, was Christopher Tin’s Grammy Award winning song ‘Baba Yetu’ which first reached audiences as a song that later realised that it was the opening theme song for the game *Civilization IV* (2K Games, 2005). A good soundtrack on a bad game, though, will be heard by those unfortunate enough to play the game. And there is also the case of bad music in a good game, which will translate into frustrated gamers, which will consequently result in criticism because of music that was disruptive to the gameplay experience, such as the case of *Final Fantasy XIII-2’s* (Square Enix, 2012) use of battle music themes in slow overworld locations. This is why the music of a game is a serious matter during the conceptual design stage of the game.

**The role of videogame music in the promotion of games.** “In the last five to seven years, music has transitioned from purely background filler to a major selling point in the video game industry” (Cerrati, 2006, p. 316), and furthering this argument, both the licensing and
original compositional aspects of music in games are also important elements of the marketing of a game. The choice of music can determine sales and future marketability of merchandise, and as Kiri Miller (2007) argues, it also influences the experience of the performance of the player and her/his identification with the characters, subcultures, and demographics that are portrayed in the game.

Commercial tie-ins between video game publishers and the music industry are also a reflection of their practises and how the game will fit with the intended audience, with game advertisement and promotion a key example. The use of music in the game and in the promotional material can sometimes be different, with game ads sporting latest pop songs, epic soundtracks, or vintage rock hits; but the reason why this music is used was found since the arcade era. Even today, arcades are bustling with sounds and images from different machines that compete to attract the attention of those around (Kohler, 2005). In the early arcade era, cut-scenes and music were revolutionary enough to call for the attention of prospective players using the arcade machine’s ‘attract mode’, which featured cut-scenes and excerpts from the game accompanied with loud music and sound effects. According to Kohler, games like Pac-Man and Donkey Kong were proof of the success of early arcade games that had a strong musical line during gameplay and attract mode.

Even after the collapse of the videogame market and the rise of the modern era of console gaming circa 1982, the arcade still serves as an example of the niche evolution of gaming (Egenfeldt Nielsen et al., 2008; Herman, 1997; Kent, 2001; Kohler, 2005; Rabin, 2010). Later games would try to stand out with their music and sound systems: the Atari console introduced the ‘Pokey’ chip, which at the time allowed for greater power of sound synthesis and memory allowing digitised voice samples such as those used in Berzerk (Stern Electronics, 1980); Ridge Racer (Namco, 1993) which had music heavily influenced by the Rotterdam Hardcore, Time Crisis (Namco, 1997) which would release an OST including its
music and audio clips from the game; and *Quake* (GT Interactive, 1996) which featured Trent Reznor, member of the popular band Nine Inch Nails. *Dance Dance Revolution* (Konami, 1998) stands out again as a prime example, because it was an arcade game that made heavy use of music for its marketing by taking their approach further by creating a dancing game that incorporated popular, licensed tracks into a game that would not only be the object of spectacle for players but would also attract audiences that would admire other people play. In the case of *Dance Dance Revolution*, the concept was still based on the principles of early arcades of using images and sound, but the player performance and the targeting of certain audiences with the choice of music exemplifies the process of the evolution of game marketing, which in the case of arcades is truly direct marketing.

In the living room, console games took a different approach from arcade games. The use of television was very important during the console wars of the 1990s, positioning the console within the homes of customers, making the living room the battlefield (Herman, 2008). Nintendo, the leader in home consoles at the time was challenged by Sega’s new console for a place in the home videogame market. At the time, videogames were seen as children’s toys and Nintendo catered for younger audiences, whereas Sega saw the possibility of segmenting the population and creating a new market with a demographic of 15 to 17 year olds despite its Master System being initially distributed as a toy by Mattel (Kline et al., 2003). Sega’s strategy consisted of ridiculing Nintendo, making it look infantile and portraying itself as a mature form of entertainment. As Kline et al. described it: “selling to this “mature” market would draw younger boys who were keen to emulate their elders, persuading the Nintendo Generation to switch loyalty” (Kline et al., 2003, p. 130). Sega’s strategy was appealing to an ‘ageing’ kids’ market, and to appeal to newfound teenage gamers the company advertised its products using popular music styles such as hip-hop, rock, and metal to distance itself from the family friendly Nintendo style. This musical trend was
also seen in the games that were published for Sega consoles with more mature games using more ‘serious’ music, releasing game titles that included popular bands at the time, such as the *Make My Video* series, featuring bands such as INXS, Aerosmith, and Kriss Kross. This practice did not limit itself to the case of Nintendo and Sega, but later, when the war was lost by Sega ‘out-marketing itself’, the new players in the videogame console business, Sony and Microsoft, would later also find themselves musically differentiated from Nintendo, but also within their own audiences.

Game music marketing strategies for games is closely related to the type of audience that is being targeted, both in the game and in the advertising of the product. With Sega and Nintendo the differentiation between audiences was primarily one that had to do with the age of the audience, whereas now the differentiation is more specific. Sony and Microsoft expanded their age demographics, crossing over to younger age groups that were traditionally Nintendo territory with games such as *LittleBigPlanet* (Media Molecule, 2008). Nintendo responded by targeting an untapped market: senior audiences found in the Nintendo Wii a user-friendly platform that offered easy games that could be enjoyed by anyone. Music in television advertising spots will most likely include in-game music or licensed music, such as *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (Treyarch, 2010) using ‘Give Me Shelter’ by The Rolling Stones in their TV ads, reinforcing the narrative of the game through the appropriation of war era metaludical associations that are pre-existing in the minds of audiences; and *New Super Mario Bros* (Nintendo, 2006) would use their original soundtrack, which reinforces the ‘traditional Mario’ style of the game. This is evidence that music is not only a powerful marketing tool for videogames but it also attracts people of different backgrounds to it, and through inference to the game.
What is in it for the music industry? As evidenced previously, licensing music for videogames has become a significant promotional tool for both the videogame and the music industries. The discovery and infiltration of this new medium came about in a different way from that in which the music industry approached film as a source of revenue. According to Michael Cerrati there has been a significant change in the use of game music:

…the roles and relationships of the parties in the music and video game industries have taken interesting new shapes. Licensing music for video games has quickly shifted from an additional revenue source for a recording artist, to a crucial marketing and publicity outlet for known and unknown artists alike (2006, p. 316).

The marketing push that is seen in the game industry to tie their products with the games is based mostly on the exposure that a license can bring through other media and the impact that advertisement has on the viewer/listener of the ad whom creates that association between the music and the game. Cerrati also found that “an average of 2.5 people play each sports game sold” (2006, p. 304), giving game music significant exposure to a segment of the gaming demographic that does not often play this type of game alone. Game music exposure is also prolonged, as gamers play for extensive hours, sometimes listening to similar motifs or musical pieces during gameplay. The cases of Jonathan Coulton, Good Charlotte, and Poets of the Fall are prime examples for the case in favour of music in videogames and how a positive relationship between the game and the music industries both benefit from a symbiotic relationship (Cerrati, 2006; Kärjä, 2008). In terms of this research paper, this relationship will prove important in the musical choices, the marketing push for artists, and the publishing of music for games outside of the game, discussed later in this dissertation.
The Consumption of Soundtracks

The consumption of original soundtracks outside of the game is a phenomenon that occurs though a variety of channels, and the legality of these channels has been reduced to a technicality in regards to the function of the soundtrack as consumable merchandise. Game publishers do not always put a price on their OSTs, as long as it creates a fanbase that will expand and play the game (for example, the Portal 2 official website allows visitors to download songs and ringtones that are a part of the Portal 2 soundtrack for free). OSTs share several more traditional distribution channels with the music industry, such as online and retail CD stores, however, soundtrack distribution also suffers from piracy in the same way the music industry does. The videogame industry is not immune to piracy and has lost millions of dollars to downloads, illegal duplication, and soundtrack downloads in a similar way to which the music and film industries are affected every year. Not only is this a recurrent practice that happens on P2P file sharing systems, but it has expanded to fan websites that allow free downloads of videogame OSTs, film music, and anime soundtracks among others. It is virtually impossible for authorities to trace the amount of files that have been acquired illegally in this manner and the justifications by consumers for not purchasing music are manifold (Liu, 2001; Orloff, 2004). The following is a brief overview of OST consumption; the motivations for their consumption are surmised in the subsequent chapters.

Videogame soundtrack formats. Like other forms of recorded music, OSTs are released in various formats dependant on the target audience, the size of the project, and other possible licensing agreements that could have been formulated during the production stages of the game’s development. Sales of OSTs in CD format are very high in Japan, but this is not the case in the West where the misconception lingers that OSTs fit into a ‘specialist item’ category, available only through import or special order (Collins, 2008a; Stevens, 2008). This
phenomenon is not repeated in digital publishing where the internet and online retailers, such as iTunes, allow the propagation of OSTs through legal purchases, while peer to peer networks facilitate unauthorised downloads (Collins, 2008a). The videogame industry embraced the internet in a similar way to the music and film industries by allowing consumers to purchase downloadable content such as extra features (and in the case of videogames this extends to extra characters, expansions, and full games) and by integrating online soundtrack consumption through their websites or the games themselves (e.g. Electronic Art’s EA Trax) (Bruno, 2007; Himowitz, 2003; Kane, 2009). The proliferation of videogame music sharing websites also grew in the early 2000s, many aimed at bringing Japanese videogame music to audiences that could not obtain a copy otherwise, offering .mp3 files to users. Videogame music is also available from several websites in MIDI format, facilitating the programming of user-generated versions of game music.

**OST outlets and acquisition.** A further issue concerning OST distribution is the outlet where the product is purchased (or acquired). The outlet is highly dependant on the format in which the OST is published, as a number of publishers and developers prefer to sell OSTs in a digital format to cut costs and others chose to release CDs that can be perceived as having a higher cultural value. Although OSTs are mostly released as CDs there are numerous ways to obtain them; and in CD format OSTs are more likely to be from AAA games as part of a large-scale marketing strategy. OSTs in a CD format are sold either at record stores, online stores, or come as a bonus item with the purchase of a game. Some publishers decide to release and distribute their OSTs either independently or in association with a record label. Such is the case with Electronic Arts’ EA Trax which is an online audio stream site where listeners also have an option to purchase what they listen to, or Square Enix Music which in association with Sony releases the OSTs for online purchase or as a hard copy (Bruno, 2007;
Collins, 2008b). Different formats are consumed by different demographics which can depend on age, social background, and (in the case of games) culture of play, for example, the case of teenagers who would prefer to obtain products online either by a purchase, file sharing, or download (Brown, 1999; Compton, 2004). This, in a way, encourages the videogame (and music) industry to ‘open’ online stores allowing them to have access to a broader market and offer cheaper products than if sold as a hard copy (Kane, 2009). OST digital downloads are available through online retailers like iTunes, Amazon, and Magnatune, and also through platform network stores such as XBox Live, and the PlayStation Store.

Research by the Record Industry Association of America revealed that from 1999-2002 record sales had fallen by 14%, laying the blame on illegal downloads and online retail (Himowitz, 2003), although the lobby group is known for its use of hyperbolic figures. This study also showed that the people who shifted their consumption patterns, creating this downfall, were mostly young people who would prefer the comfort of home for their purchase or simply downloaded music because they were not concerned that by obtaining an illegal copy that would not remunerate the artist or the label. Despite this, the internet is still the largest outlet for original soundtracks. Specialist retailers are also prominent distributors of game music. This is aligned with the otaku sub-culture that is based in the consumption of Japanese popular art. This sub-culture thrives on the consumption of Japanese products including OSTs of anime and videogames, particularly if they are original Japanese imports. The otaku sub-culture is found in several countries and regions outside of Japan (Newman, 2008).
Conclusion: Game Music Today

The consumption of videogame soundtracks, their publishing and distribution are practices that are well established and have strong ties with audiences and various industries. This chapter has discussed the origins of game music, its role in the videogame, and how videogame soundtracks are consumed outside of the game. The history of the use videogame music can be seen in either a chronological order, as a process of technological advances, or a series of events that determined the different uses of a soundtrack. The latter is used in this chapter because the use of game music through history as a determining factor in its consumption out of the game outweighs the technological development of the medium and the state of the game industry in a given period. The reason for this is that when there is a new use of game music it is likely to affect future game development and the experience of the player, experiences that can be either personal as in the case of Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, or collective as seen in the case of Dance Dance Revolution. The different uses of game music and music used in games ultimately evolved into what we now expect to see in videogames: the realism of setting and location through the choice of music, the licensing ties that give players their desired playlists, the retro sounds of games that trigger nostalgia, the interactivity of music with the avatar’s story, and the reactive audio that changes with the actions of the player. All of these emotions and reactions are what trigger the experiences of the game community and the gaming individual to create bonds with the music, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Experiential Motivators and the Consumption of Soundtracks

I clearly remember playing *Braid* (Number None, 2008) while I was in the middle of my honours year, and I stumbled upon the trailer for this game when I was doing research on a game that I was writing about. *Braid*’s trailer was phenomenal, and it struck a chord with me in the innovative use of music in the story of the game, which eventually led me to playing the game, and consequently downloading the entire soundtrack from Magnatune. The way in which I went about playing *Braid* and the way in which I listened to the music afterwards is a perfect example of the different facets of the proposed model in this dissertation: I watched the trailer, I played the game, I got the soundtrack, I listened to it at home with my housemate. I was effectively enticed by the marketing strategies of the developer, interacted with the game music (and the story, which also captivated me), and then I shared my experience with someone else in a social environment. It was this realization that led me to pursuing this topic, since I had already seen it being played out several times in my own life.

In the following three chapters the methodology of this study is presented, taking a three part approach comprised of experiential, sociocultural, and marketing imperatives to answer the question ‘what are the motivations behind the consumption of videogame OSTs?’ Having problematised the consumption of soundtracks in chapter 1 and exhibited the current standing of the videogame soundtrack and its uses inside and outside of the game in chapter 2, the next three chapters provide a literature review, as well as formulating the theories that support the consumption model that is also presented in this chapter. The literature review relates to the three approaches outlined in chapter 1, and are based on the personal, experiential motivations that occur when an
individual is exposed to game soundtracks; the social, collective listening of game music as a part of a practice of a group or an experience that involves several individuals; and the soundtrack as an object of consumption, its commodification, and the push of the game industry in its marketing strategies as a response to a demand from audiences. This chapter describes the experiential elements of OST consumption, which derive from the elicitation of personal memories from the virtual world or real life that audiences experience when listening to OSTs, and the identification and associations that are created between the game player and the different elements and characters of the game world, as well as the presentation of other considerations that are pertinent for the understanding of consumption imperatives. The consumption model proposed for this thesis is as follows:
These three approaches form the basis of the consumption model presented in this thesis, and are the key to understanding the motivations behind the consumption of game soundtracks outside of the interactive medium in which they originated. The model attempts to connect the two main actors in the consumption of game music: the consumer (often referred to as the audience) and the producer (which can be the publisher or the developer; or the prosumer, term discussed later in this paper). These two are connected by the game, the product that is being initially traded by these two parties, and in this common ground the by-product (the OST). The consumption of soundtracks outside of the game is a personal and social activity that is fomented by the industry in its growing awareness of the power and role of music in videogames. This consumption model aims to involve these parties and describe how they interact with each other, a relationship that becomes apparent as the literature reviews unfold, but is nonetheless summarised in chapter 5.
Further Definitions and Notes on the Consumption of Soundtracks

There are many avenues of consumption when it comes to videogame soundtracks, and thus several factors that will determine the preferred method of consumption. The enticing power of music can be appreciated in more than one way and the advantages of knowing why this music leaves its original, intended medium can help understand and reshape the approach of analysing audiences and the publishing of videogame OSTs. Despite the preferred channel of OST consumption being an element at the centre of this study, it is the why of the consumption and not the how that is the main topic of this discussion. It is however worth briefly mentioning the different channels of consumption and the differences in the choice of these channels to enrich the content that will ensue throughout the following chapters.

Consumption differentiation based on format.

OST consumption is not limited to the purchase of CDs, and as mentioned previously, there are several forms of consumption and it is pertinent to clarify that OST consumption is not limited to the purchase of a copy since digital file sharing, downloading, and streaming are considered by this study other means to consume game music. The term ‘consumption’ is used in this paper to describe the willing sampling and listening of a game music (i.e. the act of listening to music that belongs to a game outside of the context of a game). The choice of format is dependant on the needs or preferences of the audience, since, for example, some videogames never had an official soundtrack release, or perhaps they are not available in certain territories. However, like in other forms of recorded music, OSTs are released in various formats dependant on the target audience, the size of the project, and other possible licensing agreements that could have been formulated during the production stages of the game’s development.
(Rabin, 2010).\textsuperscript{3} Sales of OSTs in CD format are notable in Japan, but this is not the case in the West where the misconception lingers that OSTs are a ‘specialist item’ category, available only through import (Collins, 2008b; Stevens, 2008).\textsuperscript{4} This phenomenon is not repeated in digital publishing where the internet and online retailers, such as iTunes, allow the propagation of OSTs through legal purchases, while peer to peer networks facilitate unauthorised downloads (Collins, 2008b). The videogame industry embraced the internet in a similar way to the music and film industries by allowing consumers to purchase downloadable content such as extra features (and in the case of videogames this extends to extra characters, expansions, and full games), and by integrating online soundtrack consumption through their websites or the games themselves (e.g. Electronic Art’s EA Trax) (Bruno, 2007; Himowitz, 2003; Kane, 2009).

**OST acquisition and publication.**

A further issue concerning OST distribution is the outlet where the product is purchased (or acquired), which is highly dependant on the format in which the OST is published, as a number of publishers and developers prefer to sell OSTs in a digital format to cut costs and others to release CDs that in turn can have a higher cultural value.

Soundtracks that are released in CD format are more likely to be from AAA games as part of a large-scale marketing strategy, and can be found either in record stores, online stores, or come as a bonus item with the purchase of a game. Some publishers decide to release and distribute their OSTs either independently or in association with a record label, such as the case with Electronic Arts’ EA Trax which is an online audio stream

\textsuperscript{3} Examples of these agreements are described by Steve Rabin (2010). However, he does not describe the publication of the game nor the OST.

\textsuperscript{4} Videogame music in Japan has reached Top 10 status in music charts various times.
site where listeners also have an option to purchase what they listen to, or Square Enix Music which in association with Sony releases the OSTs for online purchase or as a hard copy (Bruno, 2007; Collins, 2008b).

Different formats are consumed by different demographics which can depend on age, social background, and (in the case of games) cultures of play (Compton, 2004). For example, teenagers would prefer to obtain products online either by a purchase or other means (Brown, 1999). This segmentation of the market, in a way, encourages the videogame (and music) industry to ‘open’ online stores allowing them to have access to a broader market and offer cheaper products than if sold as a hard copy. Legally purchasable OST digital downloads are available through online retailers, and also through platform network stores such as Xbox Live, and the PlayStation Store. But as digital markets are not immune to piracy, it is also wise to contextualise consumption in the black market of internet piracy. Research by the Record Industry Association of America revealed that from 1999-2002 record sales had fallen by 14%, laying the blame on illegal downloads and online retail (Himowitz, 2003). This study also showed that the people that shifted their consumption patterns, creating this downfall, were mostly young people who would prefer the comfort of home for their purchase or simply downloaded music because they were not fazed by obtaining an illegal copy that would not remunerate the artist or the label. Despite this, the Internet is still the vastest outlet for legal, original soundtracks. Specialist retailers are also prominent distributors of game music, some which cater to the Western otaku sub-culture that is cemented in the consumption of Japanese popular art. This sub-culture thrives on the consumption of Japanese products including OSTs of anime and videogames, particularly if they are original Japanese imports, as opposed to their local market releases. This sub-culture, known as the otaku culture, is found in several countries and regions outside Japan.
Music Beyond Gameplay: Motivators In The Consumption Of Videogame Soundtracks

(Newman, 2008). This is particularly important in the case of media tie-ins where a game has been turned into an anime (e.g. Pokémon) or an anime or movie into a game (e.g. Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm [CyberConnect2, 2008]).

**Platform audio and its audience.**

As mentioned previously, the gaming audience is exposed to a variety of games through the options available on their platform. As soundtracks are embedded into games their audiences are highly determined by the game’s platform (for example, the Wii U is a platform that does not directly target mature audiences, and only certain people would buy it to get games that are exclusive to the console, such as the Zelda series). In the same way that game genres appeal to different audiences, game platforms are designed to aim at certain demographics (Wolf, 2001). For example, when Nintendo released the Wii it did not intend to surpass its competitor (the Xbox 360) with a better console, but to aim at an older target audience, one that had probably grown up with games and wanted to introduce their children to the medium. This was done by introducing simple, family-friendly titles such as WiiSports, which aimed at a broader demographic from young children to retired people that would normally be the usual target audience of fast-paced, violent games (albeit, there are several action games and Wii versions of other AAA titles available for the console). The Wii, with its lower resolutions in both audio and graphics, exposes its audience to sounds are based on what was Nintendo’s initial marketing strategy to drive sales of the WII with a retro/nostalgic approach to its games; the console was cloaked in near obsolescence as a quaint charm.

The other two major contenders in the console market, Sony PS3 and Microsoft Xbox 360, are similar in the sense that they target a more ‘mature’ gaming audience and in that they are high-definition consoles, resulting in an exposure to high quality sound
effects and music a clear audio quality difference with the Wii. Whilst Nintendo does not intend to compete with Sony and Microsoft due to their unique target audience and their nostalgia-driven marketing strategy, the implications of demographics and technology used for the consoles has implications that are worth noting. These consoles are targeted at a different, more mature audience in gaming standards from that of the average, casual Wii player, and the games that are presented in these platforms reflect their demographics; dedicated (i.e. ‘hardcore’ gamers) are more inclined to create strong associations with their experiences in the game beyond gameplay. Although the types of demographics that are reached by different platforms determine the types of involvement that people would have with music outside of the game, the difference in audio quality among platforms results in a very important dichotomy: there are more official OST releases for high definition consoles than for lower definition platforms. Xbox 360 and PS3 games tend to have a higher rate of soundtrack release, which could be assumed to be because the higher resolution and sometimes more complex soundtrack would have a stronger impact on the gamer; it will be these OSTs that will inundate Japanese retailers and online stores. Lower resolution consoles, however, undergo a different process. Although there are some OST releases of important game franchises (such as The Legend of Zelda), most Wii game soundtracks are only available in digital formats, many found on fan sites that have claimed to have extracted or ‘ripped’ the original audio to give their files a greater cultural capital, despite the files being free. Other soundtracks that are available for these games are third-party remakes, fan mixes, or compilations.
Final thoughts on consumption.

Kline et al. (2003) offer another perspective on the role of the consumer of videogames and it is that of being a prosumer. They propose that according to the post-Fordist economic model consumers have become producers as they have a certain degree of intervention in products through feedback, focus groups, and, most recently, almost immediate reviews of products that are released in the market. They describe this feedback as being a part of what they call the circuit of capital.

![Figure 2: The Three Circuits of Interactivity in the Mediatized Global Market (Diagram 6) (Kline et al., 2003). This figure represents the forces behind the gameplay experience.](image)

This model comes from the perception of Kline et al. that the videogame is a participatory medium, and this is not only because of the interactive nature of the videogame but because of its audiences and the culture that revolves around it.

Steinkuehler (2006) agrees with Kline et al. in the power of online communities and the influence that they have in both culture and game development itself, whilst Jenkins (2006) believes that there is also great power in the physical culture that is created by
people and their interactions with each other. Therefore, the production, reception, and consequent consumption of the game and its merchandise are the result of the importance that is given to the product by audiences. For videogame OSTs, the circuit of capital model means that certain fan expectations have to be met in order to reach an audience more effectively and deliver a more satisfying game experience, thus, for the purpose of this study, this means that the musical decisions made for the game are crucial to meet these audience expectations. These consequences for the consumption of music are detailed in chapter 5 when analysing the marketing imperatives behind the consumption of videogame OSTs.

As has been highlighted previously, the consumption of soundtracks by audiences occurs through different channels, and many of these channels escape the control and scrutiny of publishers. The recurrence of this point is due to the importance of contextualising the role and power of the consumer in the consumption chain: audiences will look at whether the product is available or not; if it is they will want to know if it is free, and then decide if it is worth paying for, if the song is just to be streamed (i.e. listened a few times), or perhaps if it is just unavailable through any authorised retailer. These factors do not hinder consumption as such, they only determine how the product will be consumed. One particular method of consumption lies in the reproduction of the music itself: it is the appropriation of OSTs and the reinterpretation of this music by fans. Although this phenomenon is outlined in greater detail later in chapter 4, it is worth mentioning beforehand that this type of consumption goes beyond the acquisition of a physical or digital copy: it represents the full appropriation of the music into a musical performance that can then be translated into others and accepted through their social, gaming perspectives. And it is this appropriation, one that originates from a personal desire to be a part of this music,
which leads to the first imperative proposed in the model, which forms the basis of all future consumption: the experiential imperative.

The Experiential Approach to OST Consumption

![Diagram of experiential motivators]

Figure 3: Experiential motivators. Main ramifications of consumption motivated by personal experiences.

Videogame music has a very special type of relationship with its audiences, particularly those that happened to listen to this music whilst grinding for resources, trying to get to one side of the map with the minimal random encounters, and those fighting a boss battle for the fifth time. In my particular case, it was the soundtrack for the Water Temple in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, which took me nearly two weeks to try to solve (and perhaps one of the hardest puzzles in a videogame), that made a mark on me because of its relationship to the difficulty of the task at hand. But in some cases, I created a real connection with videogame music in particular plot points where the music marked a shift in the story of the game that created a lasting impression when I was a kid. The theme to the Hyrule Field in *Ocarina of Time*, had elements of the famous Zelda theme that made me feel overly excited on my first visit to this area, after spending time as the child Link, being confined to the Kokiri forest for all my life. Another example was the music in the battle with Magus in *Chrono Trigger* which was
visually impressive (for the time) and a pivotal moment in the game’s storyline, battling the evil mage that had laid a frog curse on the best friend of his nemesis unwittingly turning him into a fine swordsman, with this particular instance being greatly challenging and amusing for my 11 year-old self. But a particular piece of music marked my childhood, and it was the humiliating sound of defeat in the multiplayer mode of *Goldeneye 007* (Rare, 1997) for the Nintendo 64, a game in which I spent hundreds of hours playing split-screen deathmatches with my mum and my sister.

As I grew older I did find incredible soundtracks and very powerful memories, but memories of youth and home could be some of the most influential when it comes down to the consumption of music. These anecdotes could be seen as a reflection on how the relationship of a particular individual and music works *ipso facto*, and the different degrees to which one would be bound to this music. It was in fact, in my experience the combination of the yearning for the family home as well as my own virtual victories that triggered most of my consumption. With the remainder of this chapter, I will show how these personal observations are also to a great degree noticeable in others, that the experience of videogame music can be traced down to one of the underlying factors that will be described in this section. Therefore, the first approach taken by this thesis to understand the motivations behind the consumption of videogame OSTs is the experiential approach, which is rooted in the personal experience that is felt by the audience of the music or the videogame itself.

This experience is the first requisite to establishing a connection with OSTs; whether it is in a solitary or social environment, the connection created begins with the individual experiencing a moment in time with the music in which associations are created with people, actions, gameplay, or sheer musical enjoyment. The musical experience can change depending on the vantage point of the audience, as different
forms of memories are created if the person is playing the game or just listening to the game music. The differences in these memories will be taken into consideration to understand what the important elements are for the audience to seek out this music beyond the game. These elements will be labelled in this thesis ‘experiential motivators’, which are those that are born within the soundtrack audience’s relationship with the game music and associations that elicit memories of in-game or real-life experiences.

Through my research I have identified two major experiential motivators, which are represented in experiential associations, representing the bond between the OST and the game, and nostalgia, which represents memories the bond created with the music and real-life events. Experiential association is characterised by the bond that is created through the identification of the audience with elements in the game. Literature identifies three main sources of association between the audience and game music: character association, narrative association, and franchise association. Identifying oneself with a character of a game through music, the stories and events of the game, and/or the worlds in which the game takes place are the main focus of this type of musical association. On the other hand, nostalgia delves into the memories of audiences; these may be triggered by music, or they might be memories of experiences associated with the music itself. This section discusses these two experiential motivators and how they relate to the consumption of videogame OSTs.

**Experiential Associations**

When a person listens to music, whether it is in a social context, alone, or as a part of another activity (e.g. gameplay), the initial appreciation of it comes at an individual level. One listens to music and begins to create associations with it depending on the
paramusical elements that are present at the time. In gameplay, the individual creates these musical associations with either gameplay or his/her surroundings at the time. The OST can be considered the mental bridge that connects the individual with the memory; it is musical memory that largely triggers experiential associations (Baumgartner, Lutz, Schmidt, & Jäncke, 2006; Cady, Harris, & Knappenberger, 2008; Janata, Tomic, & Rakowski, 2007). The effects of videogames on audiences and the way that stories, rules, and semiotic messages interact with game audiences are well documented. For over a decade studies have been conducted on the relationship between the player and the videogame at an individual level, and the effects of music in gameplay have also been the focus of several scholastic papers. In this section, this study will elaborate on why the individual experience of music can induce the transmediated consumption of OSTs.

The experiential association is probably one of the most powerful motivators for the consumption of videogame OSTs, and since it starts with the individual experience, and it often arises in conjunction with a visual element, as in a memory, gameplay, or as a part of a larger, social event. The roots of associations lie in the creation of a musical memory, an imprint of meaning that will reside in the individual’s mind and that is triggered by cues (e.g. music or images) which are tied to a particular memory, acting as an element with a distinct meaning and relationship to the individual: a sign. According to Robert Buerkle (2008), “the basic notion of a sign is quite simple […] words, images, sounds, and gestures are among the most common, yet nearly anything might function as a sign, so long as its deployment evokes some mental concept beyond itself” (p. 69). Buerkle is referring to the drawing of meaning in videogames through semiotics, that is, the messages that are embedded in these elements in a game. He continues to explain how the recipient of a message understands the code within by explaining that it is
through “context—or, more specifically, the signifier’s [audience] position within the system of the text” (p. 71), meaning, the musical message will be coded and/or understood through the experience of the individual.

Likewise, the context in which the audience of videogames OSTs encounters the music will determine the type of association that is formed. This context triggers experiential association and has close links to the visual experience that is also surrounding the listener, not only because of the audiovisual nature of the videogame but also because memories are comprised of a variety of sensory stimuli that occur simultaneously (Whalen, 2004). However, Zehnder and Lipscomb (2006) give priority to sound when it comes to the creation of strong relationships between the listener and the visuals of a game, since in their own study they found that “the musical score appeared to exert more influence on subject ratings than the visual images” (p. 242), though they do not attribute this link only to sound. Therefore, an experiential association is a link that is created between the audience and the game OST through the musical identification with an element determined by the context in which this association is created. Among the reasons why audiences identified with game OSTs, experiential associations can be considered to be the most common and powerful, due to the close psychological bond that is created with these elements, mostly because of the time of exposure to them, in particular bonds created during gameplay (de Certeau, 1984; Hartas, 2005; Mortensen, 2007).

Being in the game, a personal interaction is the key to a de-massified medium such as the videogame, where personal interaction leads to intense memories and future reinterpretation, appropriation, and consumption (Jenkins, 2004; Kline et al., 2003). But how does this relate to OST consumption? As OST audiences create musical memory, the stage is set for future elicitation of this memory. The musical identification of
themes, characters, and situations creates associations through experiencing music, whether the music was originally auditioned outside of the game, originated in the game, or during gameplay (Pidkameny, 2002). These musical memories are not created from a third person perspective (e.g. the avatar in the game, big brother playing a game, friend listening to a soundtrack in the car) but they are a part of the individual’s personal experience, defining or trivial moments in a person’s life that were experienced first hand, as part of what Miller (2009) considered the player performing the role of the avatar. If one is playing the game then it is one’s actions that create gameplay; if one’s family member is playing a game then it is a part of one’s experience to be an observer and a listener in that point in time, a spectator; if it is one’s friend who is listening to the music then it also becomes a part of one’s social interaction as well as one’s memory and experience of being a listener.

Albert Muniz and Thomas O’Guinn make an observation on this level of association in sports fans that can apply to OST consumption, in which the real experience (as a collective, social, and personal experience) is rooted in being there (Albert M. Muniz & Thomas C. O’Guinn, 2001). Although sports fans are not directly playing in the pitch their identification with their team, their players, and team symbolism is analogous to that of OST audiences. For game audiences, this identification is also aided by the personalisation of games, where the de-massification of the market caused by the diversification of products gives production more flexibility, resulting in a variety in the market that is evidence of the industry’s “market management to balance production and consumption” (Kline et al., 2003, p. 73).

However, OST musical memory does not behave like an infectious disease, where simple contact with the music creates meaningful memories, but the elicitation of these memories comes from the more personal bonds that are created with specific elements
of the game and the music. This study has identified three experiential motivators that create strong bonds between the player and the music: character associations, narrative associations, and aesthetic associations.

**Character associations created in audiences through game music.** Videogame developers aim at creating experiences with characters that the player can relate to, because of their stories, their personality, their symbolism, or their physique to ensure identification and memorability (Hartas, 2005; Oxland, 2004; Sellers, 2006). Several are the factors that influence in the emotional experience of the players in videogames, but in the end, if the player does not identify with the game, gameplay can be reduced to arbitrary and abstract interactions, devoid of purpose, and any substantive emotional response. Despite this approach, there are those, such as Matthew Payne (2008), Paul Booth (2009), and Mirjam Eladhari (2007) who believe that real identification and character memorability comes from the interaction with the character or the avatar through gameplay. This strong interaction creates the memorability of a character beyond gameplay, and combined with the music that is imprinted on the character, further associations are created that may lead to the consumption of OSTs beyond gameplay (Payne, 2008). This is the experiential motivator of character association, where players listen to game music outside of a game because they are drawn to the characters that are represented by the music, and furthermore, by the experience of what it was to be that character, someone else, and to live a parallel life through an avatar, which is represented and interpreted through music.

**Character vs. avatar.** We can start to understand this association by understanding the difference between a character and an avatar, the memorability of characters, and the ways in which these connect to music. In a videogame, players take control of an avatar
and traverse the game world as a pseudo out-of-body experience; the concept of a character, however, implies a connection with the game narrative and story. There is one main difference between a character and an avatar: personalisation. One personifies the avatar of an already existing character, whereas an avatar is the personification of oneself in the game (Hartas, 2005). An example of these concepts occurring simultaneously in a game is *Portal*. In *Portal*, the player begins the game waking up in a chamber, with no information on the traits, personality, or name of the protagonist; hence, the player is in control of an avatar, his/her own manifestation in the game, one that has no voice of its own, and the player is always in control of the avatar. It is through the course of the game that the player gets glimpses of the appearance of the protagonist, and the name of the ‘character’ is revealed unceremoniously during the end credits. *Portal*, in a similar fashion as *Half-Life*, allows for the player to fully take control of an avatar, while at the same time creating strong relationships with the game characters and elements (for example, the Companion Cube or the Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device), but in *Portal* the identity and traits of the main character are only hinted at through the sarcastic comments of the murderous artificial intelligence GLaDOS.

According to Henry Jenkins “characters are understood as “real” people with psychologies and histories that can be explored and as fictional constructions whose shortcomings maybe attributed to bad writing or the suspect motivations of the producers” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 66). These psychologies, back-stories, histories, and personalities give the character strong individuality. Conversely, an avatar is, according to Pat Pflieger (1999) a projection of the individual, an intentional relationship with an abstract entity. Mirjam Eladhari (2007) also believes the player represents him/herself
in the avatar, which in turn serves as the representation of the player to others in the game world. The player sees the world through the avatar's eyes.

The level of involvement of the player also differs between characters and avatars, as characters are already predesigned, whilst an avatar’s clothing, gender, and body features are usually customisable. Characters also have strong backstories, which the player discovers through gameplay, but avatars have a limited backstory and the player is allowed to make decisions that will affect the personality of the avatar. A good example of this character customisation is *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2008) where the player embodies the ‘Vault-Dweller’, and is able to assign the avatar’s gender, facial features, body build, hair colour, clothing, arsenal, and skills. The actions of the player in game will determine the personality of the avatar using a ‘karma meter’, which will have consequences on the way in which non-playable characters (NPCs) approach the player, for example someone calling a hit on you because your good actions were bad for business, Eladhari believes that “through the interactions associated with doing the quest together with another PC [playable character], we “get to know” the other character, that is, we get an idea about how this player character behaves and who s/he is” (2007, p. 177). But it is in the musical identification between the player and the character or avatar that this difference proves noteworthy, since avatar themes would represent the construct and projection of a player whilst the character would have traits of their own personality represented in the music.

**The memorability of characters.** The interaction with game characters influences their memorability and their relationship with game music. Players can identify with playable characters through their stories and the level of immersion that was experienced during gameplay, and there are also strong bonds of love, hatred, or enmity with NPCs, which
also arise from gameplay. The aim of the game designer is to balance these emotions to establish a narrative that will aid gameplay, and the first point of contact for the player in the game is the main playable character. According to Booth (2009), one identifies with the character by trying to imprint one’s ideal image of said character and the role they should be playing into the style of playing and decisions made in the game. This is true in games where the player has control over a customisable avatar, but it is also evidenced in games that have strong character personalities due to the perception the player has on who the character should be. This perception is guided by game elements such as story, dialogue, and music, since they are embedded in the game by the developers to create a scenario that will further the narrative or the situation in which the player is in relative control of the events that unfold during gameplay. Through this interaction, the playable characters become ones that the player can identify with through the blurring of one’s own personality, culture, and person (Huang, 2009; Reading & Harvey, 2008; Zehnder & Lipscomb, 2006). Musical representation of the character’s and avatar’s personality and traits is key to this identification, and it is also a determining factor on the identity that the player will bestow on the playable character. Themes and motifs will be discussed further later in this section, but it is worth mentioning that musical representation is a very important tool when it comes to creating the personality of a character.

The main character of a game is the personification of the player and the close psychological bond created between the player and the main character is particularly strong due to the time of exposure to them, thus the experiences of the main character become the experiences of the player (de Certeau, 1984; Eladhari, 2007; Hartas, 2005; Reading & Harvey, 2008). For example, in Portal 2, the voiceless, nameless, and faceless character, Chell, is rarely seen in this first-person game, unless the portals are
placed in such a way that the avatar can be seen, giving the impression that one’s actions in the game are purely one’s own. This perception, in turn, aggravates GLaDOS’ comments and taunts: GLados is not questioning the competency of the avatar, she is mocking me.

Secondary characters are also the objects of associations since they are inhabitants of the game world with stories and plights that attract the attention of the player (Hartas, 2005). As the gameplay progresses, the involvement with secondary characters becomes more noticeable as the stories of the main character (which are by inference one’s own stories) and secondary characters intertwine. This type of involvement brings about strong emotions during gameplay such as those described by Nic Kelman when he wrote “because the day a game makes someone cry will be the day we will have to call the game art” (2004, p. 237). A game that beautifully encourages the involvement of the player with NPCs is The Legend of Zelda: Majora’s Mask (Nintendo, 2000), where Link is given the ‘Bomber’s Notebook’, where the player can keep a record of important moments and persons of interest. Majora’s Mask is a game set in Termina where the moon will fall in three days, and Link, with the aid of the Ocarina of Time, is able to go back in time to the ‘Dawn of the First Day’, allowing the game to cover a full three-day cycle (in-game clock included) and NPCs to have a set schedule during this period. The ‘Bomber’s Notebook’ is a sidequest item that allows Link to mark the schedules of the inhabitants of Termina, and if the player visits certain areas of the game world at the appointed time, quests can be completed or triggered earning rewards. The reason why this system is vital to the narrative of the game is that it actively encourages interactions with the NPCs, to learn their stories, and fulfil their wishes, which can be quite an emotive task when you consider it is the end of the world. For example, one of the longest and most elaborate sidequests is the
‘Reuniting Kafei and Anju’ quest, which follows the story of a bridegroom who has vanished, reason being that he was cursed and turned into a child by the Skull Kid, prompting him to run away. Anju, his fiancée, is unaware of his whereabouts and asks Link for help, seeing the player as the only hope for the reunification of the couple by serving as a postman, a mercenary (retrieving a stolen wedding mask), and as emissary, culminating in the player witnessing the reunification and exchange of vows hours (minutes in real-time) before the world ends where the couple thank their confidant and encourage him to seek refuge as they will ‘greet the morning together’. *Majora’s Mask* requires long hours and careful calculations to complete these quests, but also allowing for the player to truly get to know the inhabitants of the world that she or he is trying to save. In the end, saving the world is not only a menial ‘hero task’, but it is something that needs to be done for them.

Associations are also created with enemies and villains. Videogame music and the experience of gameplay creates a space where the illusion of challenge is easily targeted and personified by the nemesis or goons that are put in front of the player. Examples such as Sephiroth’s ‘One winged angel’ theme in *Final Fantasy VII* or Kapka’s ‘Hopping mad’ in *Final Fantasy VI* (Square, 1994) clearly represent the psyche of the opponent through gameplay, and create associations of animosity with these characters, but are associations nonetheless. This type of involvement is the one that draws players towards secondary characters, be they allies or villains. At the heart of this remembrance of characters is the music. Payne (2008) believes that iconic characters are memorable and remembered due to the influence of music in memory. The relationship is largely due to the interaction, story, and setting in which the player interacts with the setting, and adding to this, the relationship of the music with characters and its interpretation of the role and emotions of this character create strong
bonds with the player that complements the gameplay experience. Evidence of this connection between visual elements [e.g. characters, spaces] and the player is given by Zehnder and Lipscomb (2004) showing that the player was highly influenced by the music because of the musical meaning and signifiers that were embedded in the music.

**Musical memorability and repetition.** Since experiential associations related to game characters are based on the exposure and the level of identification felt by players with these characters it is important to note that a significant, contributing factor for this is music since it is an essential element in gameplay. Music, or the lack of music, can be important for the gameplay experience. *Final Fantasy X*, for example, is a case in which very distinctive music is used to represent the different characters and situations in a game that gives over 30 hours of gameplay. On the other hand, *Limbo* (Playdead Studios, 2010) is an example of musical absence and minimalistic music in a soundtrack that is compensated through sound effects. *Limbo* tells the story of a young boy who descends to limbo to find his sister and is met with deadly obstacles during his search. Set in a black and white world, the 2D platform game uses music to contribute to the harrowing experience by using long pads and layers of white noise, low-frequency oscillators (LFOs), and ambient sound samples to describe what the almost expressionless character is feeling, which is a sense of desperation and uneasiness throughout the game. Probably the most identifiable character theme in the game is that of the giant spiders: a low, pulsating LFO, that gets louder as the spider approaches, a sound that is repeated several times during the game. This association is also created musically with the aid of two important elements in musical association: themes and motifs, and repetition. Themes are musical pieces that represent a certain character [as well as emotions, situations, and scenarios], whereas motifs are smaller musical
fragments that also convey musical meaning (Diaz Gasca, 2009). Musical repetition, or *looping*, is a common practice in videogames that was originally used due to technological constraints, but now games use more elaborate and longer pieces of recorded audio or MIDI as well as emerging audio, a technology that allows for music to adapt to the situation and action of players (Marks, 2001).

The musical memorability of a character lies in the importance of the game character in the gameplay experience, provided that immersion is possible, in order to create an association that would lead to musical associations outside of the game. Regardless of the character’s background, composers write game music surrounding their characters and game events, referring back to motifs on a regular basis. Character themes are particularly prominent in games that involve more complex and directed storylines. One of my previous studies on the relationship between narrative and music in *Final Fantasy X* describes how themes and motifs were used and how they changed meaning throughout gameplay (Diaz Gasca, 2009). Although the study was focused on a particular theme that represents an idea, situation, and a set of characters, the thematic characteristics of the game’s soundtrack also came to light. In *Final Fantasy X*, like in many other games, themes are used to introduce the characters’ personality and their role in the game as “music can reflect the inner feelings of a character or the outward state of the setting. And in both cases it can choose to “comment on” either state through the audiovisual contrast” (Lipscomb & Zehnder, 2004, p. 244). The difference between themes and motifs in the context of musical association is that the theme is the entirety of the musical piece that describes the character whereas the motif is a musical excerpt of the theme, a signpost that alludes to the theme or character. Zehnder and Lipscomb describe the motif as “a musical theme that becomes associated with a character, object, emotion, or idea within the game or motion picture” (2006, p. 250),
and according to this view there is an association created and a meaning assigned to motifs and, by inference, themes.

Therefore it is pertinent to ask who gives meaning to these musical pieces and how the player appropriates this meaning. A thorough answer is beyond the scope and limitations of this study, but there are two people that endow themes with meaning, and those are the director (or music composer) and the player. According to Kiri Miller (2007, 2008) the interaction of the player with the character and the intention of the director can sometimes align, and other times, as found in the studies of the Grand Theft Auto series, push the player to go against the stereotype of the main character highlighting social schisms and ironies that were purposely placed in a game by developers. The director aims to create a compelling experience that can be experienced by many through the use of musical representation, musical styles, and compositional techniques one can conduct an analysis of the intended meaning that the director wishes to give, not only musically, but also in the audio-visual context of the gameplay experience. And there are certain liberties that the director would give to the player in terms of how to understand and allocate this musical meaning in the game world, as it would be expected in linear, directed games or highly customisable games. But videogames, being an interactive medium, provide an experience that can be quite different from player to player, and the player plays the part of audience and protagonist simultaneously. In The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (Bethesda Game Works, 2011) the highly customisable characteristics of the game allow for the player to choose his/her path in this open world fantasy RPG, where players create avatars as opposed to characters. Skyrim tells the story of the Dragonborn, one that was born with the blood and spirit of dragons, a mortal that can absorb a slain dragon’s soul and gain its abilities. Much like the Vault-Dweller in Fallout 3, the Dragonborn can choose which sets of
skills to master, weapons to use, and political allegiance, allowing for a highly
customisable storyline. The one trait that is shared with all the variations of the
Dragonborn that were created by players around the world is the task of killing dragons,
and as often when the player engages with one (or several) of these creatures the
Dragonborn’s theme, ‘Dohvakiin’, is played in the background. In this case, the
meaning that is given to the theme is dependant on the gameplay experience of the
player. Simultaneously, the theme composed by Jeremy Soule is imbued with meaning.
The track is an epic orchestral piece accompanied by a large choir, with heavy use of
horns and sung in the dragon language, making the theme a piece that instantaneously
represents the power of the Dragonborn. Themes in videogames create associations
between the characters and the players though the interpretation of character through the
music and the experience of the player combined, making themes the music of one’s
achievements in the case of playable characters and the description of the psyche of
non-playable characters.

The other factor that applies in musical character memorability is repetition, and
it is not one that applies only to character associations. Exposure for long period of time
to a certain song can be counterproductive to gameplay, and can make the experience
dull or annoying. But for this reason, the length of loops in videogames has become
progressively longer, though different game genres have different average loop duration
with FPS games having the shortest and RPGs having the longest (Collins, 2008b).
Repetition sets the ambience and mood that will need to be used or recognised later as
the narrative progresses, including the identification or deciphering of the personality of
a character. “The powers of [the looping of] the melodic fragments [themes and motifs]
cannot be unlocked until the player has reached the appropriate moment in the game, so
the paradigmatic atmosphere music also acts as melodic foreshadowing to the extent
that often goes unrecognized and a players report feelings of déjà vu as the melodies they learn have an eerie familiarity” (Whalen, 2004). The importance of looping also lies in the relationship that it has with the actions of the player in a certain area, which also translates to the different characters are involved in this scene, in a manner in which the strife, repetitive tasks, characters, and encounters are imprinted with the music that is playing regardless of if this song is a theme or location music (Hakima, 2010; Munday, 2007; Newman, 2002). Hence the links between looping, repetition, and musical character association are the elicitation of memories that are associated to the music, the character, and/or the task; as well as a looped memory of actions or music (e.g. having the song stuck in your head). This does not mean that the listener will remember the theme, the music, the characters, or the place in their entirety, but any of those aforementioned elements can spark the memory of either music or characters.

This forms the basis of character association: the relationship that the individual had with characters and the association that was created through gameplay that will leave a mark on the memory of the player, a relationship that is triggered by remembering the character or the music which recreates the connection between the music, the character, and the player. This imprinted memory will create a pathway towards consumption outside of the game.

**Narrative associations.** Experiential associations are created through the player’s interaction with the game’s narrative. As mentioned earlier, this study wishes to distance itself from the narratology versus ludology discussion, therefore this narrative association is understood as the identification with the stories that are embedded in a game. To understand narrative as a means for association with videogames it is imperative to understand how videogames can be, can create, and can have narratives,
since it is through stories, locations, and spaces that players can identify with game music. In videogames, music is affected by the narrative through gameplay, and musical meaning can change as the plot progresses thanks to lengthy playtime and gameplay (Diaz Gasca, 2009). Therefore, the personal, experiential narrative association comes through direct contact with the game story, the setting, and the music, and the evolution of these elements together as a part of the interactive experience of the videogame.

**Narrative and story: creations and experiences.** In this study, narrative and story are treated as very similar concepts, where the player is able to immerse him/herself in a digital construct that describes a setting, a place, and a story; and this is the association that is identified in this chapter, one where the audience feels associated with a particular story or the way in which this story is told. Narrative is generally understood as the way a story is told, how stories are created, settings and environments; and how the order of occurrence of events (Diaz Gasca, 2009; Egenfeldt Nielsen et al., 2008; Gorbman, 1980; Juul, 2005b; Tong & Tan, 2002), therefore, there are different understandings and perspectives on how to approach narrative in a game. The most apparent notion of narrative is the story or plot that is featured in a videogame, but in fact story and narrative are distinctly different elements. Robert Buerkle explains this distinction:

> [Narrative] is our ability to mentally project a spatiotemporal context different from our own. […] Story is all that is “inside” the narrative, the world projected by the discourse and everything contained therein—

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5 For a more detailed discussion on narrative and the role it plays in videogames refer to my previous study *Final Fantasy X: The Relationship Between Narrative and Music in RPGs* (Diaz Gasca, 2009).
events (plot), actants (characters), and spacetime (setting) included. In other words: the whole of the diegesis. (2008, p. 178)

Buerkle’s definition does not polarise narrative and story, and according to Zach Whalen and Laurie Taylor (2008) they are two elements that go hand-in-hand: narrative is created through story, and the world (or story world) is also a part of that narrative. The difference between narrative and story is merely that of mediation and the process in which the game communicates with the player what is happening in the diegetic world. Audiences that identify with the story of a game are interested in the plot, the characters, the settings, and the events that take place in the diegesis, while there are those that feel that the way in which a story was told was the real highlight of the game.

In videogames, the importance of the intertwining between narrative and story is seen in the interaction of the player with the game, the way the plot unfolds, the setting, and the music that creates the environment. Porter Abbott highlighted this quality of narrative:

But call them what you will – latent stories, virtual stories, untold stories, story material, the pre-narratable, life itself – we know them in story form only as they are recounted [...] what happens when these events are told, or staged, or filmed, or mediated in whatever way. In other words, [...] narrative, the first rule of which is that leaves its mark on the stories it tells. [...] And it is only in this way to grasp the story, through an act of re-presentation, which is at the same time and act of re-creation.

This is the narrative difference. (Abbott, 2008, p. 37)

The distinction between narrative and story is necessary since several respondents in the survey in chapter 6 would overlap the technical definitions of narrative and story, and it serves to clarify notions that will be expressed later in the study. For the time being, ‘narrative’ will be used as a term that includes story, as there
is also controversy on the mutual role of these two in the ludology vs. narratology debate that goes beyond the scope of this study.

**Narrative memorability.** Videogames are an interactive experience, the immersion in an environment that allows the player to be another person, another person in another place, in a different setting. Videogames are based on the creation of worlds, similar to novels, where the player has to move and interact with the setting, the characters and the plot, as opposed to mediums such as film and television that do not require the involvement of the audience for the narrative to unfold (Fenty, 2008; Whalen, 2004). Jesper Juul, a ludologist, considers narrative as sets of rules, but contextualised various definitions of narrative and contrasted them with videogames to present the possibility of games being narratives. He arrived at the conclusion that narrative is “the way we make sense of the world” and when comparing this use of narrative with “novels/movies/general storytelling” and videogames, he concluded that this definition applies for all media “like everything else in the world” (2005, p. 158). In that sole definition of narrative and the multi-medial comparison, Juul put videogames on the same plane as other narrative experiences and mediums, in particular ‘general storytelling’, with which we can arrive at the conclusion that as general storytelling can relate to real-life events and experiences, videogames also represent an experience that is lived by being there. Although Juul puts the narrative baton in the hands of the storyteller, in videogames the story is being told by the player as he/she is involved with the environment. By interacting with that game narrative the player identifies with the virtual world (Juul, 2005b), and this occurs through the creation of a persona, the setting and backstory of a game; and the plot.
The creation of a persona in videogames is generally understood in terms of association with characters and nostalgia, but experiential associations that are the result of the creation of a persona during gameplay are highly related to the location and setting in which the player is situated. In RPGs, for example, the avatar becomes the focal point of the player's interaction with the game. The player represents him/herself in the avatar, which in turn serves as the representation of the player to others (and possibly other players) in the game world. The player sees the world through the avatar's eyes. Eladhari furthers this idea by stating that players can create a persona from their characters, a persona being a personality that is ubiquitous in the real and virtual world. Eladhari also writes of the example of the “French-speaking Sherry” (Turkle, 1995 in Eladhari, 2007, p. 177), where Sherry became a different version of herself when in France. This is where the creation of a persona in narrative association becomes similar to nostalgia, when players feel connected with a place and its music because they miss the place, and they also miss the person they were there. The alternate reality that is experienced by most players is described by Eladhari as similar to a traveller going on a holiday, where players are in a different world where they can express themselves and experience the game as they would in a world where they could do what they pleased. “We are free to play in worlds that reflect us” (Shaw, 2010, p. 9). “Through the interactions associated with doing the quest together with another PC [playable character], we “get to know” the other character. That is, we get an idea about how this player character behaves and who s/he is” (Eladhari, 2007, p. 177), and similarly, that is how players can get to know their surroundings and their own character.

Players also associate themselves with videogame narratives through the backstory and the setting of games, a bond that is created through the interaction and
exploration of the game world. For an immersive narrative to be created there needs to be a setting, one that is believable by the standards of the narrative, a setting that can place the player in the story. James Gee writes:

Humans find story elements profoundly meaningful and are at a loss when they cannot see the world in terms of such elements. [...] Because all the objects and movements in the game have been assigned meanings and these meanings have helped generate the visual and auditory design of the game, the actions we players carry out produce more and more of that design. (Gee, 2006, pp. 59-60)

For Gee, the player has predisposed expectations of the sounds, look, and feel of the setting where the game takes place. “Ambiance, mood, feeling, sound, look: these all sound like mere window dressing. But they are a large part of the pleasure the game gives (Gee, 2006, p. 59). The ‘reality’ of a place is not necessarily measured in the graphics or the quality of sounds and visual, but what the game allows the player to perceive and imagine, how it allows the player to interact and act, and on how to play a role in the game world. This is particularly true for text-based games, out of which Zork (Infocom, 1977) is a good example. Zork is a PC game in which on a monochrome screen you are given text only, informing you of your current status, and free to input a command to interact or move in the environment. It is not hard to see how these games make use of the imagination of the player much like a book would:

Troll room. This is a small room with passages off in all directions.

Bloodstains and deep scratches (perhaps made by an axe) mar the walls. A nasty-looking troll, brandishing a bloody axe, blocks all passages out of the room. (Infocom, 1997)
On the way there, the player has already been given several instances to collect items, and upon arrival to the Troll Room one would hope to have picked up the sword three rooms back.

The setting of a game is set in locations that are created through the aids of pre-conceived meanings or semiotics (e.g. shining enemy body part = weak spot, red colour on the screen = damage taken), and these can be, as Gee mentioned, aural, visual, and emotional (i.e. perceived mood, feel, ambience). The memorability of settings comes when there is a combination of these elements that impacts the senses and psyche.

For example, players of *Final Fantasy XIII* will remember entering the Gran Pulse town of Oerba due to the combination of visual elements (a barren desert with crystal as opposed to sand. The sun rising in the distance just over the hill that the player is climbing), music (a deep bass synth contrasting a solo soprano, which gives a sense of desolation), and emotion (the town is meant to be the place where two of the playable characters were born, and in hope of finding answers the team has headed there, but the scene in front of them is somewhat unsettling). This scene, through the combination of different elements, creates the memorable impact that was required prior to the following chapter in the story, and the ‘reality’ of this scene for the player in that instant is also aided by the backstory that was revealed via the plot and gameplay. Gameplay backstory can refer to fragments of the game that tell a story about the setting: a child’s toy in the ruins of an abandoned village, the clothing of a lord amidst peasants, the empty desks and offices at a research facility (Hakima, 2010). In the game *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013) backstory is elegantly and cleverly placed in the design of the island where the game takes place. The memorability of these settings comes not only through the contrasting visuals of island paradise contrasted with the crazy Solari cult that is out to kill everyone, but through the inclusion of bonus items.
(called ‘relics’ in the game) that the player finds. Lara Croft (the main character), being an archaeologist, finds clues about the history of these items and the island by describing to the player the importance of ancient Edo period masks and abandoned toys (and the absence of children on the island). Backstory also emerges through interactions with other characters, which can give clues on how to address people in the game world, therefore creating a setting that is not only spatiotemporally separated from the player, but that is also foreign in the way it operates. The memorability of these places and the relationship that is built between gamer and game world creates a memorable bond through interaction that can then be traced to OST consumption.

The third memorable impact of narrative is the plot of the game. Although there are games that do not have a plot as such or have abstract tasks with no real end story (e.g. Tetris), most contemporary games have a basic story that unfolds through gameplay. A game’s plot/story is a narrative element that is present throughout gameplay and can create bonds and associations with the player. Earlier in this section, Buerkle defined ‘story’ as “the whole of the diegesis” (2008, p. 176), and by doing so he described an interaction between different game elements that left the player at the centre of the development of the story since it is the player who will ultimately transverse these settings and further the narrative (Egenfeldt Nielsen et al., 2008; Tong & Tan, 2002). According to Aliyah Hakima (2010), the use of rhetoric in games is what creates identification with the audience, and since the control is in the hands of the player, then the interactivity of videogames allows for the plot of the game to be a personal experience, one that he/she has to experience and see through to the end. The struggles of the character become one’s own, and the story of a game becomes a personal experience that can transcend the medium. Kline et al. (2003) believe that players create their own stories despite the directed experiences that are orchestrated by
the game developer and designer. The personal appropriation of the story can even transcend the game itself, whereas a Bemani game (i.e. Dance Dance Revolution) can have a story in the player’s mind: one that is about becoming a performer, a dancer for oneself, or for the person that is dancing beside you, or for the audience that is watching you masterfully dominating the game, where the game world extends to the real-life, immediate surroundings; a personal and collective experience with a story that was unintended, but memorable nonetheless.

The memorability of game narratives carries significant weight in the identification with audiences and the associations created between the events that are lived in the game world and the music that emerges from it. These sounds, essential to the game experience, have their own interactions with the game, and their own meaning in the context of narrative and storytelling.

Musical involvement and memorability: emergence of associations through interaction with music.

[...] the metaphor function of video game music provides a sense of space, characterization, and atmosphere in a game. It is also the way music in games can be frightening or can evoke particular moods. Second, the metonymic function of video game music is that which upholds the syntactic structure of the game by compelling the player’s involvement in progressing the game’s narrative. For example, game music supplies readers with clues about approaching enemies, therefore giving the players an edge and an incentive to keep playing. (Whalen, 2004, p. ix)
The musical memorability of that is rooted in narrative associations cemented in the experiences that are lived and possibilities that are created for the player in the diegetic world. The musical representation of places, players, settings, stories, and the involvement that the player has in the forging and metamorphosis of musical meaning is what gives stories the power to transcend the game. It is the feeling that takes the player and the OST audience back to the freedoms that were given in that game, similarly to when, for example, I used to pretend I was swinging a sword when I heard the theme for *Ocarina of Time* at the age of 12. Music is a powerful element in videogames that reminds players of the stories and their experiences in the narrative of the game, and the use of diegetic and non-diegetic music can define the level of involvement of the player with the music and the meaning of the musical piece in the game. In the case of *Ocarina of Time*, musical memorability and musical storytelling plays an important role in the narrative of the game, as the player has to memorise songs that need to be played throughout the game, and each different song is learnt in a different setting, for a specific purpose, and is assigned a meaning: “Song of Storms”, which is taught by the windmill keeper and phonograph player Guru-guru, and used for irrigation, and controlling the water levels of a well; “Zelda’s Lullaby”, which is taught by Princess Zelda and used as a passcode to places that have ties to the Royal Family of Hyrule, or “Saria’s Song”, which is taught by Saria and is used to talk to the character to ask for guidance. Each song in the game is given a background, a use, and the game gives the player control over the instrument to play music anywhere in the game world. This use of music is exemplary of Gee’s (2006) notion of game elements that carry assigned meaning, and clearly an example of diegetic music that has to be learnt and understood as a requirement to complete the game.
Christopher Hanson (2010) writes about the role of repetition and familiarisation in the gameplay experience and how different ‘tries’ in games can be carried out in different lengths of time, levels of success, or awareness of the environment; but these different repetitions are an essential part of the experience and the familiarisation with the game and the environment brings the player closer to identifying oneself with the setting and the story. For example, *Call of duty: Modern warfare 3* (Infinity Ward, 2011) is a first person shooter with a variety of multiplayer maps where players play a number of different modes of deathmatches against another team. Familiarising oneself with the map is a process that takes many turns, many deaths, and little time, especially for those new to the game, whose average ‘life expectancy’ is roughly 20 seconds. Through this process, players become more familiar with their environment, and learn how to ‘protect their turf’ in modalities such as ‘domination’ where players take and defend position set throughout the map. This same familiarisation occurs with music, where the player is exposed to the repetition of music in an environment but is also, like in the case of *Ocarina of Time*, expected to have a certain dominance over the musical instrument and its pieces to progress in the game. Essentially, Gee and Hanson would agree that music constructs spaces and memory through the act of repetition of tasks in the game world, the diegetic role they play in the game world, and the extra diegetic creation of spaces and experiences that add to the memorability of an experience, of a particular game, or story. “The experience of playing the game is closer to living inside a symphony than to living inside a book. And the symphony is not just visual, but it is composed as well of sounds, music, actions, decisions, and bodily feelings that flow along as the player and virtual character […] act together in the game world” (Gee, 2006, p. 59). Diegetic music is the music found inside the game world, one that is generated by the player or NPCs, songs that describe the setting and create an
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atmosphere of setting and space. In *Fallout 3*, for example, the Vault-Dweller has a radio that is worn on the left arm of the character, and it can be tuned into the different radio stations that broadcast through the Capital Wasteland. Similar choice of music selection is available in racing games, with examples as early as *Cruis’n USA* (Midway Games, 1994) where the player can switch stations on the car radio to a selection of music. The option of changing music and setting the music in the game creates different emotions and alters the perception the player has with the game environment according to studies by Lipscomb and Zehnder (2004).

The level of appropriation and learning of game music in the diegetic plane does not limit itself to the case of *Zelda* games; titles like *Guitar Hero* and *SingStar* have a different take on diegetic music that transports the game outside of the screen and into the physical realm. Also, there is the case of diegetic music in games where songs play on radios, jukeboxes, or are performed by characters inside the game. Diegetic music does not necessarily narrate, it can describe, aiding in narration combined with the rest of the visuals and creating an imprint in the mind of audiences that will listen to the music to elicit their experience of the game world (Buhler, 2001). Musical narrative in a game’s diegesis can also be experienced by players that play the instrument in the game and those that experience music being played in a game. Those that play instruments in the game can be divided into those who purposely have to learn a musical piece, or those who have to issue a command that will generate a musical note or piece. The first, those who learn musical pieces, have an active engagement with the music and the game world as the learning process was a process of trial, error, and repetition, similar to the process that Hanson (2010) used for describing the process of gameplay. Since several of these games require the player to memorise a particular musical piece or develop a certain dexterity in a performance (e.g. *Guitar Hero* and *SingStar*), these
games actively tap into the player’s memory and re-emerge later in the player’s sub-
consciousness either referring back to the game or referring back to the original piece, as in
the case of games with licensed music. Evidence of this link is provided in chapter 4.

The other group of players are those who do not have to practice or to perform
once-off musical memorisation as a part of a puzzle. For example, in Mario Party
(Hudson Soft, 1998) the minigame ‘Mario Bandstand’ played by all four participants in
the game requires the players to ‘play’ their instrument in time with a side-scrolling bar
that indicates when the player must press the A Button. This mini-game does not
require any musical knowledge or skill, but it involves ‘musical performance’.
Likewise, in The Legend of Zelda: Link’s Awakening (Nintendo, 1993) the player can
merely choose the song that is to be played by the ocarina and equip it in the same way
as a weapon. The musical performance is then reduced to pressing the button that has
the song equipped for an automatic rendition. In these two cases, the player can only
assign musical meaning to the song by the consequence of his/her adequate or
inadequate performance and through repetition the player will acquire musical meaning
and will also be exposed to the musical piece.

Puzzle music is also a part of gameplay that connects the audience to the place
as opposed to the narrative of the game, due to the lack of depth in the meaning or
consequence of the musical interpretation, and to the ‘roadblock’ nature that they have
in the narrative, as it is required to complete the puzzle with a musical aid, but no real
musical knowledge or skill is required. Examples of this use are Donkey Kong Country
3: Dixie Kong’s Double Trouble! (Rare, 1996), and Fallout 3. In Donkey Kong Country
3, the player can find secret caves that contain musical repetition puzzles that reward the
aural and visual memory of the player by giving them a ‘banana bird’ that will help
them beat the final boss without a confrontation. Fallout 3 employs a similar technique
when the Vault-Dweller attempts to activate the failsafe of a computer-generated dream by activating a number of items that generate a sound if activated in the right order, and no sound if their order is incorrect. Both these games require no musical skill, but have notes and visual aids that are attached to the solution of a puzzle that requires interaction with the game environment creating memorability through this interaction.

Musical storytelling and memorability: diegesis, non-diegesis and the sonic painting of landscapes. The location of the music also plays an important part in the memorability of the music, since this will determine the type of impact it will have with the audience. One of the functions of music in videogames is to imply setting through various audio cues that are interpreted by the listener as a part of an environment (Morris, 2002). Rod Munday clarifies that “while vision is generally regarded as the most important sense for apprehending an environment, sound has certain advantages over sight. Sound surrounds the listener, blending and combining in ways that visual information cannot emulate” (2007, p. 52) and follows by stating that “in video games, it is worth remembering that computer-generated environments make no natural sounds: hence the importance of music and sound effects to give them meaning (2007, p. 53). When music performance appears on screen, or its existence in the game world is implied, the diegetic nature of music serves a mean to describe the setting, whereas non-diegetic music, which does not originate in the game world, serves as an interpreter of the events that occur on screen. As described earlier with the examples of Ocarina of Time and Fallout 3, diegetic music allows for the description of the location and society of the diegetic world, since “music works to create the specific environment or diegesis the player is immersed in” (Whalen, 2004, p. 14).
The role of musical diegesis in the association with narratives by audiences and the memorability that would lead to OST consumption outside of the game is of importance for this thesis. In the words of James Buhler, “understanding music in the sound design allows interpretation to probe the rich tensions, complexities and contradictions that music helps articulate” (2001, p. 58). Buhler furthers explains that this understanding also helps comprehension of the entirety of the soundscape as a musical composition, and the interpretation of this soundscape produces the imagery and the understanding (interpretations) of narratives and settings. Diegetic music in videogames is one that the player is able to interact with through the avatar, music that can be heard, performed, and witnessed in the case of ‘watching a band play’ in the game, resulting in an experience that is similar to Eladhari’s (2007) notion of ‘being there’, in the game, and taking that experience as an extension of a real-life experience. Diegetic music has a particular way of giving gamers an insight of the world: whether it is Jonathan Coulton’s song “Re: Your Brains” being played on a derelict jukebox in the zombie apocalypse world of *Left 4 Dead 2* (Valve Corporation, 2009) or The National’s “Exile Vilify” playing in an lone radio inside a test chamber in *Portal 2* (Valve Corporation, 2011) music that originates in the game world can add to the sense of irony of a setting as well as reinforce the context of the setting.

Buhler (2001) also believes in ‘synchronised’ and ‘contrapuntal’ music, which can change the definition of a setting by reinforcing the already created narrative made by visuals and sound effects or giving the player an interpretation that is opposite to this narrative. Diegetic music can reinforce narrative setting through simple elevator music and ‘live’ musicians, or contradict the narrative, as is the case in the examples of *Portal 2* and *Left 4 Dead*. Non-diegetic music is probably the most common tool used by directors to attach meaning to a setting or to create ambience, through instrumentation
and musical styles that rely on pre-existing semiotics. “Videogames are chock full of connotations, and they are by no means limited to those surrounding words. Score music, for example, typically connotes a particular affect” (Buerkle, 2008, p. 83). Unfortunately, or maybe even fortunately, this is not a fool-proof method because despite the intentions of the director to induce a particular emotion, the reading of the game as a text, as gameplay, is read differently by different audiences, hence personalising the experience (de Certeau, 1984)

**Franchise association.** Franchise associations are somewhat similar to narrative associations as they refer to the experiential associations that are created with stories and settings, but the difference lies in the meaning of certain game elements and stories which are unique to a particular series, hence ‘franchise’ associations. Audiences identify with game aesthetics: the approach on the narrative, the themes, the recurrent musical themes of the game, etc.; which they later transform into a brand loyalty, a matter explained in chapter 5, born from an original gameplay experience and sought out in subsequent games of the same series building on the original game. Essentially, this form of association is created with conventional images that are repeated during throughout the game which are reduced to the simplest, basic meanings of gameplay: the experience that is expected and imagined in the mind of the player (Payne, 2008). The connections created with characters and narratives from a previous game experience carry through to the franchise, which is highly attractive for some players as they wish to know more about the original story and the characters (Taylor & Whalen, 2008).

At the centre of franchise association are the aesthetics of the game, and music is a key element of this, since it encompasses much of the narrative and the experience, as
Music is the signature imprint, the trademark of the franchise (Gee, 2006; Pidkameny, 2002). Music aids in the creation of narratives and setting, and every story takes place in a place, a diegetic world that is interpreted by various codes that carry meaning and many of these represented through music, and the familiarisation with a place (particularly the familiarity with a franchise or narrative) is reinforced by the repetition of themes (Buerkle, 2008; de Certeau, 1984; Hakima, 2010). This is especially true in long-running franchises, such as Mario, Final Fantasy, Zelda, and Metal Gear among others, games where the use of recurring themes is what links the sometimes disparate storylines and gives players the sense of familiarity with this narrative, world, characters, items, or even enemies. The style of the music is also important for franchises since it adds to a ‘recognisable’ feel, the ‘sound’ that is expected from a Final Fantasy game or a Star Wars game that helps the player believe that they are in a world they already know.

Buerkle (2008) compares film and videogames, and points out the interactions of audiences with music and other elements of gameplay (game icons and story) that can take place in the game and how they are similar to a the linear medium of film. Considering the familiarity that is created with the audience through “recognizable characters, settings, and other iconography” (Buerkle, 2008, p. 248), it is easy to see the connection between games that are based on existing franchises and the musical association that can be created with the franchise that exists outside of the videogame. The franchise associations experienced by the player are essentially based on the recurring themes that are found across a series of games or transmedial stories, experiences based on previous encounters with narratives that are linked by the music to franchises of games or other media; the subsequent consumption of OSTs outside of the videogame medium can be accredited to this musical connection.
**Experiential Association Summary**

Experiential associations are those that are created through the personal identification of players with various game elements through music. This study isolates these associations into three categories: characters, narratives, and franchises. Character associations are those where the player identifies with the avatar or the character through themes and motifs that either direct or specify the psyche of a player, or allows for a free musical interpretation of the player in the diegetic world. Players may consume OSTs to embrace the personalities, trait, or stories of the characters that are represented in the music. Narrative associations are those that are concerned with the diegesis, the plot, and the way in which a story is told and how these are represented and created through music and how audiences listen to OSTs to aurally transport themselves to these settings. Franchise associations are those that favour aesthetics over narrative, where the player identifies with the particular style of a franchise and the music and sound of it, listening to the OST to be a part of the ‘bigger picture’ of a specific franchise.

**Nostalgic Associations**

Retrogaming, 8-bit graphics, 16-bit graphics, sprites, 2D platformers, turn based strategy, remakes, pixels. Videogame design has seen the comeback of game design techniques of yore, with indie developers, either funded through Kickstarter or trialed by Steam’s Greenlight program, have reminded young gamers (and old as well) that big explosions, epic soundtracks, and 4K resolutions do not necessarily make a game good. A prime example of this is the success story of Swedish developers Mojang and their hit game *Minecraft* (2011), which puts players in a 3D pixelated, block world where
players can build, hunt, survive, and create using the resources in the surrounding environment. Other game franchises are being rebooted or resurrected, with the new *Tomb Raider* (2013) and its fresh take on a very successful franchise from the mid-1990s; *Donkey Kong Country Returns* (Retro Studios, 2010) bringing back an alternate version of the Super Nintendo classic, and the return of a self-proclaimed ‘equal opportunities ass kicker’ came with *Duke Nukem Forever* (Gearbox Software, 2011), a sequel to the 1996 *Duke Nukem 3D* (3D Realms). These releases do not (necessarily) evidence a lack of creativity on behalf of the game industry, rather an exploitation of the past.

The consumption of video game music outside of the game finds its second experiential motivator in nostalgia, a powerful sentiment that helps in the revisiting of music beyond gameplay. Nostalgia is a topic that has been the focus of several studies, and it has been ascribed as being at the centre of the videogame experience, especially in the marketing of a game, in the reasons why people play games, and in the way that the experience is lived, and relived, during play and replay (Huang, 2009; Reading & Harvey, 2008; Taylor & Whalen, 2008; Whiteman, 2008; Wolf & Perron, 2003). Furthermore, nostalgia in videogames is an important approach to see the relationships between videogames and other media, including OSTs (Reading & Harvey, 2008). In this study, nostalgia is considered a motivator, a cause and a means to revisit, through music, a game, a time period, a memory, and an experience. Experiential motivators based on nostalgia differ from experiential associations as they are based on the memory of an experience lived in the game or outside of the game and the association of music with said experience.

Nostalgic consumption, in videogames, occurs when a player consumes a work that has appeared previously in another medium. Nostalgia is a yearning for something
that happened in the past, a past that is within living memory. A player cannot feel nostalgic about medieval times but about a memory during his or her lifetime about events that are associated with medieval history. For Reading and Harvey (2008), nostalgic-play is the term they use to describe nostalgia in gameplay, the reinvention of an experience in as play. The term also “takes place through a dynamic interplay of a body of relations that includes the player, the game, and the social and cultural context of production and play” (Reading & Harvey, 2008, p. 168). As Newman notes, “there is nostalgic pleasure in listening to the music [of videogames]” (2008, p.81); in this section, nostalgia will be portrayed as a contributing factor for the playing and revisiting of games and game elements, and how this nostalgia is accessed through music.

**Nostalgia and games: yearning for the past.**

Nostalgia is a personal and collective sentiment. This section will limit itself to studying the personal aspects of nostalgia, and will not venture into the study of nostalgia itself, as this topic has been reviewed in depth by previous studies. The word has a variety of definitions:

- “[A] collective longing for a happier, simple, more innocent age” (Reynolds, 2011, p. xxv).
- The “process of looking back to an unattainable past and trying to bring that past to the present” (Taylor & Whalen, 2008, p. 3).

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“A symptom of the Capitalist era, Nostalgia is now a marketable affect, especially in the realm of popular music, films and video games” (McMillan, 2010, p. 141).

“[S]omething that is no longer current” (McMillan, 2010, p. 55).

“Nostalgia is the emotional by-product of change” (Fenty, 2008, p. 21).

These definitions are just some in a long list of studies that have looked at nostalgia as a social issue, a marketing tool, and a personal sentiment; meanings that have evolved from its original pathological status during the war. The common denominator between all these definitions is memory or remembrance of an event or experience, according to Reading and Harvey’s (2008) definition. Payne (2008) gives more importance to remembering as opposed to the memory itself and aligns with the ideology of James Wertsch who says “[t]his entire orientation puts a strong emphasis on process, or action, and hence my preference for the term ‘remembering’ rather than ‘memory.’ Instead of talking about memories that we ‘have,’ the emphasis is on remembering as something we do” (2002, p. 17). Payne and Wertsch are referring to “classic game elements (e.g., characters, levels, weapons, soundtracks)” (Payne, 2008, p. 54), which Payne sees as means to access these memories, triggering the remembrance of them, inducing Reading and Harvey’s concept nostalgic consumption. Nostalgic consumption occurs through the remembrance of a memory or the re-experiencing of a previous experience, usually through stylistic and musical similarities in the game that build on that previous experience by referencing back to an original memory. Herein lies the importance of nostalgia as an experiential association in OST consumption.

As mentioned earlier, experiential nostalgia is a yearning for a time or an experience, and this translates in videogames to the experience of the game or the time
in the player’s time in which the game had a particular significance. Take the game experience, for example: in videogames, interactivity enables players to engage in experiences through gameplay—what Taylor and Whalen call:

experience of presence. Whether acted out in person or mediated through a machine interface, games communicate history most effectively by situation the player within the time and space of the memorial event. These features of temporality and situated presence distinguish record aspects of the reader/player's interaction and alter their content and expression accordingly gives them unique potential for mnemonic function. (2008, p. 5)

The experience of the game itself is important because of the associations that are created there, and also because of pseudo-out-of-body experiences that videogames may produce (Zehnder & Lipscomb, 2006); these bonds are strong, to the point that game publishers, such as Nintendo, rely on generating nostalgia in audiences (Taylor & Whalen, 2008). Xiangyi Huang, for example, sees ‘classic’ game series (i.e. Super Mario, Metal Gear) as those that rely on nostalgia to sell. At time of the Nintendo’s Wii launch, the core titles were ‘classic titles’ “enabling game fans to reexperience (sic) the nostalgic association with their favorite characters, which reestablishes (sic) the long-lasting cultural significance of Japanese video games” (Huang, 2009, p. 89). Hence, nostalgia becomes the way in which players also identify with videogames, and the sense of belonging and familiarity grows strong with the longing to return to these characters, experiences, settings, and sounds.

Another way in which nostalgia operates in players is when the individual remembers a time in his or her life that involved the videogame. These can involve people, a younger age, or a particular setting, all of which are moments and events that
happened in living memory (Reading & Harvey, 2008; Taylor & Whalen, 2008), in the, perhaps, ‘strict’ meaning of nostalgia, but digital media and the creation of reproducible experiences raise questions about what the object of nostalgia really is (Reynolds, 2011). Reynolds believes that the creation of media capable of faithfully reproducing an event meant that listening to a vinyl, which would theoretically deliver ‘the same’ aural experience hence triggering a replica of the emotions felt from listening to this recording for the first time, would change the way in which nostalgia is understood. He observes that the definition overlooked the implications of an evolving experience, one that changes with time and that, in reality, it was the combination of events, occurrences, and sensory perceptions that created ‘the moment’, and, in fact, the recording and the person were the two common factors between experiences. Nostalgia should be a longing for the original experience, but in the interactive and ever-changing experience of the video game, the medium also challenges the classic definition of nostalgia. Therefore, replay is motivated by the impact the text had on the player. “Because the very forms of video games belie attempts at constancy, nostalgia grows for a return to the original text through repetition—even through the commodified representation of the original” (Taylor & Whalen, 2008, p. 8). Sean Fenty (2008) agrees with this statement declaring that videogames revolutionised the term nostalgia because of their interactivity. “Indeed, for some, classic video games have become powerful nostalgic artefacts, not only as reminders of another time and place (a tether to a longed-for past) but as yearned-for states of being, desired spaces in and of themselves—digital homes to which gamers yearn to return” (Fenty, 2008, p. 20). Nostalgia can sometimes reflect the wish of people to go back to more of the same but in a different form, one that is not too different but recognisable, within the parameters of what would be considered canon to some players (Whiteman, 2008). Such is the case of franchises and
Music Beyond Gameplay: Motivators In The Consumption Of Videogame Soundtracks

game series that have been established for a number of years, including cross-medial franchises, which shows the importance of a nostalgic approach in marketing (Taylor & Whalen, 2008). The aesthetics of a game can make the game look old aiming to create nostalgia. It is not only a question of game aesthetics; nostalgia does not necessarily refer to the past, but to a past that is imagined, or conceived, as referring to a different time, or perhaps even a different timeline. This is true in the case of Braid, where Hanson exemplifies the game as one that is more than a “pastiche” (2010, p. 217), by saying that this nostalgia is created not only through aesthetics, but also game narratives and “core game mechanics” (as seen also in Donkey Kong, Super Mario Bros.) (p. 221).

Nostalgia should not be confused with retro. Guffey (2006) describes retro as involving the following:

- “Carrying deep emotional appeal” (p. 9), retro refers to a sense if timelessness. It is a “trendy synonym for 'old-fashioned' or simply 'old’” (p. 9).
- It can also refer to the post-war years in the US, particularly mid-20th century.
- A notion that values, morals, and general lifestyle of yore are to be held at a higher esteem than the deranged or malign standards of the present.
- Seeking irrelevance in “technological obsolescence” (p. 10).

Therefore, retrogaming (i.e. the practice of playing old games) creates a false sense of nostalgia, one that is more related to being retro since it highlights obsolescence and a bygone era, as opposed to a remembrance of events from living memory through nostalgic-play, which through the iconography of the game transports

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7 Retromania by Simon Reynolds (2011) is recommended for readers that seek to know more about retro.
the player to a different time period in their own lives, and is important as it is a reinvention of the original play experience (Reading & Harvey, 2008; Taylor & Whalen, 2008; Wolf & Perron, 2003).

Playing the original game in its original console does not appear to be the way to a ‘real’ replication of the experience either, as some players feel disappointed when playing 'classic' games. “Some say that these games are not the same, somehow, as the ones played years ago. Something not quite distinguishable is inauthentic—the sounds, the colors, the feel of the controller, and the smells, even” (Fenty, 2008, p. 20).

Although arguably full immersion is the ultimate goal of game designers, audiences are still mediated by a machine, and the experience of the videogame also involves the setting in which play takes place, hence nostalgia also brings back memories of a particular moment in time outside of the diegetic world. Therefore, Fenty proposes a his own consideration to nostalgia in videogames:

Nostalgia is the emotional by-product of change. People feel nostalgia—the yearning to return to some past period or irrecoverable condition—because the current condition is somehow different. […] It is this participation within virtual spaces that make video games such a revolutionary medium and video games such powerful sites of nostalgia.

(Fenty, 2008, p. 21)

Nostalgia and videogame music. Nostalgia can be triggered by music, taking you back to a specific moment of time when the music was being played, according to Juslin and Västfjäll, in what they call “episodic memory” (2008, p. 563). “Empirical evidence suggests that nostalgia may be one of the more common responses to music” (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008, p. 568), and in videogames this nostalgia is evident in the consumption
of game OSTs. Nostalgia is the key component for the ‘replayability’ of games and the market of used games and retrogaming (McVeigh, 2000). Taylor and Whalen quote Brian McVeigh, who wrote a paper on the consumption and commodification of Hello Kitty, saying “appeals to nostalgia encourage a reconnection with the past by buying certain products united by one leitmotif; same commodity, same individual, different ages/styles/designers/tastes” (McVeigh, 2000, in Taylor & Whalen, 2008, p. 7). As players revisit the game and revisit the experience, they can also revisit these memories through music, since the experience of nostalgia lies closely in appropriation, and appropriation built around the context that created said memories, in the re-reading and re-enactment of artefacts [i.e. game], but it does not necessarily disintegrate the artefact through overuse and commodification as Theodore Adorno (1978) states, but rather personalises the experience according to Henry Jenkins (2004).

As mentioned earlier, the re-experiencing of events through nostalgia creates a conflict between the original experience and the new. Whiteman (2008) describes nostalgia as one of two types:

- Synchronic: That which wants to return to established norms, places, interfaces; the preservation of the memory in its purest form.
- Diachronic: One that wishes for the evolution of the diegetic world and memories, for the new experience to build on the old.

This means that the ‘fidelity’ of the music in an OST can trigger emotions of wanting to go back to the original experience (e.g. play the original game, listen to the official OST), or to build on the previous experience (e.g. listen to the music on an iPod or CD, listen to variations and reinterpretations of the music). The discrepancy that emerges from the spatiotemporal difference between the original experience and the new experience gives way to various ways in which a listener can experience nostalgia,
and this variety of experiences is used by developers, fans, and audiences to consume games or soundtracks. Hence, it is adequate to say that one can use nostalgia to direct an emotion or a yearning on the “[...] emotions music can induce depends on the functions of the music in a particular situation (e.g., using music to relax or to evoke nostalgic memories), and may thus vary considerably from one context to another” (Whiteman, 2008, p. 572). Nostalgia can be induced by timbre and aural qualities of music (e.g. a capella solo, 8-bit by default generated nostalgia) (Diaz Gasca, 2009; Neumeyer & Buhler, 2001; Pidkameny, 2002); in a similar manner that visuals can induce nostalgia, as was the case in Braid. Plot also comes into play with nostalgia, through gameplay, melodies that are heard from the beginning can change and adapt, and the player can yearn for the times in the beginning of the narrative, or the player can also relate to the character’s backstory, which is represented in the music, as in the case of Final Fantasy X (Diaz Gasca, 2009, p. 51). In this way, nostalgia is a tool used by developers to direct sentiment in the game, and outside of the game as this nostalgia would then be a part of a greater nostalgia (e.g. the sentiment of nostalgia felt by the character in the story for a place compounds to be come the nostalgia of the audience outside of the game for this place as well as the feelings of the character). Nostalgia used and consumed by fans relates more to the concepts of appropriation and fandom, which are topics that will be discussed in the next section as a Sociocultural Motivator.

As a sentiment, nostalgia amplifies the emotions that surround memories; it is a yearning that is triggered by sounds and images and connects memories and places with feelings that have already been experienced as well as highlight the differences between the present and the past. This contrast in time and space is nostalgia, and audiences can feel through music a strong connection that can determine the way in which music is consumed outside of the game.
**Experiential Motivator Summary**

The first motivator identified by this study for the consumption of videogame soundtracks outside of the game is the experience of an individual with the videogame or game elements (such as images, stories, aesthetics, or music), and the creation of memories that are connected to these experiences. Therefore, associations and nostalgia are the key elements in this type of motivator. Experiential associations are created by the player through music with:

- game characters and avatars with which to identify due to their personalities, backstory, character representation, and the way in which the player sees him/herself represented in the diegesis, and the interpretation and representation of these characters and the player (as an active participant in the game world) through the use of themes and motifs;

- game narratives, which are the settings, plot, and the development of events; and the way in which instrumentation and musical style can create spaces, the way in which the plot is interpreted and progresses with the use of music, and the evolution of musical meaning through the interaction of the player in the world;

- game franchises that create a familiar setting with the player through sounds, music, aesthetics, and stories that are already important to the player from experiences with previous games and inter-medium franchise and licenses.

Individuals also experience nostalgia through game music. This nostalgia occurs through the remembrance of a past and awareness that said past is different from the present. The spatiotemporal difference means that true nostalgia cannot be achieved, but the new experience can build on old perceptions of the original memory or can attempt
to be faithful to the original memory; these memories can be either related to the game and game elements, or they can refer to a time in the life of the listener in which game music was included. Musical triggers nostalgia because of the memories that are associated with this music and the context in which it was heard, and this nostalgia can bring individuals to listen to the soundtrack, play the game, or listen to new interpretations of the game music. The origins of experiential motivators reside on the individual, and can be interact with social motivators or market imperatives, and these relations will be explored later in chapter 5.
Chapter 4: Sociocultural Motivators and the Consumption of Soundtracks

I remember the first time I heard videogame music played live. It was at a pub in southern Gold Coast, where a band named The Comovers played a magnificent set, and for their encore, they rocked a rendition of their *Super Mario Bros.* medley. The audience in the pub averaged an age of 21, all children of the Nintendo generation, people that had grown up playing videogames with the reluctant approval of their parents, people that did not remember a world without games, people that remember when videogames were compared to Marilyn Manson, people that grew up in a time when game music ‘sounded like game music’. The reaction of the audience was not surprising: loud cheers and the dance floor filling up to a song that we could all call our own. After the song, the crowd began to reminisce over the game and their childhood, brimming with nostalgia. What The Comovers had done that night made me realise that what my parents had described as an abnormal behaviour (a kid playing videogames and not football), was in fact the norm for people in my generation: the memories of game music were collective and brought us together.

In chapter 3 it was shown how the personal experiences of audiences with game music allowed them to create bonds with the game and their own experiences, which would later motivate the consumption of soundtracks beyond the game as a means of remembrance of and identification with game elements. A corollary of the individual experience described in chapter 3 is the realisation that this personal experience is lived by many people simultaneously with every person that is in possession of a cartridge, disc, handheld device, and digital download that includes the same game that someone else has. These individuals share a similar experience, visit the same world, and participate in the narratives that are put forward by game designers. Furthermore, the experiences that are lived by an individual can take place in a social environment: a family home, a videogame bar, a LAN party, or over the
internet with players who are potentially connected from all parts of the world. Videogame music becomes an artefact of cohesion among audiences that share experiences on a social level, that participate in events and appropriate music as a means of self-identification with a group and a medium to connect with their object of admiration. It is essential to point out that by no means is this dissertation claiming that the videogame community is a monolithic entity, but a heterogeneous, diverse one: ages vary, cultures differ, and game genres are diverse. The way in which the gaming community is understood is through the shared experience that these individuals have through their exploration of a virtual environment, and, by extension, the musical experience they share.

Kiri Miller in her article *Jacking the dial: Radio, race, and place in Grand Theft Auto* (2007) writes about her view of the demographics of the GTA series from an ethnographic standpoint, highlighting that every installment of the game also told the story of a member of a particular ethnicity and the social and musical contexts in which the players embodied these distinct avatars. Miller argues that gaming audiences share similar experiences within the game world, and that “the games’ virtual spaces frame musical reception in much more constraining terms than does the latest hit single” (2007, p. 405) or an audience in a cinema, describing gameplay by these diverse audiences as “separate but parallel performances of particular stories in particular places” (p. 405). Through this perspective it is possible to study the demographics of videogame music by understanding the environment through which they were exposed, as individuals and collectives, and conclude if these environments were influential in their subsequent elicitation of game music beyond the context in which they made first contact with it. Therefore, these considerations are important in understanding the behavior of audiences in the consumption of soundtracks when viewed through the lens of gameplay as performance and exposure to music during this performance as a rationalisation of the avatar(s) and the virtual environment, which is then manifested in social contexts.
outside of gameplay as a shared experience of this interpretation much like the actors of a play, or as Miller describes them, as tourists in a foreign land.

In this context, the second imperative to be analysed is the sociocultural motivator, one that is highly influenced by the aggregated value that is given to items that are important to groups because they are reminded of something that goes beyond the mere item, otherwise understood as *cultural capital*, a term which will be elaborated on further later in this chapter. The singularity or rarity of an OST can determine the inclusiveness of audiences in social circles that also deem a certain musical piece worthy of remembrance. This singularity also affects the interactions of audiences with other members of their group, with music sharing and collective consumption being some of the most visible occurrences. Sociocultural motivators also include the devotion, dedication, and following of certain groups towards game music that is written by a particular composer or that belongs to an important game.

This chapter explores the sociocultural motivators behind the consumption of videogame soundtracks - how the collective experiences of audiences lead to a communal consumption, appropriation, and fetishisation of music by audiences, fans, and gamers and non-gamers alike.
Videogames are a social experience, one that goes beyond the individual, single-player campaign to become the shared experience of several players around the world that form a collective of people that shared the experience of interacting within the same digital space. The social experience extends to those that share the gameplay experience by playing in multiplayer mode, or perhaps, simply just by watching someone else play, or just being present in the vicinity of where a game is being played. The gaming community, one that was perhaps seen as a small minority of isolated individuals playing in a dark room, has evolved since the first videogame in 1962, becoming a group that is recognised and celebrated in popular culture (Jenkins, 2006). These people are linked by the experience they lived in the game, a commonality that is not limited by having games in common, but by the interaction they had with a game interface. The collective experience of video-gaming can be represented in several ways: cosplay, game conferences, game venues, live music, and most notably, the greater online gaming community. Today there are websites, such as Twitch, which allow for users to view game matches, extending the videogame experience not only to players but also to spectators. Governments, such as that of the United States, have
recognised the level of competition in gaming communities so that foreign players can apply for an eSport (electronic sport) visa just like any other ‘real’ athletes would. Teams battle each other in colossal tournaments and train together and are sponsored by private enterprise to compete in such events. Competitions such as the Blizzard *Hearthstone* tournament gives the top 16 players around the world a chance to win USD$100,000 in cash, out of a USD$250,000 prize pool where the lower ranked runner ups leave with a decent USD$5,000. Clearly, videogames have gained a greater exposure in the public arena, and the interactions between gamers along with them.

In this study, the social aspects of gaming represent another important imperative in the consumption of videogame music, with music being a strong element in the culture of gaming, as a common denominator of experiences, a symbol of identification in the group, and as a valuable item of cultural capital. Note that in this thesis, ‘gaming culture’ is understood as a general, umbrella term for commonalities in the practices of people that play videogames. Earlier studies suggested that gaming was a subculture, however, the reach of the medium has expanded so that it proves increasingly difficult to treat gaming as a subculture now given the accessibility to games and the acceptance of games as a pastime, hobby, line of work, entertainment, or art. Also note that the experiential motivations and sociocultural motivations for OST consumption differ in the sense that an experiential motivation is triggered by the engagement of an audience (or individual) with the OST, be it through gameplay or a friend’s recommendation. On the other hand, a sociocultural motivator involves a gaming audience that participates passively or actively in a gaming community, hence, the concept of cultural capital functions in a different manner. Social motivators are understood under two headings: singularity and following.
Fandom, Participatory Culture, and Cultural Capital

Since the videogame is a context in which audiences are able to interact with a new environment and express themselves as a part of a digital culture outside of the game, the audience has to be seen as a group that constantly evolves outside the boundaries of ideology: the audience does not exist anywhere but it is also in constant motion (Harris, 1998). To understand sociocultural imperatives it is pertinent to mention three key elements that come into play in social interactions between gamers and the way they view and value game elements and music: fandom, participatory culture, and cultural capital.

Fandom and its importance in sociocultural motivators. Fandom has been defined by many authors and been the focus of several studies on audiovisual media, mostly in the context of television, for example in the study of fans of the Sci-Fi series Star Trek. ‘Fanatic’, the origin of the word ‘fan’ and the term ‘fandom’, led society to acquire negative connotations that aided the stigmatisation of fandom, giving the idea that fans were brainless followers and devotees (Jenkins, 2004, p. 12).

Henry Jenkins introduces the concepts of ‘fans’ and ‘fandom’ as:

[…] a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups […] to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representation; fandom is a way of appropriating media texts and rereading them in a fashion that serves different interests, a way of transforming mass culture into popular culture…

[Videogames and other forms of media, although the author here is referring to Star Trek] is not simply something that can be reread; it is something that can and must be rewritten to make it more responsive to their needs, to make it a better producer of personal meanings and pleasures. (2006, p. 40)
What this research will draw and understand from Jenkins’ definition is that fandom describes the ways in which groups idolise elements that belong to a particular trademark of popular culture on an individual and collective level. Furthermore, the rewriting practices described by Jenkins will also be expanded and explained along with the sociocultural motivations. However, Whiteman’s approach to the term gives a definition that is more aligned to the intended use of fandom in this study: “The term “fan” suggests a degree of allegiance to a text, persona, or practice that goes beyond that of a casual consumer.” (Whiteman, 2008, p. 33)

Fans can give privilege to a particular person, work, producer, site, or game. Fan relationships with producers can turn ugly when the idealised conception of the text is changed, a discontent that is often displayed through the most immediate, accessible, and direct form of feedback that is known to date: the internet. Whiteman aims to examine fan expectations and the voicing of the “expectation of media texts and the negotiation of textual “authenticity” by fans in ways that […] privilege nostalgia” (2008, p. 33). These are the perceptions of what fans think that texts are or what they should be, due to the construction of a canon that is born from the producer’s rules of what the story should be as well as from the expectations of fans, drawn from previous experiences with a game or game series, wishing to relive the feeling that they had when they first experienced the game. The creation of a canon suggests that the relationship that is created between the player and the game allows for the fan to read the game as a text and call it their own, through various forms of reinterpretation and appropriation.

**Participatory culture.** The gaming culture is a participatory culture, which means “the games-playing audience is plainly an active one” (D. Williams, 2006). “Playing games is a complex psychological engagement that blends creative exploration with narrative in a form
of mediated communication that infuses young people's engagements with participatory intensity” (Kline et al., 2003, p. 18). There are several authors that describe ‘gaming culture’ and the role of the participation of game audiences in its rewriting, construction, and production. Fans are active participants in the evolution of meaning. “…[F]ans as readers who appropriate popular texts and reread in a fashion that serves different interests, as spectators who transform the experience of watching television [and playing videogames] into a rich and complex participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 23).

This thesis will use the definition given by Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. The authors use the term “player culture” to describe a culture that is “born within the games and then expands further and further. It is players [gamers] who form game communities, and it is game communities that through their actions define the metaculture around a game” (2008, p. 152). This culture is comprised of hardcore gamers, social gamers, and casual gamers, the latter still being debated as to whether they should be considered as a part of gaming culture (DeMaria, 2007). Nevertheless, all these different gamers are audiences to game music. The manifestations of cultural participation in game music have been many and documented by academics and fans alike, and they are prime catalysts for the consumption of soundtracks.

In the participatory culture of gaming, there is an extensive interaction amongst gamers and an active interaction between gamers and game elements. This comes back to Reynolds’ (2011) concept of fandom where fans not only consume but *rewrite*, and it is ratified by Matthew Guschwan who writes “[f]an studies has re-cast the fan as an active participant who co-constructs meaning and produces ancillary texts” (2012, p. 25). Burgess & Green (2009) find YouTube to be a site where participatory culture is represented in the active consumer input and manipulation of content, but also where these practices are frowned upon (and regulated) by some media authors and at the same time encouraged to build a loyal community. YouTube, Reddit, and 4Chan are sites that serve as examples of the
participation of gaming audiences being evident in the appropriation of game elements (both visual and musical) to further explore and share the experiences of a collective group. Another example of social participation is live game music, which can be either the interpretation of existing orchestral game music or it can also be the reinterpretation (i.e. arrangement) of old game music by an orchestra, soloist, or band. Collins (2008b), Newman (2008), and Kohler (2005) described the importance that live game music has within fan circles. Kohler believes that this phenomenon is due more to a sense of legitimisation within fan communities where game music was presented in a serious, ‘high art’ context that was socially more accepted, withdrawn from negative social prejudices that surround gaming. Newman agrees with Kohler and further notes that this is an attempt to lift the artistic value of game music. After experiencing a linear version of game music, such as the one presented in a live setting, an audience can find itself more familiar with the recorded OST. Thus, the participatory nature of the gaming subculture can be a key, determining factor on the following of a game and its soundtrack, which would ultimately lead to the consumption of OSTs.

**Cultural capital.** David Throsby defines cultural capital as “the stock of cultural value embodied in an asset. This stock may in turn give rise to a flow of goods and services over time, i.e., to commodities that themselves may have both cultural and economic value” (1999, pp. 6-7). It is important to keep in mind that videogame merchandise, art, and music has an aggregated ‘cultural capital’ for gaming subcultures and also possesses a real monetary value that is important for the game industry and its subsidiaries. Aggregated cultural value is linked somewhat to the experiential concept of nostalgia, with a certain item triggering this sentiment through a particular memory. However, there are several other reasons why an item can hold a particular importance for members of a gaming culture, who
are, in fact, the ultimate moderators of the elements that will hold value to the community as gamers themselves have become producers due to the feedback they give to developers (Kline et al., 2003). Let us revisit Kline et al.’s model:

![Diagram of the Three Circuits of Interactivity in the Mediatized Global Marketplace](image)

*Figure 5: The Three Circuits of Interactivity in the Mediatized Global Marketplace (Diagram 6) (Kline et al., 2003)*

As gamers are able to distribute, consume, and comment on game music in an almost immediate manner, they also have the power of creating, adding, or subtracting capital value on certain game elements (Jenkins, 2006). Therefore, as the fans take on the role of the producer by creating the idea of cultural value, they also become the producers and are able to intervene in the production process of further material published or rewritten by fans. It is one of the aims of this thesis to also investigate if the fans, now active producers, are able to generate a sufficient public demand to instigate the publication of soundtracks.

It is important to clarify that although the model proposed by Kline et al. is evident in the production process of videogames, the videogame industry, in its core business model, will be more inclined to mitigate risk and make decisions that will ultimately maximise the
profit and return from videogame sales. Feedback from audiences is taken into account as an estimated ‘average consumer’ and decisions are made from there to lower the risk factor. In its essence, this means that despite the flow of feedback and the faux collaboration that is apparent between producers and audiences, the game industry will make decisions that will keep the average player, the board of directors, and the shareholders satisfied, hindering the potential that a game could otherwise have. Although this paints a picture of one-sided production, the participation of the industry with the community and the feeling of belonging that is fabricated with audiences being able to voice their opinions, allows for the model proposed by Kline et al. to work as a theoretical framework.

**Singularity**

The distribution of soundtracks by producers and the collection and reworking of soundtracks by audiences creates a distinction among the members within the gaming community, based on the possession of items that are identified as important by a certain group. This is what is referred to in this study as ‘singularity’: the singular identity that is attained by a person or an item through the association or affiliation that comes with the possession of said item, despite the multiplicity (or various versions/copies) that this item has. An item’s singularity holds a special importance at a collective level, which motivates its consumption. Social singularity, expressed in the context of the broad videogame culture, refers to the importance that is given socially to an item and the collective admiration or praise that is given to holders of said item. Videogames, and other popular culture media, have certain idols and items that have importance to the members of that particular culture, which are consumed by audiences in a form of collective remembrance of an experience, and music and musical recordings hold a special place among these special items (Berger, 2002; Reynolds, 2011; Shuker, 2008; Wall, 2003). In the case of videogames, the videogame OST is a part of the promotional material
and merchandise that can be acquired through the original publication of the music (e.g. CDs) and although the intention of the individual might not be to ‘show off’ the fact that they have an original copy, possessing an original soundtrack is acknowledged as cool by other people that have played the game. The ‘coolness’ acquired through the possession of a soundtrack can refer to the mutual identification with individuals outside of gameplay, having shared a common past experience in the diegetic world (e.g. ‘I can’t believe she’s got an Aperture Science coffee mug! That’s just rad’). There are other ways in which the social ties are created and it is through the sharing of individual experience outside of the gaming context that brings people together through mutual identification with a common denominator (Newman, 2008).

Because these items are not of regular use in the average environment, in the way that an iPhone is to the everyday person, singularity also has ties to the rarity of this object and the authenticity of the source of the same. For instance, Reynolds describes how uniqueness played an important role in rock memorabilia in the sixties, where fans would seek to acquire the original promotional posters of concerts and events, “the first printing because those were the ones that were actually in circulation” (2011, p. 18). Jenkins describes how fans are “cultural scavengers, fans reclaim works that others regard as “worthless” trash, finding them a source of popular capital” (2006, p. 39). So in this context, fans are drawn to these exclusive items. However, herein lies a dilemma: Reynolds also points out that recording (furthermore, the exact duplication and replication that can be achieved through digital mediums) created the current concept of retro by crystallising experiences through a perfect recreation of an event. One can infer that because of this recreation, the replay and perfect reproduction of a recorded sound, an officially published OST can claim to have a higher cultural value than its ‘illegally’ downloaded counterpart. But then, what happens to official digital copies? If we look back again at Creekmur’s (2001 in Spring, 2008) definition of a
soundtrack as marketable merchandise then any form of the OST would be a valuable cultural asset. This means that for a fan the sole act of having an OST in any of its incarnations can be deemed as cultural capital; having the music is cool in itself. Gilles Deleuze (1994) offered a philosophical resolution to this dilemma by describing singularity of items as identified in the midst of mass reproduction in the way in which repetition (i.e. reproducibility) is carried out, a repetition that in its meaning carries connotations that sets the individual items apart. In other words, it does not matter if the ringtone on my phone comes from an official OST release, the fact that the ‘Gym leader battle theme’ from Pokémon plays on my phone every time I get a call give me, my ringtone, and my phone a distinction that makes me stand out. Deleuze’s proposal applies to videogame soundtracks in that the associations and connotations that are created around the release, distribution, and acquisition of soundtracks give them their own identity as an item (and hence the individual and the group), and also highlights the process in which the music was obtained. Thus, the singularity of individuals and game soundtracks lies in the multiplicity of the music, its representations and formats; and the distinction within a larger set of audiences and products, which in this study can be simply understood as ‘the coolness factor’ that these OSTs and individuals inherently possess.

The singularity of soundtracks: looking at the ‘coolness factor’. The soundtrack as an item that can be consumed by audiences can acquire a coolness factor, which is otherwise known by other authors as fetishisation, a term that describes the assignment of added meaning and symbolism to an object that otherwise would only hold an ordinary/original meaning (Booth, 2009; Everett, 2007; Taylor & Whalen, 2008). This original meaning is a concept that is linked to nostalgia as it can sometimes reflect the wish of people to come back to more of the same but in a different form, one that is not too different but recognisable,
within the parameters of what would be considered canon (Whiteman, 2008, p. 43).

Whiteman aims to examine fan expectations and the voicing of the “expectation of media texts and the negotiation of textual “authenticity” by fans in ways that […] privilege nostalgia.” (p.33) These are the perceptions of what fans think that texts are or what they should be, and a soundtrack that is ‘certified’ as original by the publisher or the composer is bound to gain attention. Matthew Payne views this sentiment as a ‘collective nostalgia’ that is a representation of a group’s collective past.

Generally speaking, collective memory is not interested in researching “objective” histories, but rather how a group re-presents its past and how it propagates and disseminates this narrative. (Payne, 2008, p. 53)

Collective memory, describes Payne, “has two major implications for gaming communities” (2008, p. 55). The first is that “gamers must speak to each other about” (p. 55) games and talk through gameplay within games to maintain collective memory. The second is that the gamer community has to be socially recognised and active. “…the collective identity and the group on a subject is socially and historically contingent and is never a foregone conclusion” (2008, p. 55).

As a cultural object, soundtracks are fetishised and gain cultural capital as they link various individuals under a collective past and allow for the participation and assembly of these individuals, regardless of the setting and format of the music. Hard-copy musical formats (i.e. CD, vinyl, tape) do not necessarily hold an advantage over digital counterparts, especially in the West where videogame soundtracks (particularly those from Japanese titles) are hard to find, and often only available as expensive imports. Digital copies then are also given status since it is another form of the same music and the effort of finding the digital copy is acknowledged; the collection of digital copies is still a form of collection, especially when it comes to music, since the possession and knowledge of this music is what is
important for members of the gaming culture (Everett, 2007). After all, “[…] there is
nostalgic pleasure in listening to the music, but the collection serves also as a focus around
which a community can coalesce” (Newman, 2008, p. 81).

**Social participation and appropriation of soundtracks as singularity.** The singularity of
soundtracks is not limited to that which can be bought and consumed, it is also the way in
which it is consumed and practiced that creates a social bond with other people that have
shared a common experience. It is worth noting that not all soundtrack audiences have played
the game and their consumption of soundtracks may be motivated by other experiences that
were the product of interactions with other people or with the music itself; even as an
observer of gameplay (i.e. watching someone else play the game, or watching a gameplay
video on YouTube) the personal participation in this collective experience is different
(Burgess & Green, 2009), because in this particular case we are not dealing with the plurality
of the videogame demographics inside the game rather the audiences that are secondary,
passive listeners. Another pertinent reminder is that the consumption of soundtracks is not
limited to listening to the original audio files, the modes of consumption available to
audiences range from live performances, ringtones, sampling in other songs, and learning the
music itself and performing for others. All of these aforementioned modes are intended to
reach a target audience that is already familiar with games, but at the same time they also can
reach other people due to the musicality of the pieces. Their commonality is the ability to
create connections between people through the game music, even through a simple gesture of
‘I know that song’ and ‘that game is fantastic!’

The congregation of people around videogame music is more visible when it is done
in the context of a concert (Newman, 2008), and the participation in these events is of
significant impact in the social relationships that music audiences have. Daniel Cavicchi
(2007), author of a study on musical fandom in the United States in the 19th century, believes that audiences that went to concerts would seek out music to listen to at home and in other spaces, a consumption that was based on the commodification of music in the live scene. Live performance, in this context, is then just another form of consumption that can lead to further listening. This is why events such as concerts by the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Videogames Live!, and Play! A Video Game Symphony are important for audiences, to be able to celebrate their experiences and memories collectively, especially when live music projects are taken on board by established musical ensembles such as the London Philharmonic Orchestra with their *Greatest Video Game Music* series. The ability to be able to share these experiences collectively legitimates aspects that were considered to be either ‘subcultural’ or inappropriate in other environments, back in the time when videogames were not widely accepted and visible to the general public. Reiterating Kohler’s (2005) view on the legitimisation of game music in public spaces through live performances, the importance of such exposure provides a space to share these experiences and this music with people that might have otherwise been apprehensive towards game music simply because it is labelled ‘game music’, whereas “[a] concert by a string orchestra, well, that was downright *classy*” (Kohler, 2005, p. 134). String orchestras are not the only performances at play; bands, fans, and independent artists also are participants in this performance because

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8 The relevance of Cavicchi’s 19th century study of music and audiences lies in the bridging of eras and the understanding of fandom. As Cavicchi explains: "Music culture, in particular, is useful for beginning to open up the history of fandom because it was at the forefront of both twentieth-century media technology (in the form of both recording and broadcasting) and nineteenth-century urban entertainment (in the form of commodified performance and mass-produced texts) and thus provides linkages between what typically have been perceived as different eras of audience behaviour" (2007, p. 248).
game music can be considered beautiful in its own right, and performance becomes a new level of interactivity with game elements (Pidkameny, 2002).

**Appropriation of soundtracks.** Appropriation is another important factor in singularity, since it involves the reading and reinterpretation of texts by audiences, and moderated and accepted socially by fans, and this is a topic that can resonate or create discord especially with the industry regarding copyright. Although it is not the intention of this study to discuss copyright, it is pertinent to mention that producers have to realise that fan content is something that can be used for their advantage, as it is an inevitable part of fandom.

Fans acknowledge that they do not have authorship of the text but this does not deter the production of fan creations as these rewritings are representations of the complexities of the relationship of fans with texts (Tushnet, 2007, p. 69). As Sandvoss explains:

[…] fandom as the mode of reading sits uneasily with the aesthetic principles of reception theory. It constitutes a particular form of engagement with the text that presupposes familiarity and in which our extrications are more rigid, our determination to construct meaning in reference to the function of fandom greater than in other processes of reading. (Sandvoss, 2007, p. 31)

The appropriation of game music by fans gives birth to a collective authorship that allows for the reworking of these pieces, thus sites such as YouTube and OverClocked Remix are created, but both with different types of audiences. OC Remix, a site dedicated to the remixing and hosting of videogame music, is a community that celebrates videogame music, not in its original format, but in the remix. Remixing represents the involvement of the fans with the music in a similar way to the relationship between fan and fanfiction, where audiences engage in reinterpreting a text whilst remaining within the boundaries of a canon, an authenticity that is stipulated by producers and fans alike (Booth, 2009; de Certeau, 1984)
and which is seen in the remix as maintaining a musical style that safeguards themes and motifs while reworking the piece in different musical styles. The songs in OCRemix also somewhat maintain a production style that can be identified as belonging to the original game.

OCRemix contrasts with sites like YouTube, in the fact that while YouTube seeks the rewriting, reinterpretation, or fidelity to the original music, text, and game for entertainment purposes, OCRemix is:

[...] an organization dedicated to the appreciation and promotion of video game music as an art form. Its primary focus is www.ocremix.org, a website featuring thousands of free fan arrangements, information on game music and composers, resources for aspiring artists, and a thriving community of video game music fans. (OverClocked Remix, 2012)\(^9\)

As an ‘entertainment’ site, YouTube allows for fans to upload videos of gameplay, machinima, reviews, soundtracks, and performances; catering for a broader, more general audience. YouTube videos such as Maluka’s cover of ‘The Dragonborn comes’ grab the attention of audiences because of the quality of the rendition of a song that is ubiquitous in Skyrim, and audiences have access to many of these renditions either by stream or download from the cover artists’ websites or online shop. What is found in fan renditions and covers of game music is the enthusiasm and passion of performers that go to great lengths to recreate something that is precious to them and others.

**Final thoughts on singularity.** Concluding, sociocultural singularity allows for the identification, appropriation, and reinterpretation of game music in a social context because it ties people together, acting as a common denominator in an experience that was lived in a

\(^9\) It is worth mentioning that OCRemix has its own YouTube channel.
digital world or in an environment where game music was significant. These experiences are transferred into real life, and affect the interactions of gamers giving them an initial common ground, and having knowledge, participating, and/or possessing game music adds to the ‘coolness factor’ or the ‘edge’ that gives status to a player based on the systems of cultural capital that are created by gamers and fans (Buerkle, 2008; Dovey & Kennedy, 2007). This is because of the interactive quality of the videogame, where people can feel that they are inside a world in which they can be alone or interact with others, or play a game that allows for the game world to transverse into real life. This is the case, for example, with the Bemani games, where the social construct and show of people dancing creates a world outside of the game and brings several people together in the same playing field, being audience, participants, and part of the experience at the same time. What motivates audiences to listen to game music due to singularity is the feeling of being a part of an extended social network, where experiences and music can be shared and celebrated and acknowledged; being there with others and being connected through the music is what is important in singularity motivators.

Following
The second sociocultural motivator for the consumption of soundtracks is following, which is the importance given to a game, a composer, or a franchise and their credibility within gaming circles over the music itself. This does not mean that the game music is not important, in fact it can be the musical brilliance or the empathy of a player with the music that induced this liking, but this particular motivator is based on a sentiment similar to brand loyalty, which will be discussed later in this thesis. As explained earlier, the concept of fandom plays an important role in subcultural behaviour and consumption. Fandom is also closely related to the following that a game, composer, or series has. There are degrees of game following, which range from apathetic, to casual, to fandom, each representing the
amount of engagement that the OST audience will have with the game or the OST itself. Collins (2008b) and Compton (2004) describe the variety of individuals within the gaming audience and the OST audience. This distinction is significant to this research for several reasons:

- Audiences that consume OSTs are not necessarily gamers.
- Audiences that consume OSTs may have not played the game.
- Audiences that consume OSTs might not know that the music they are listening to is game music.

It is because of this that the concept of following needs to be noted in this research, since the degree of following determines how motivated a person will feel to listen to game music. Fandom is a socio-cultural phenomenon that involves several individual and community practices that revolve around particular items or figures of interest, which can be endorsed by prominent players in the game industry (such as composers or designers) or by the franchise itself. The power of endorsement is initially created by the fans, who give importance to a particular person, therefore the fame and prominence of this individual and the power of endorsement that he/she/they can have (Everett, 2007). As the entertainment industry well knows, fame cannot be achieved, or retained, if there is no support of a loyal fanbase. Therefore, sociocultural following, in essence, gives importance to authors, people, and games as opposed to the item itself and its cultural meaning; it can be broken down into two different types:

- Following the work of someone in particular and the franchise that the work represents (Song, 2011; Spring, 2008).
- Following the image or brand that a person represents (i.e. the endorsement of a prominent person) (Kärjä, 2008; Shaw, 2010).
**Following soundtracks.** The following of videogame soundtracks is visible in the various social interactions that audiences have with one another when sharing experiences, and the presence of the music is perhaps a subject addressed during these interactions, partly because of the use of music in a game. For example, in the case of *Final Fantasy VI* (Square, 1994), Pidkameny (2002) believes that the music comes in more as a backdrop to the action rather than as a reaction to actions, nevertheless the music of this particular instalment is popular among gamers and fans of the series. Here is where the first type of following occurs: the soundtrack for *FFVI* was composed by Nobuo Uematsu, now former composer of a great part of the series’ music. Uematsu’s style of composition used in the first *Final Fantasy* aided in the success of the game that saved SquareSoft from bankruptcy, an approach to music that was very thematic, with melodies that would be easy to hum and at the forefront of the composition (Belinkie, 1999; Song, 2011). The *Final Fantasy* series soundtrack is probably one of the more notorious in terms of the crowds it gathers for live performances that celebrate both the franchise and the composer, despite Uematsu retiring from the composition for the series, as part of a phenomenon where fans are “placing them [composers and games] alongside the mainstream of contemporary elite classical music” (Newman, 2008, p. 81) for orchestral performances, and band concerts, such as those of The Black Mages, that elevate composers to rock start status (Marks, 2001). The case of Uematsu epitomises the following of a franchise and person, since it is hard to find another composer in the videogame world that has achieved such a high esteem among fans, one that borders on a cult of personality. Uematsu’s live concerts, *Final Fantasy* CD collections, piano arrangements, and sheet music, are all a part of a greater marketing campaign on behalf of Square Enix, but the company always reverts back to the image of the series and the maestro under which fans gather and consume music through the various live performances and webpages created around the game and the composer.
A similar case to Uematsu’s occurred with Nintendo composer Koji Kondo, composer of the *Super Mario Bros.*, *The Legend of Zelda*, *Star Fox*, and *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, among many others. Kondo is mostly known for his *Mario* and *Zelda* soundtracks, with *Ocarina of Time* being his last solo work, after which he worked as a collaborator, sound designer, music supervisor, and advisor. This is an example of following the brand that a person represents. Although Kondo’s role as a lead composer ended in 1998, having his name on the credits serves as an endorsement of the game and adds authenticity to the sounds that are heard in the game. This is built on the previous collective experiences of gamers, who perceive previous games as ‘original’ and ‘authentic’, and then are reassured that their beloved memories are not being tampered with by someone they are not familiar with. This goes back to the concept of nostalgic motivators and builds on it as developers and audiences perceive this, collectively, to be an important factor in new releases. The representation of a particular franchise is a social motivator as it helps fans relate to each other and debate on the game and its elements through the various channels that are available to them, which can sometimes turn into heated arguments (Whiteman, 2008). The knowledge of games, and the stance and view that some people can have towards a game and its creator can lead to a collective mind-set, creating canon, and tending to feed to the popularity of the game or individual.

Fan following can also be cross-medial as film composers are increasingly adding videogames to their line of work (Cerrati, 2006; Collins, 2008a), such as Danny Elfman, Hans Zimmer, and Michael Giacchino among others, and the pre-existing popularity of artists shows an increase in the consumption of soundtracks (Kärjä, 2008; Spring, 2008). The soundtrack itself can be a motivator to play the game in the first place because of the licensing of music for ads and the artists that are in featured in the soundtracks, such as in the case of the *FIFA* series.
Supergiant Games, creators of *Bastion*, announced the release of their second game, *Transistor* (Supergiant Games, 2014) in 2013. Following a similar layout to that of their previous, very successful game, *Transistor* featured a familiar isometric camera angle, similar game mechanics (although the battle system did differ from that of *Bastion*), and a narrator that gave the player insight into the psyche of the character, Red. But one of the main features, although perhaps the most subtle form of advertising the game, and simultaneously relating it back to *Bastion* by tapping into the players that had previously played the game, was the music by the same composer that had composed the *Bastion* soundtrack, Darren Korb. *Transistor* also features the talent of Ashley Lynn Barrett, the same vocalist that did the voice of Sia in *Bastion* and the singer in the soundtrack’s most popular song “Build that Wall”. By making this decision Supergiant had already ensured that people that had played *Bastion* could relate to *Transistor*, despite its different game mechanics, and in a way, associate this musical sound to Supergiant Games.

Returning to the case of Nobuo, Matthew Belinkie (1999) and Xinju Song (2011) both suggest that the fame acquired by Uematsu for his compositions and contribution to the franchise earned him status among the gaming community. Uematsu’s name became synonymous with the franchise, and this popularity is also a driving factor in the franchises current marketing and promotion strategy. Supergiant used the same strategy that Nintendo and Square Enix had done with their most successful franchises, cementing its style through the use of music.

Akin to experiential association, fans have a strong sense of admiration for the composers and artists that have written a game’s music. This following and admiration raise the cultural value of an item or a game if it is endorsed by a specific author (Kärjä, 2008) and also trigger the reinterpretation of works either in live settings or on the internet (Newman, 2008). Sites like YouTube and OverClocked Remix (ocremix.org) have provided spaces for
fans to take ownership of game music, and reinterpret and redistribute their music, allowing for a different type of consumption of the same videogame music. The auto-fill setting on YouTube’s search bar is also an secondary tool to find different versions of the song that one is seeking: for example it is possible to find the audio for ‘Still alive’, or the end credits of Portal which include the original audio and lyrics, or a live version, perhaps one performed by Jonathan Coulton, finally arriving to the live version where the song is sung by Felicia Day, internet superstar, creator, and actor in The Guild; where the audience happily sings along to ever word of the song.

Lastly, another form of consumption that is also merits a mention is ‘videogame radio’, usually found in the format of videogame music playlists that can be found on Spotify or dedicated websites like rpgamers.net and vgmradio.com, that allow players to listen to various soundtracks from a variety of musical genres and game genres. These however, differ from on-demand game music consumption, but rely on the endorsement of a curator that brings the playlist of choice, much in the way that audiences prefer a radio station for the DJs and musical styles in rotation.

In a similar manner, fans have created their own subcultural distribution models responding to demands of game music that is not available for purchase. Chiptunes, for example, have long been the object of admiration and consumption of fans that desire to listen to OSTs that were never published or made available officially, but whose music was still ripped from their original source. Listening to this ‘old school’ music also resembles Reynolds’ concept of retro consumption, which can then be deemed ‘cool’ due to the rarity of the game. However, and recapping on Reynolds’ views on digital recording, because these sounds can be obtained and replicated as the means of a perfect copy, and because they can be equally, perfectly distributed and played back through digital means, the ‘rarity’ per se of the item is lost, leaving its capital value on a different plane to that of ‘hard copy’ material as
it relies on the popularity or *cult* following that the game can have.  

Returning to the example of chiptunes, and parallel to the notion of *cult following*, a passive musical endorsement can be achieved in some games through adequate selection of music, which legitimises and gives authenticity to retro-style gaming, through the replication of sounds that would be deemed proper to the era the game is imitating. Such is the case of *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World: The game* (Ubisoft, 2010), a game based on a graphic novel, which was then adapted into a live action film that coincided with the release of the videogame. The side-scrolling beat ‘em up game was overseen by the original team behind the film and the graphic novel, and to go along with the videogame references made in the original novel the game was designed with a retro, 8-bit look and included music by chiptune band Anamanaguchi. The combination of factors, fidelity to the story, endorsement by the creators, and musical ‘accuracy’, led to the game having positive reviews on release and fit well with niche audiences that were a fan of the original series of novels.

**Conclusions on Sociocultural Motivators**

As texts are increasingly set in versions of reality, video games also offer experiences of remembering that may be either personal or cultural. As the latter, video games act as public records of events objects and can even be mnemonic and memorial devices. (Taylor & Whalen, 2008, p. 5)

As a medium, videogames offer an individual and a collective experience, in the sense that many people share the same experience and can relate to each other and celebrate that common denominator in various spaces, where music is a strong, present element in the

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10 A *cult* following can be seen as the ‘hardcore-ness’ of the game; if it is considered to be a ‘must have played’ game or one that had a particular impact on the gaming community. This is the case of gamers that have played titles such as *Half-Life* or *Myst*, games that were highly influential in the aesthetics of games to come.
experience. Events, concerts, and live gigs present an opportunity for audiences to enjoy game music even if they have not played the game, and people attend these events to remember and share their own experiences, or simply to enjoy good music. The internet also provides a space for fans to share their own appropriation of game music and share their versions of their experiences, by performing or remixing a game’s soundtrack. These appropriations build on the established canon or can also remain well within the boundaries of ‘authenticity’, as both versions originate from the original gaming experience. The creation of a social space that occurs outside of the diegetic world is the catalyst for social motivators outside of the game and inside of the game through multiplayer gameplay, and for audiences that view these matches or experiences online through videos or live streams. For some, listening to game music is motivated by the rarity or coolness that it will provide within the gaming culture, while for others it is a way to follow idols and franchises that they love. The consumption of game music is founded on a personal experience which can be shared with others, and there is yet another level of complexity in this, which lies in the relationship that the industry and the marketing of games has with audiences and music, which will be described in the following chapter.
Chapter 5: Marketing Imperatives and the Consumption of Game Soundtracks

As explained earlier in this thesis, it is no secret that the videogame industry is a business, and quite a profitable at that, too. Music has played an important role in this business through history: by making the first sound when a dot hit a rectangle in *PONG*, to when engineers were the programmers not because the developer could not hire a musician but because it was very hard to find someone that could compose and code at the same time; and to the point where it because easier and better to add your pre-recorded music on a disc. It is not hard to think that because music has played an important part in the revolution of videogames modern day producers and designers would add extra care to pick their music wisely, to help the game make a player feel powerful emotions that would make him or her come back for more. My first encounter with the merchandise side of videogames came from videogame manuals from a very young age, where I found t-shirts, comic books, and strategy guides for the games I had purchased on offer from the developer. My first musical merchandise encounter was the *Killer Instinct* soundtrack that came with the game. But the realisation that the producers of games were not the only ones that were making profit from metaludical products was the rise of ocarina sales in the months after *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* was released, around the time I got my first ocarina, but wished to have the blue one that I saw in the game, and then realising that it was an independent company, not one affiliated with Nintendo, that made these ‘*Zelda* ocarinas’. But there was nothing wrong with my humble ocarina, it allowed me to play the songs I learnt to play in the game, making my own arrangements of the pieces, making me a new producer of the content that had been given to me by Nintendo through their game.
The consumption of any product is regulated by the two main forces within the market: the consumer and the producer. Whilst the previous chapters were dedicated to the analysis of the role of the consumer, the gaming audience, this chapter focuses on how the producers shape consumption. The separation between consumer and producer is not as binary as one might think, especially when referring to videogames, largely because of the somewhat direct involvement of the consumer in the decisions that surround the production of a game, and the creation of what Kline et al. (2003) describe as the prosumer. Experiential and sociocultural motivators express the engagement of audiences with the product and the way in which they interact with videogames and their elements through music, an interaction that is heavily scrutinised by the gaming industry to understand the way in which audiences behave in order to reach a target audience that can feel identified with their product through the use of visuals, slogans, and music. Some consider the videogame to be an art form (Buerkle, 2008; Kelman, 2004; Poole, 2000), but at the same time the game and its embedded elements are products of an industry (or various industries), and it is these products that individuals and groups interact with.

As an economic imperative, videogame soundtracks are a consumable product which also acts as a segue to another product that is the object of consumption, and it can be understood under two motivators. The first motivator, commodification, entails the metamorphosis to a soundtrack from a game element to a product, and as a publication that is the response of a demand that originates, largely, in the gameplay experience. The second economic motivator is branding and marketing, which is the push of the game industry to reach niche markets and dedicated audiences (fans) with familiar elements that represent the group that the audience identifies with. This chapter explores the use of music in the game industry and the marketability of OSTs and games through the identification of target audiences and their expectations, and the role of music outside of the game as a licensing too
and a standalone commodity. At the end of this chapter, the relationships between the different imperatives are briefly explored.

**Economic Imperatives**

![Figure 6: Economic imperatives. Metaludic consumption brought by industry strategy.](image)

The third approach to the central of this dissertation comes in the form of another question: what market demand is the videogame industry responding to with the publication of soundtracks? Answering this question gives insight into the motivations audiences have to consume soundtracks and also the expectations towards the industry to release OSTs. To approach this matter, two topics will be addressed: commodification, and branding and marketing. Richard Rogers describes how “commodification abstracts the value of an object (or form or person) so that it can enter systems of exchange. In this process, the use-value and the specificity of the labor and social relations invested in the commodity are lost; it becomes equivalent to all other commodities” (2006, p. 488). It is the shift in use-value from
soundtrack to cultural artefact that is especially relevant to this thesis, the abstraction of a background/narrative musical element present during play into a consumable item with a price tag. Branding and marketing are the techniques that are used by the industry to present their products, both as elements of a larger whole (brands) and as consumable products (marketing); both are techniques used by the game industry to ensure monetary gain, which can translate into merchandise, such as OSTs, that exist outside of the videogame (that is, a ‘meta-ludic’ object).

Economic imperatives adhere to the notion of the OST as a product and audiences as consumers of this product, an idea that is not new for an audiovisual medium. Katherine Spring (2008) describes the use of popular musicians in early 20th century film and how the industry quickly found that audiences reacted positively to the tie-in and this gave birth to the original soundtrack. In videogames, Pidkameny (2002) suggests that music became the selling point of the game with game composer George Sanger, and Kärjä (2008) also points out the importance of music as a tool for the marketing of the a game. Michael Cerrati (2006), in his paper on game music, discusses the use of music in games through a business perspective and the way in which the music and videogame industries have worked together as the size of the market grew ever more stronger, as a means to target specific audiences with music. The analysis of technology and videogame consumption from a marketing perspective by Kline et al. (2003) provides a valuable background to understanding the impact of the concepts of branding and marketing, as well as commodification and their impact on OST consumption. They believe that consumption has a heavy reliance on three main aspects of technology marketing: culture, technology, and industry marketing. Due to this, the Kline et al. make several propositions on the videogame industry’s marketing strategies and consumption of videogames:
• Producers infiltrate gaming subcultures to take advantage of trends or predict them. In the case of soundtracks, music can determine the target audience.

• Subcultural gaming consumption is not based on the item itself but on the distinction that said item represents in the subculture.

• Audiences can affect production and releases.

It is because of the third point that Kline et al. draw a ‘production circle’ rather than a ‘production line’, where audiences have input on production decisions that are made prior to and after the release of a game. This cyclic model (presented earlier in this paper) is important to understanding the influence of the audience in the videogame production model, and must be taken into account to understand how the industry responds to audiences when it comes to OSTs. As Guschwan writes:

While there may be nothing new in suggesting that commodity producers appropriate the labor of trendsetting consumers, new social media has changed the speed and level of interaction between producers and consumers. Social media has enabled fans/consumers to easily congregate online, but it has also created an opportunity for marketers to exploit the labor of these fans/consumers and the communities that they have constructed. (2012, p. 20)

Guschwan believes that audiences are responsible for the creation of much of the metaludic material by authors that reside in cyberspace, but at the same time, producers take advantage of these communities to create trends, sometimes giving the illusion that audiences are actually the ones responsible for the creation of canon. Kline et al. see this as the infiltration of the consumer-space by producers, where the industry allows its audiences to dictate certain aspects of pre-release and post-release elements of the game, but at the same time keeping a tight leash on their own product, since, after all, they are running a business.
This interaction is central to this particular type of motivation for the consumption of soundtracks.

**Commodification**

A parcel had arrived in the mail: it was the official *Piano Collections: Final Fantasy XIII* book, which featured piano arrangements for various songs from the game. I had just received the official version from Square Enix, which made it more special, which was a stark contrast from the PDFs that were available on ffshrine.org. Since 1992, Square Enix has released CDs with recorded piano arrangements of selected pieces from *Final Fantasy* games along with sheet music for the tracks featured on the album. But those who cannot get their hands on these transcripts have other means of obtaining them, that is, through the internet. Game fans and musicians are able to download sheet music and arrangements for videogame music pieces, with some deriving from scores such as the *Piano Collections* series, while others are arrangements created by users and fans who dedicate their time to transcribing and sharing their versions of musical content. Whether the push for publication of sheet music was a call from audiences or an initiative from publishers is not clear, but the consequences of this has seen videogame music enter classrooms, school orchestras, and private instrument tuition as a means to engage the student with serious music that they can relate to. These practises have facilitated the propagation of videogame music beyond the game, from game publishers, to fans, allowing others to learn and perform videogame music beyond the context of gameplay.

Videogame soundtracks play an important role in the experiences of audiences as they create a sonic backdrop for gameplay and other life memories, whilst simultaneously creating spatiotemporal associations through music. The removal of videogame music from the original, intended experience through its publication (or distribution) by audiences or
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producers is seen in this study as the process of commodification of videogame soundtracks. This applies to the production and release of material, be it promotional or a product for purchase, of CDs, audio files, ringtones, sheet music, and even user-generated downloadable content. Commodification is usually associated with the extraction of a cultural object from its original context for its commercialisation, entering a system of exchange that removes the initial use-value and intention of the commodity (Marx, 1986; Rogers, 2006). Adam Newcombe described commodification as “the privatisation of public space […] the complete commercial detachment of an element of culture from a society” (2000, pp. 51-52). He was referring to the transition of cultural elements of society (e.g. medicine, knowledge, music) into commercial products (e.g. medicines, books, OSTs), which can be born out of a need to remember an experience. Akin to Roger’s definition of commodification earlier in this chapter, the key concept in soundtrack commodification is the extraction of the music from its context to be made available for distribution.

Among the several reasons behind this extraction, Reynolds’ (2011) and Fleury’s (2011) concept of retro seems to point at the consumption of artefacts mainly due to nostalgia and the associations that are created for consumers which takes them back to a fixed time and/or space. If the videogame environment were considered a ‘public space’, its content and sounds (diegetic and non-diegetic) would be cultural elements in this space. Thus, the transition of music out of this space into an OST can be the manifestation of its commodification.

Furthermore, and as mentioned earlier, Rogers (2006) concurs with Theodore Adorno’s (1978) belief that commodified items can become a “fetish, a representation of values with no intrinsic relation to the object’s use-value, production, and circulation” (2006, p. 488). A fetishised OST enters the economic arena with an aggregated value that is recognised mainly by its subcultural following, one that can be seen as a response to a
demand from audiences that expect this transition. The transition itself can be the initiative of the publisher who releases a soundtrack, or an audience initiative where individuals would rip and share audio files directly from the game without the permission of the copyright owner. Yet the process of commodification transforms the music into a product that can be used as a commodity by the industry, which induces consumption via several media channels, and audiences, which in turn get involved in the game’s production process.

The commodification of games and soundtracks is the result of an industry that is aimed at the “profit-maximizing sale of cultural and technological commodities” (Kline et al., 2003, p. 21), of which music, as an element in this audiovisual medium, becomes a commodity itself by entering as an item of consideration in a market economy (Adorno, 1978; Belinkie, 1999; Kline et al., 2003; Yabsley, 2007). Why are soundtracks transformed into commodities? Because commodification is a tool that is useful to both the industry and fans since, for example, it is a way in which nostalgia can be triggered, such as in the case of retro-gaming (Fleury, 2011). As mentioned earlier, nostalgia is a key component for the ‘replayability’ of games, and the memories and experiences of players are commodified in the shape of soundtracks and videogames (Mcveigh, 2000). Another reason for the commodification of games and soundtracks is the marketability that they will have as products later, especially in the case of trans-medial franchises and licenses, where a new or pre-existing product is introduced into the game with the aim of targeting a specific market and audience with the aim of selling more of the aggregated commodity or bringing into attention a secondary commodity. This is the case of mediums like film, where the movie itself, the trailers, licenses, and music are commodities on their own, each serving a different purpose in the marketing plan (Spring, 2008).

Commodities, however, are important for the marketing of a game because of the potential meaning that can be attributed to them by audiences through their interactions and
the malleability of the commodity to be used in different contexts by audiences (Jenkins, 2004). In the case of videogames this ability to create, transfer, and give meaning to commodities (be it the game or the soundtrack) is based on the interactivity of the game and the nature of the interaction of the audience with the text, and it is the reason why Huang (2009) and Kline et al. (2003) consider videogames to be the ideal commodity of the post-Fordist era. In the case of videogame music, the commodification and distribution of soundtracks (more so their availability) can help prolong the shelf life of a videogame, or even ease the comeback of a franchise. Essentially, commodified game music becomes a good source of secondary revenue for publishers and composers, as well as a useful post-release marketing tool.

The role of videogame music and the relationship that it has with the audience paints a picture of the commodification of a very familiar element in game marketing: nostalgia. The spatiotemporal associations that are created with videogame music would give way to asking if this commodification is indeed the commodification of musical memory, as opposed to the more traditional approach of commodification practices of exotifying or recontextualising objects. Are the non-monetary extraction, reproduction, distribution, and appropriation of videogame soundtracks not commodification if it does not culminate in a purchase? The reason why this is apparent is the practice of publication and distribution of both audiences and producers — producers that trade and market in the traditional, monetary driven market economy, and the audiences who create micro and macro transactions through the personal or social distribution of soundtracks.

To elaborate on the latter: the process of obtaining a game soundtrack, extracting audio from a videogame, and appropriating (i.e. covering and remixing) game music is in itself a process of commodification as it meets the two main requirements for commodification to take place: first, through the extraction of game music from its original
medium and context (e.g. gameplay) where the music goes from being a part of an experience to a conduit of associations linked to this experience, and the second is the placement of this new commodity into a market economy, which in the audience commodification of videogame music it is an economy that trades not in money but in the bartering of memories, identity, and nostalgia within the individual and other social agents. This user-driven, audience commodification of music is the by-product of an existing commodity: videogames, a product that is already branded and created through its profit-driven model to allow for the easy reproducibility of its various elements. What is important here is that the original commodity (the game) has already been marketed and purchased, entering the traditional market of commodities, and audience commodification is merely a addition to this process where ‘trading’ occurs between consumers in the currency of YouTube hits, sharing, and singularity, and the products are both nostalgia and identification through the common denominator of game music.

This initial commodification of the game becomes obvious due to the initial role of the producer: to maximise profit and reduce risk in the publication of a videogame. Therefore, in the process of creating this commodity, whilst mitigating risk, the game concept (i.e. an engaging, enjoyable experience for an audience) is constructed by an apparent trend followed by the game industry to allow the audience to take part in the production process, though not necessarily as direct intervention on the initial release but incorporating fan expectations as the building blocks of the game, future downloadable content, and the overall marketing strategy that surrounds a game release. Audiences play two roles in the commodification of soundtracks and games: the role as a prosumer, the audience that comments, gives feedback, and through their opinions shape a game; and the role of the producer of new textual meaning, the audience that gives meanings to new texts and creates new texts and interactions that are based on the original game. Despite the apparent,
harmonious relationship between consumers and producers, the idea that audiences ‘voice’ their opinions which are then heard and taken into account by producers is challenged by practices of datamining and ‘big data’, where producers, usually secretly, take ‘feedback’ into their own hands and analyse the players’ actions in the game. Such actions may include the musical choices during gameplay (in games such as *Grand Theft Auto*) or the choice of having music at all in games — what this means is that more often than not, audiences are speaking with their actions, not with their voices.

What is interesting to observe are the interactions and behaviour of audiences with music as a product outside of the game. Booth (2009) looks at the way in which fans interact with the OST as a commodity, as a product through the words of John Fiske:

[…], fan’s productive relationship with the text [is] in three parts: semiotic, enunciative, and textual. Semiotic production is internal to the fan: “it consists of the making of meanings of social identity and of social experience from the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity.” Enunciative production, alternatively, defines the ways fans engage in dialogue about a media text: the way a “fan talk[s]” to another fan. Finally, Fiske describes fans making their own texts, what he terms “textual production.” (Fiske, 1992 in Booth, 2009)

Booth and Fiske’s views are somewhat aligned to my views on the way fans interact with the commodity, as prosumers will have an enunciative and textual approach to commodities, whilst as creators of new meaning they interact with semantic and textual approaches; their views are also descriptions of the types of consumption that takes place among audiences. As texts, videogames have the ability to be consumed, read, presented, and

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11 Big Data and Datamining are both practices that collect player event data (e.g. moved 3 times, shopped 2 times, solved puzzle, played 3 hours) in order to develop predictive analytics (What will the player do next? How can we, producers, improve the gameplay experience by predicting what the player will do next?) to maximise player retention.
interpreted in various forms to suit the target audiences, particularly when it comes to cultural diversity and the localisation of products, according to Xiangyi Huang (2009), and the process of commodification aids in this process of the simultaneous diversification and homogenisation of meaning. The interactions between audiences and games are also beneficial for producers, since audiences themselves can become the commodity. Ryan Milner (2008) asserts that the way in which producers ‘embrace’ fandom is by studying their followers and commodifying audiences in order to gain profit, where fan reworks (e.g. mods and remixes) are transformed into supportive texts that support the official product (and sometimes into works that influence the official product), building a loyal fanbase and inducing further consumption.

The commodification of music and fans are two aspects of the game and music industries that become inevitable in the business model of both these industries, despite claims that resist that this commodification has in fact happened already (Milner, 2008; Yabsley, 2007). Videogame soundtracks are a product, one that is tied to a videogame, and one that is the product of the creativity of the composer and the ingenuity of the production team, and the labour of audiences revisiting, consuming, and reworking game music are practices that have been assimilated by the industry. The commodification of game music becomes a means through which the industry bolsters the consumption of its product as audiences, according to Buerkle (2008), create their own commodities from game elements through their interpretation, which allows for the shift in the use-value of the soundtrack from music to cultural artefact (Margeirsson, 2011). Soundtrack releases, box sets, concert series – music is portrayed and transformed into “discrete, isolatable commodities, readily marketable for sales in material formats”(Spring, 2008, p. 69), in practices that are similar to what happens in the film industry.
Branding and Marketing

This is perhaps one of the imperatives that the gaming populations would notice the most when they delete their cookies, history, and clear their cache in their internet browser: internet ads. The collection of Big Data, as well as ad tracking systems and history records determine which you are more likely to get when you open a page, watch a video on YouTube, or even go to your mail. Before skipping the ad after 5 seconds, players are pumped with sounds and images of what would appear to be a modern version of the arcade ‘atch a video onvideogame ads targeted with carefully curated music, showcasing a game or even go to your mail. Before skip’music, showc Advertising, when done well, can determine by how much a game will shame a filmhe ad after 5 seconds, players are pumped with sounds and images of whaparticularly interesting, where you find game mechanics that if they do not feel different from a previous game it has to include a new jump or ability, music that represents the era in which the game takes place, music that will attract the attention of certain audiences, and explosions to satisfy others. The way in which music is used in advertising as well as the way in which games use licensed music reflects the core structures of a gameo satisfy others. o be a moblockbuster multiplayer with a weak story, or even a flashy role playing game with good music and story.

The other considerations in the economic motivators for soundtrack consumption are the effects of branding and marketing, which are the techniques that are used by the industry to present its products, both as elements of a larger whole (brands) and as consumable products (marketing); both are techniques employed by the game industry to ensure monetary gain, which can translate into metaludic merchandise such as OSTs. Alongside Kline et al.’s (2003) model of cyclic production, the authors also noted that marketing is a powerful tool in the videogame industry. They found that in the digital technology markets the industry closely observed subcultural trends in the hope of guessing what the ‘next big thing’ would
be, unleashing a barrage of ads prior to the product’s release. This advertising campaign influences the target audience’s consumption patterns, and after the release of a new game, other forms of merchandise are also released, OSTs among them. However, it could be argued that the power the industry has in advertising is balanced by that of audiences through forums, blogs, conferences, and the internet (Jenkins, 2006). Thus, the bond between the producers and audiences in the cyclic model would grow stronger, turning into a symbiotic relationship. Branding and franchising would be a by-product of this relationship, by giving audiences a familiar product that present a low-risk factor to publishers.

Branding is a key element in the commercialisation and marketing of a product as the identification with audiences is crucial, especially in the case of new titles, where audiences feel the need to be familiarised with a product before they can purchase it. This familiarisation occurs through the marketing process that associates videogames (through music or visuals) with similar pre-existing experiences (i.e. Battlefield ads with Hollywood action films, and GTA with TV mob dramas), and it culminates in the industry tapping into existing markets (or audiences that would be comfortable purchasing a gameplay experience that they are somewhat identified with). This can be understood through Theodore Adorno’s (Adorno & Simpson, 1942) concept of pseudo-individualisation, where he believes that popular music audiences, under the impression of purchasing a new, original material, is actually purchasing something that has already been chosen for them. Pseudo-individualisation would stipulate that a product cannot be sold to a non-existing consumer-base, so the most effective way to mitigate risk is to target existing audiences giving the assumption that the ‘old’ game concept that is sold is somehow ‘new’ and catered specifically for these consumers.

It is for this reason that the reactions of fans and audiences are included in the production and post-production phases of game development, because establishing a new
brand requires learning from the successes and mistakes of others by learning about the current market and potential audiences, and building on a brand requires studying the existing fanbase and building on what is already established without desecrating loved franchises, lest the fans become upset (Kline et al., 2003; Whiteman, 2008). Marketing and branding decisions often reflect the type of player that the publishers are aiming to target, decisions that often reflect the stereotypes or preconceptions that are found within the gaming culture, where the purchase decisions that are made by consumers show what type of gamer they are (Kubik, 2010). Kubik states that the consumption patterns of gamers determine how they are seen by other members of the gaming community, and ultimately the publishers themselves, a characterisation of the consumer that was openly seen during the Console Wars of the 1990s, where Sega aimed to target a new audience with a marketing campaign that was based on what Kubik described as the ‘legitimisation’ or ‘deligitimisation’ of consumers of certain games and consoles. Although the Console War brought about the demise of Sega, their approach shows the importance of the use of music in the identification of audiences with a brand in order to attract them to a product, with Sega’s campaign aimed at a different audience from Nintendo’s using a differing style and music to give Sega a ‘mature edge’ over its rival (Kline et al., 2003).

The choice of music in videogames is closely monitored by marketers as the game's soundtrack can prove to determine the demographics of the game. Kline et al. find that current popular music will accelerate the initial momentum of a game, but will also accelerate its product cycle, making the music and the game 'out-dated' soon after its release. Downloadable content is a way around this dilemma, especially in music games, allowing audiences to constantly update their playlist with new, preselected playlists that are the product of licensing agreements. The placement of the music is also a determining factor in advertising (e.g. Sony promoting the PlayStation in clubs with predetermined playlists that
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tied to the advertising of the console to reach older audiences) (Taylor & Whalen, 2008). The use of music in the creation of a brand is crucial, as the overall feel, look, and sound of a game is what the player will identify with, either with a console such as in the case of Sega and Nintendo, or with a game such as the *FIFA* series where the use of Latin American music and Brit Rock is almost mandatory. Guschwan (2012) believes that these decisions constitute a good marketing campaign, one that takes place continuously in the game, where the use of advertising, licensed music, pop icons, and commodifiable elements turning the game into what Lars Konzack (2007) calls advergames. Any game has the potential of becoming an advergame as the brand, style, characters, music, etc., are all commodities, items that are consumed in the game and can be presented and offered as standalone items available inside or outside the game.

The creation of a loyal fanbase is also highly coveted by publishers and producers to generate another form of ‘free’ advertising: peer to peer or word of mouth advertising (Milner, 2008). A distinct brand creates division and unity within gaming communities, such as the case of *Call of Duty* versus *Battlefield*, two military first person shooters that have very distinct audiences, where fans of a particular franchise will advocate for their game of choice and preach to others what they believe is possible (or done better) in their playing field. This is what Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) call a “Brand Community”, which consists of members passionately following a particular brand collectively as a form of social integration and personal remembrance; communities that are built around the fervent dedication of fans and the feeding and endorsement of these practices by producers. Gamers that are loyal to their brands and franchises mostly motivated by nostalgia, previous experiences that they had with the franchise, ones they wish to relive again in a different form that is still recognisable to them, especially through narratives, aesthetics, sounds, and music (Whiteman, 2008).
Videogames, according to Kline et al., are a product created through a marketing process that is aimed towards gamers through a process they call “digital design practices”, which takes into account the branding and future marketability of the game and derivatives (i.e. merchandise, advertising, licenses, sequels, etc.) (Kline et al., 2003, p. 21). Videogame music, according to Gee (2006) is a part of the aesthetics of the game, thus it is, along with the visual component of the game, the trademark of the game or franchise; decisions that are made around music are carefully made according to the aesthetics of the game or as a result of the infiltration of marketing research practices that the game industry has in fan communities (Kline et al., 2003).

**Conclusions on Economic Imperatives**

Economic imperatives represent the ways in which the game industry presents and pushes videogame soundtracks to audiences as a commodity, a product that is ready to be consumed, that is attached to a brand (i.e. the game) as a strategy built on a marketing imperatives. Belinkie (1999) suggests that the game and music industries wish to commodify soundtracks, regardless of the cultural backgrounds of the composer (the East/West divide that is ever present in videogame design). Therefore, two factors were visible as economic imperatives for the consumption of OSTs: the commodification of the soundtrack and the branding and marketing of a game. The commodification of the soundtrack reflected the change of use value of music and transforming it into a marketable commodity that is consumable by audiences. The branding and marketing of a game determines the role that music will have in a game and how it will be presented to represent the game, a franchise, a marketing campaign, or audiences themselves. These imperatives influence the consumption of soundtracks by audiences and are closely related to experiential and sociocultural motivators, relationships that will be described in the following section.
**Summary: The Interaction Between Three Motivators**

In this study I have isolated the motivations for the consumption of videogame soundtracks outside of the game and attributed to them three distinct headings: experiential and sociocultural motivators, and economic imperatives.

*Experiential motivators* are those that are based on the individual, those that are rooted in the personal experience of someone that has experienced the music or the game and created a memory, attachment, or a recollection linked to said music. These motivations rely on two governing factors: the *associations* that are created between the individual and elements in the game, as well as the *nostalgia* that is triggered by game music. *Experiential associations* are linked to the characters and avatars of a game, whose personalities, actions, traits, and stories are represented musically with themes and motifs; with narratives, which are the stories and worlds that are created through the interaction with the game world, through the musical, spatiotemporal creation of settings and events; and franchises, that are the aesthetic attributes of a series of games, which are built around a particular style (both visually and musically), that are linked by a similar musical, thematic, and production approach that is recognisable by audiences as belonging to a particular story they are already acquainted to. *Nostalgia* is the sentiment that arises when music represents a moment in time in the life of the individual, and the elicitation of memories of experiences in the game world itself. The feeling of nostalgia applies to gamers and non-gamers, since it is the connection with a memory that involves the music, no necessarily the game itself. *Experiential motivators* draw the consumer back to the soundtrack outside of the game as a means to access familiar settings, game elements, experiences, and memories through music.

*Sociocultural motivators* are based on the collective and social experiences of a group and how they see themselves represented in game music, a medium through which they feel...
connected as gamers. These motivators are heavily dependent on the concepts of fandom and cultural capital, as fans appropriate, consume, and rewrite texts and feed them back to the broader social network, while cultural capital is the importance that is given to an item (in this case the soundtrack) beyond the original purpose that it was intended to have. This representation occurs either through the *singularity* that is given to them by the soundtrack or the *following* they have of a particular game or person. *Sociocultural singularity* is the status that is gained by an individual in the context of a group due to the knowledge or possession of game music or works that are derivatives from game music. *Sociocultural following* on the other hand, is the appreciation and loyalty that fans have toward a particular game title, game series, developer, publisher, or music composer. *Sociocultural motivators* rely on the sharing of knowledge and cultural artefacts, of experiences and stories that emerge from individual or collective experiences, since videogames are a collective experience in the way that multiplayer or single-player campaigns are essentially similar for players. The consumption of music that originates from these motivators is based on the collective enjoyment of this music and the importance that is given to the practices of others, the personal practices (that will then be shared with others), and the collective experience of game music outside of the game and the metaludic experiences (e.g. listening to game music at a concert, or on YouTube).

Finally, *economic imperatives* are those that appear from the interaction between the two main characters in the production cycle: the audience and the producer (developers, publishers, designers, composers, etc.). These imperatives reflect a cyclic model of production where producers get the audience involved in the development of their games and music in order to maximise profit. These imperatives are dependant on the way in which music is *commodified* and how the *branding and marketing* of the game uses music to attract their target audience. *Commodification* is the way in which music is presented as a
consumable, standalone item that can be extracted from the game, and how producers encourage the creation of fan intervention to use this free labour to attract attention to their product. *Branding and marketing* is the way in which decisions are made to present the game, the music, and the audiences themselves in order to meet fan expectations and create audiences for their product. The consumption of music is bolstered through these imperatives to encourage the consumption of game music not as a means to increase game revenue but to gain exposure, or in some cases to associate music and games with other metaludic people or culture that will create benefit for another industry (e.g. higher revenues to the music industry due to the licensing of a particular music to a game).

These three motivators are not fully independent of each other as they sometimes interact and sometimes overlap, depending on the individual’s experience. For example, the first personal experience with game music would have been playing at a friend’s house, making it a sociocultural experience at the same time. Or the participation of a group to push for a soundtrack to be published interacts with economic motivators for the game industry. Likewise, my first experience with music out of the game came in the shape of a CD that came with my new *Killer Instinct* (Rareware, 1994) game, which involves experiential and economic imperatives. And these three forces reinforce each other, motivating the consumption of OSTs as shown on *Figure 1*.

The proposed model and theories that are presented in this chapter do not come without further research. The next chapter will contain data that supports the claims found here, through surveys undertaken by participants in this study.
Chapter 6: Data Analysis

Up until this point, the focus on this dissertation has centred on theories and literature that have surrounded the consumption of consumers, of audiences, of people that have taken their diegetic experience beyond the virtual realm and made it a part of their life. In the course of the literature review it was clear that there are three main elements that come into play when it comes to the consumption of soundtracks, and one of the most powerful elements in this equation is the personal experience that takes place in an individual’s life tying strong knots between that experience and the remembrance and revisiting it through music. These ties have been retraced through literature to childhood experiences and the strong bond of nostalgia; as well as a group’s appropriation of soundtracks that in a way revisit the collective memory if members that partake in these social activities. The elicitation of memory through music would call for a study of musical memory and the ties that are created and why these memories are so compelling in gaming audiences, but this is not the focus of this thesis. Rather, it is important to note that memory, whether it is tied to the musical experience, to family, to loved ones, or gameplay, they rest in the mind of individuals that are transported to a place of familiarity through the power of music. And herein lies the main point of the dissertation: to identify the forces behind the consumption of videogame soundtracks as a stepping stone for future studies, which might seek to understand the fine details of musical memorability beyond gameplay, among other research areas that can stem from this study, and thus, there is no need to elaborate in these points further in this thesis as the focus would steer away from the motivations for consumption. Therefore, due to the nature of this study, and the dearth of literature on the subject of musical consumption outside of gameplay, it is necessary to look at the people that engage in these practises and make them contributors to the process of this study.
To understand a consumer-based behaviour that is strongly related to the audience’s personal and social experiences, this study uses the information collected through a survey that includes gamers and non-gamers alike, similar to the approaches taken by Belinkie (1999) and Zehnder and Lipscomb (2004). The survey consists of multiple choice questions that allow for general, demographic identification of participants in matters such as age, gaming activities, and their exposure to game OSTs, and open ended questions that allow participants to provide answers about their own experiences with soundtracks, their perceptions of music, and their games of preference. This survey is used mostly to reaffirm the current approaches and theories that have been presented in the previous chapters rather than to find the approaches themselves, but there are still some interesting responses. This chapter outlines the responses of the surveys as well as the trends that were observed in regards to the approaches that are taken in this study.

The survey was conducted online, contacting participants via email through Griffith University’s internal email system and threads on gaming forums (ocremix.org in particular). 373 responses were received, most of which came from participants aged 20 - 25 [45.6%]. The survey was open to participants of all ages, but the demographic that received the email would have most likely been within the university’s student demographic, which is reflected in the concentrated results on the early twenties age bracket.

**Survey Rationale Reprise**

The survey aimed at identifying the links between the game, the player, the game music, and the player’s experience inside or outside of the game. Participants were asked to identify game music that is important to them and to name the game that this music belonged to. This in turn allows a further analysis of the genres that these players found memorable. The survey

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12 Several respondents admitted to sharing the survey in other forums and pages.
also asked participants to provide information on their gaming, social gaming, and music listening habits, which were then cross-referenced with their other responses to understand how they felt about music and their experience.

Surveys have proven useful to a number of researchers in the fields of psychology and ethnography, and are prime methods in the acquisition of qualitative data. In particular, the works of Lipscomb and Zehnder (2004), Iwayima (1997), Yamada et al. (2001), and Pitts (2005) are good examples of the benefits of these methods for videogame studies, audience reception, and gamer engagement. These authors limited the responses of most of their participants by offering multiple-choice questions giving a determined value to each response. Short answer questions were also allowed in some studies (e.g. Pitts’ use of short answer questions to scrutinise the engagement audiences had with live performances). In this particular research, surveys were used to determine the connection of gamers with the game and its music, and how they identify themselves as gamers through music, or if they are not gamers at all.

Using questions that are targeted at obtaining information on what was important to audiences regarding game music and games, this survey divides the questions into categories that will be related to the three approaches of this thesis. The survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1 to this thesis.

Method

The survey was available online using the survey hosting website Survey Monkey and to maximise the outcome it was open to participants who had consciously or unwittingly consumed game music. The survey was also open to participants of all ages as consumption patterns and motivations could vary depending on the age of the participant. There are theorists who believe that gaming culture transcends local (i.e. regional or national) culture,
however, there are also very strong cultural deterrents towards videogames in certain regions (Jenkins, 2006; Kohler, 2005; Poole, 2000). As mentioned by Kohler (2005) and Newman (2008), there is a cultural resilience towards videogames and videogame music in the West that is not as prevalent in Asian culture, especially in Japan. As this research does not intend to discriminate between participants from different backgrounds, the survey was focused more on the reasons why a soundtrack was obtained rather than where it was obtained or the availability of the soundtrack. Additionally, data collected by the Entertainment Software Association (2013) found that nearly half of gamers (45%) were female, hence this study did not make a gender distinction in order to not discriminate on the basis of culture nor gender.

It is also important to reiterate the points made earlier in this thesis on the approach taken in this paper to study a distinctly heterogeneous group such as the gaming community, and that is through the understanding that these people, that have come from very different background, share a common experience that lies in the embodiment of an avatar, the performance of this avatar, and the sometimes subliminal appropriation of this performance that allows for the theoretical framework conducted in this dissertation to bypass other demographic considerations in favour of a fluid assessment and discussion of the participants’ consumption habits on videogame music.

The surveys were comprised of 16 questions aimed at determining the demographic that the participant perceives himself/herself as being a part of (age group, hardcore vs. casual gamer, etc.), whether this person listens to or has listened to game music and has been aware of it, the preferred OST consumption medium, the impressions of the music in the game, if they follow a particular franchise, developer, or composer, and why they would listen to music outside of the game context. The surveyed person was also asked to share gaming preferences in terms such as game genre, platform, and favourite soundtracks.
Survey Responses

Demographics

Age. In this survey, the data collected originated from participants whose age was concentrated in the age range of 16 to 35, where participants aged 20 to 25 constituted the majority with 45.6% of the demographic, followed by a 24.1% that were 16 - 19, and those aged 26 - 35 comprised 23.6%. The youngest gamers and those over 35 represented a combined total of 6.7% of participants.

This concentration of younger participants is a reflection of the population that was reached via the two means that were employed in this study — the university population on one hand and the online community, which is made up mostly of electronically literate audiences. The concentration of young adults in this study does not distort or corrupt the findings of this survey as gaming communities are most likely to thrive in cyberspace, and many of the practices are promoted, advertised, and discussed in this particular medium. The
age cluster around the 20s and 30s age bracket also reflects the ‘ageing gaming population’: children that used to play videogames in the 80s (the ‘Nintendo Generation’ and the early adopters of the Atari) are now 30 or 40 and have more capital to spend on videogames.

**Self-identification within gaming and non-gaming demographics.** Participants were asked ‘which of these describes you better - casual, social, hardcore gamer, or not a gamer?’ in order to determine how they saw themselves in the gaming demographics. The nomenclature of these groups may prove debatable, but for the purpose of this thesis this broad distinction was necessary in order to establish the level of engagement that the respondent has with videogames, ergo the clarification in the survey was imperative to achieve the desired result. The hardcore/casual distinction is primarily based on Kubik’s (2010) study on the divide that existed in the perception of female gamers within the gaming community, and in this case the terms are used to describe dedicated gamers and those that do not necessarily spend much time playing videogames. The social category is used to include those audiences that do not feel identified with the other two categories, and play games that may not have a defined outcome and have low levels of involvement in terms of skill or challenge.

![Figure 8: Gaming identity. Identification of participants according to their engagement with videogames.](image-url)
The majority of participants identified themselves as a casual gamer (you play games every now and then, at home, at work, school, or on the go) with 52.8% of respondents, followed by those who claim to be a hardcore gamer (you play games whenever you can. You are probably a member of a guild and like playing online with friends) with 38.6%, leaving social gamers (you play games on Facebook and other social media. Maybe Friends with Words, Farmville, Sims Social, or Bejeweled are also in the mix) and non-gamers with 4.3% of the populace each. In terms of gaming identity, there were two prominent groups: casual gamers and hardcore gamers, which combined took over 91.4% of responses. Therefore, the responses received correspond to the views of gamers that have a medium to high involvement with videogames.

**OST consumption preferences.** To the question ‘have you ever listened to videogame music outside of the context of the game?’ the survey found that the vast majority of participants have listened to videogame music outside of the game (90.3%), and the survey ended for those who answered ‘no’ to this question. Notice that 36 respondents did not listen to game music despite some of them identifying themselves as being gamers of some degree; perhaps due to their involvement with the games they played or they could have also been players that chose to play without music, which would deprive them from such experience.
Figure 9: Consumption of OSTs. Percentage of participants that have listened to OSTs outside of the gameplay environment.

For the question ‘how do you listen to game music?’ participants were asked to select one or more ways in which they consumed videogame music. 83.7% of respondents preferred to listen to videogame OSTs, followed closely by downloaded music with 80.1%, and YouTube streams with 73.1%. These figures show a clear preference for online media in the consumption of videogame music. Other modes of consumption were identified as significant, such as listening to other people play the game (42%) and videogame ads and trailers (36.9%). These results reflect the strong connections that are built into the greater social environment of videogames, which will be explained in the discussion section of this chapter. One in five respondents also prefer to listen to soundtracks performed live (22.4%) and as external references in movies, popular music, and other sources (20.5%).
The results show that the main means by which game music is consumed is through means of active consumption, that is, the consumer sought the music themself, predominantly via obtaining a copy of the music in some form, followed by online streaming through YouTube. The second largest consumption method was through passive association (or passive consumption), where the music was not sought or it was provided by a third party. Ads and indirect consumption therefore prove important in consumption habits. The third largest modes of consumption were modes where it involved a larger group of people being involved in or aware of the reference to the game; concerts and sampling by other authors makes this the third most prominent mode of consumption.

The survey also asked ‘have you ever purchased, downloaded, streamed, or shared videogame music?’ In contrast to the previous question, this question aimed at determining what percentage of the respondents that had listened to game music outside of a game had taken the initiative on their own to seek out this music.

Despite having an overwhelming majority of 91.5% of affirmative responses, the remaining 8.5% of participants had not sought to acquire game music on their own initiative, which came as an interesting result, as several of these gamers played online games and big
triple A titles, which would have been expected to create a higher impact on audiences due to their more elaborate production process and marketing budgets. It is also notable that half of these respondents mentioned remembering the music of arcade games and casual games, and a third of them received music from third parties. Ergo, there is still consumption that would occur within this portion of the demographic, but it is mostly determined by external forces rather than experiences and associations that are strong enough to induce metaludical consumption.

Figure 11: Sharing habits. This figure represents the responses of audiences towards how likely (or how often) they would engage in game music sharing practices with other people.

Participants were asked about their sharing habits, and how often they shared game music with other people. In terms of how many participants shared game music with others, 58.6% revealed that they did not share music often, one quarter of participants (25.4%) do not share game music, and just 16% actively engage in music sharing. The majority had shared game music with other people, thought not often. Results, however, do highlight that music sharing is still a part of the majority of the consumption practices of respondents.
Musical Memory Associations through Gameplay

**Game memory and determining popular games and genres within participants.** It was also important for this study to determine the songs that participants found memorable, the game this music was from, and to later determine if the type of game or game series affected their consumption patterns by analysing their subsequent responses. The question read: ‘think back to a particular piece of game music that stands out on your memory. What game is this?’ This open-ended question gave two different types of results: the game titles or series that were of importance to the respondents and the genres of these games, which proves particularly important to understand elements of game structure, narratives, and brand loyalty among gamers.

![Figure 12: Most popular games. Games participants identified music from these games when prompted to name music that was particularly prominent in their memory.](image-url)
Nine out of ten of the games mentioned by respondents were parts of a popular, on-going series or franchise: *Final Fantasy* (10.79%), *The Legend of Zelda* (9.21%), and *Super Mario* (6.32%) were the three most popular game series. Special mentions of these series included *Final Fantasy VII*, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, and the first *Super Mario Bros.* The game that came at number four was *Bastion*, from the independent developer Supergiant Games taking 2.63% of responses, on par with the *Donkey Kong* series. The *Halo* series followed with 2.37%, *Assassin’s Creed* with 2.11%, and the *Kingdom Hearts*, *Pokémon*, and *Sonic the Hedgehog* series following with 1.84% each.

**Distribution of game genres in participants.** The games mentioned by participants were from a great range of genres, but despite the diversity of titles the genres were strikingly in favour of Role Playing Games with 42.3% of games mentioned by participants as significant games in their memories belonging to this genre, namely the *Final Fantasy* series, *Chrono Cross* and *Chrono Trigger*; the *Kingdom Hearts* series, and *The Elder Scrolls* series among others. In second place comes the Action-Adventure genre with a total of 20.3%, mostly comprised of games from the *Zelda* series and mentions of *Silent Hill*, *Ace Attorney*, and *Journey*. Parallel to the top game results, the third most important genre is Platform Games, making up 15.4% of answers and with the *Mario* series topping the list. The First Person Shooter genre was mentioned only in 6.86% of responses.
Association of game elements through game music. Participants were also asked to rank which game element they felt more related to when they listened to a game soundtrack.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association of Game Elements</th>
<th>Degree of identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game characters</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game story</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics of the game</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The music itself</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the responses of participants the game story is the aspect that is usually more associated with the game music, with a large percentage of audiences rating the story 1 or 2 in their response. The association of music to game characters remained fairly even in
the responses, with a small concentration on the 2 and 3 ratings. Table 1 also shows that the participants were undecided whether to give the aesthetics of the game importance when listening to game music, yet they were inclined to place this element in the lower end of their considerations. Identification with the game music itself was not as important to participants as the other categories, receiving the lowest 1 rating and highest 4 rating; however, this clear lack of preference towards game music met a conflicting result in further open-ended questions, where the music or quality of music was mentioned often as a motivator.

**Discussion**

Videogame soundtrack consumption has been analysed in this study as the product of the interaction between three main forces, which motivated audiences to listen to videogame music outside of the context of gameplay. What is of utmost importance in the survey results is the creation of associations and the elicitation of memories that is created through videogame music, and the survey reveals a variety of these elicitations are rooted mostly in the motivators that were outlined in the methodology. The questionnaire was designed to reveal links that were created between audiences and game music during and beyond gameplay, in order to corroborate the proposed model for the study of the consumption of videogame music outside of the game. This survey revealed very interesting aspects of OST consumption and aspects of the associations that were created between audiences and the music they were, or were not, consuming directly. The key findings of this survey were the following:

- Audiences value the experiences they have because of the memories that they elicit.
- Audiences value collective experiences, which become memories they relate to the music, though it is associated with their experiences.
• Audiences respond to marketing imperatives, predominantly branding and endorsement.

These key findings clearly support the proposed consumption model with its three approaches of experiential motivators, sociocultural motivators and economic imperatives, and demonstrate that they are crucial in the consumption of soundtracks; the ways in which audiences are affected by these motivators are the object of this discussion. To this point, this chapter has looked at the quantifiable data that was collected through the surveys, and the following is a discussion that revolves around the open-ended questions that were asked to participants, presenting and analysing the different responses and comments made by respondents. The following sections will also conduct discussions surrounding the different motivators that were proposed in this thesis, and will use the respondents’ input to form conclusions on their consumption habits. For the sake of readability, only certain excerpts of responses are transcribed to exemplify aspects of theory or curiosity that arose from the writings of participants.

Discussion of Experiential Motivators

The videogame experience and the experience of playing a videogame were found to be two distinct concepts for audiences, as the majority of survey participants associated game music with playing the game and the interaction with the game, a group that was almost 80% of the surveyed population. These associations were, as expected, reflective of the postulated approaches in the methodology, as open ended responses showed memory associations that linked the music to the interaction with the game world, its characters, the narratives, and the ongoing themes from franchises. Gameplay was the primary source of memories elicited by game music outside of the game with 57% of responses, out of which events in the game comprised just over a fourth of the total, followed by the moods and emotions that the music
evoked, which were also rooted in gameplay; game locales accounted for just over one in ten mentions. This large proportion of gameplay related results was expected, as theory pointed out that musical memory in game music was highly dependant on the experience of playing a game, as well as the corroboration of the surveys which indicated that the vast majority of participants had played the game they nominated as having musical importance to them. A 25-35 year old hardcore participant described the relationship with music and gameplay: “The scenes and scenery of the level it was played on. Mentally I can not associate the music with anything else due to the strong connection it [the music] has with the game.”

Conversely, it was somewhat unexpected to find that a large amount (43%) of memory elicitation came from sources other than gameplay, a finding that was expected to appear in the surveys but not with such a high rate. Memories were mostly of nostalgic nature, although family and friends as well as places outside of the game were also important contributing factors, with over a fifth of participants finding that listening to game music reminded them or evoked imagery of the time of play as opposed to interacting with the diegetic world. Music elicited memories of times in the lives of participants that usually involved friends and family members, or activities that they used to perform around the time of gameplay. When asked which memories the music brought to mind, a hardcore gamer aged between 34 - 44 answered “Warm cookies, and pajamas (sic), how I would get up early to play before school.” A 20-25 year old casual gamer has a similar association with the music of Pokémon Trading Card Game, with specific images that took place in a determined period of time: “Snow. It’s close to the Christmas school break. Nobody cares about school, we just play with these shiny cards.” And this 16-19 year old casual gamer referring to another Pokémon game, referring to playing the game in specific locations, as opposed to gameplay itself: “ [I remember] Silly things - being driven home and playing the game the
first time, playing the game to the point of falling asleep on the couch, or in bed when I should've been sleeping.

These are just some examples of the wide range of answers that were given in the surveys, and the different associations that are formed between the gamer and the music. As mentioned in chapter 3, experiential motivators are sometimes the strongest associations that are created between the audience and music, as every experience is derived from the individual’s initial perspective, which would then branch out to social and broader motivators for the consumption of soundtracks. As one participant, aged 16 - 19 explained when asked what memories were recalled when listening to game music:

Everything. The strife and joys inside and outside the realm of the game. What was going on in my head as I played, what was going on when I accomplished something, or even what was going on completely unrelated to video games. It truly takes me back.

These following sections will exhibit how participants reflected these associations with the different elements proposed in the methodology concerning experiential motivators.

**Experiential associations originating from the game.** Preliminary analysis of responses hinted at a connection arising from the experience of gameplay and musical associations with music consumption outside of the game. The final study not only revealed that this connection existed, but that it was also a strong, determining factor in future consumption of game music beyond gameplay. These associations are clearly defined within the proposed methodology for experiential associations: characters, narrative, and franchise, with an added fourth association, emotion, which encompasses the latter three and will be discussed further. Participants associated game music with their exploits in the game, the stories, and the settings on screen when they were exploring the game world.
Participants also found that listening to game music not only took them back to the game and the experience of being in the game, but in some cases the music was bringing the feelings of the game into real life. For some respondents game music allowed them to imagine that they could bring the abilities, the game rules, and the capabilities and allowances of their avatar into real life. Responses such as these reflected the transposition of game music and reality: “Because it brings back memories, makes me happy and merges my dream world with reality in my head;” “It reminds me of moments I had while playing said game and how some of the music can go with real life situations.” Another participant went as far as to describe properties similar to synaesthesia that was triggered by game music: “I see life through colours, different things make me see different colours.

What was perceived to be an in-game experience can also be transferred into daily life, with music becoming the catalyst for imaginary adventures beyond gameplay. This shows that through the interaction with videogame music listeners appropriate the themes and associations that were created inside the game and consider gameplay exploits to be their own. Of course, this is due to the interactive nature of videogames and the player’s skill in overcoming the obstacles presented by the game, but nonetheless, the music that was intended for the game is personalised via the player’s involvement with the diegetic world.

**The presence of musical associations with game characters.** One in four participants mentioned remembering playable and non-playable characters through music, mostly through their representation via dedicated themes or incidental themes (i.e. battle themes, event themes, cut-scene music), particularly those that played adventure games, open world games, and RPGs. When asked what memories the music evoked, the majority of participants described the actions of a character or a significant moment in the character’s narrative. These were either elements from the plot of the game, or more directed events such as cut-
Music Beyond Gameplay: Motivators In The Consumption Of Videogame Soundtracks

scenes, as illustrated by this 20-25 year old casual gamer: “I can see ‘Link’ the player character from Zelda running out onto the Hyrule Fields (sic).”

In this particular example, the respondent is referring to The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, and traversing the Hyrule Field is commonplace in this game, hence the respondent’s association to seeing Link running as this is a repetitive, prolonged action that occurs in gameplay. The Hyrule Field also has a special significance in the game’s story, as the main character leaves the land of this youth for the first time and finds this vast expanse that leaves him in awe. The player is made aware of the relative enormity of the fields (by Nintendo 64 standards) through a small cutscene. This same participant acknowledges sharing Link’s wonder by describing the exact moment in gameplay: “Leaving the forest for the first time after finishing the Deku tree and the Hyrule field clip playing. I was so excited about the size of the game world and the possibilities.”

In terms of associations with playable characters, respondents frequently associated these memories with the actions of the characters. Abilities, motions, and personalities were commonplace in the survey responses, with participants associating the game music to the methods of interactivity and permitted actions that the player can perform through their avatar, such as “Mega Man, jumpin' n' shootin’”, or as another respondent describes it: “The memories of stalking an enemy for a knife kill. Travelling closely behind hoping he won't turn around and see me.”

Other characters were also important because of the involvement they had in the story or with the character. Two characters stood out in the survey: GLaDOS, the villain of the Portal series, who repeatedly taunts the playable character, Chell (and by inference the player him/herself), with sarcasm and passive aggression; and Aerith, a playable character from Final Fantasy VII, who dies in one of the most memorable cutscenes in videogame history. These two characters stand out because of their personality and involvement in the game
story. GLaDOS’ motif in *Portal 2*, for example, was a prime example of the musical personification of the character, where a deep distorted synth lead plays an octave interval from A2 to A3 for one beat each, and back to A2 for the remaining two beats of the bar; it is a motif that displays the robotic rigidity of a machine whose sole intention is to perform scientific experiments with no regard for the well-being of the test subject. In the case of *Portal 2*, this motif is played several times when Chell encounters her nemesis.

It can be seen that the background story of the characters is important, especially when music represents the character’s personality or background, such as in the case of this 26 - 35 hardcore respondent who mentions the game *Bastion*: “I see the inevitable conflict between the Ura and the Caels.” In this particular case, the participant was referring to ‘Build that Wall (Zia’s Theme)’, a melancholic song that talks about the building of a wall to divide two nations; the response not only denotes an understanding of the song, but also a vivid recollection of the background of the different characters in the game. There is also a strong sense of appropriation in the response of this 20 - 25 hardcore gamer:

I recall the shock of watching an entire planet, and MY populace burn when I hear Adagio for Strings (Homeworld). Zero’s theme (Mega Man X) encompasses the entire character arc of X starting out weaker than Zero, but ending as the one to avenge him.

The level of involvement with game characters is also more noticeable in hardcore gamers. As the previous two examples showed, participants that described themselves as hardcore gamers were not only more thorough with their responses but they were also more involved with games and their elements. The associations with characters through music by hardcore gamers focused on the interactions and events surrounding the character as well as the personality of these. The observations and analysis of the responses to the survey show a
clear connection between the music, the elicited memory, the game character or avatar, and the audience; whether it was an association that was appropriated where the player would connect the music to him/herself, or whether it was a clear link to an avatar, the music of videogames brought listeners back to the perception of the embodiment of an avatar outside of gameplay and allowed them to return to that mind-set. As a 20 - 25 casual gamer responded: “The music evokes the feeling reminiscent of those felt when playing the game as the online character.”

**Game narratives and events.** The survey also found strong connections between the narrative of the game and the players, mostly rooted in the events of the game, the different settings of the game, and the game’s plot. One in three participants mentioned recollecting events and places in the diegesis when they listened to game music, many of them going on to describe the particular event they recall, such as “John Marston's death” and “when Mallow finds out Frogficus (sic) isn't his real father”, to more elaborate responses:

> I listen to game soundtracks to understand the game better. I have found that, while the game itself can provide you with every element of fiction -- plot, setting, characters, conflict, symbols and perspectives -- it is practically an unopened coloring book up until the music settles in. Without music, all detail in a game loses its effect. Music not only enriches games; it breathes the life into them, and is the glue that holds all of the other elements of the game together.

Others identified the music with deep emotional connections that were experience alongside key narrative events as described by this hardcore gamer aged 20 – 25 on his experience in *Final Fantasy VII*: “Aerith's figure fading to the bottom of the pool while the
music melts my emotions and leaves only profound emptiness. Cloud trembling, trying to cope with the loss of a friend.” These responses show a clear connection between the role of music and the endurance of the gameplay experience through music, as mentioned in chapter 3, as videogame music plays an important role in the construction and drive of the narrative of videogames, and the associations that are created with audiences usually reflect the sentimental impact that was felt during gameplay. Cutscenes, and pivotal plot points were important in the creation of associations with the blending of visual and musical elements, as seen in the three previous responses. Settings also took up a noticeable percentage, with one in six participants making mentions of landscapes, specific levels, or level design. One respondent found that game music allowed “the scenes and scenery of the level it was played on. Mentally, I cannot associate the music with anything else due to the strong connection it has with the game.” For another participant, a particular theme evoked strong memories of a specific game: “Hearing Schala's theme, or the Zeal theme (both from Chrono Trigger) takes all the time and experiences from those fictional worlds, trapped in memory, and opens the floodgates holding them back.” This association with place showed that participants listened to game music to envision the setting of the game and the feelings that were experienced during gameplay, commonly those of excitement, nostalgia, and fun.

The third game element that came out as important to participants was the story and how the player interacted with the game world in order to see it unfold. The consumption of music outside of the game allowed the listener to remember the experience and the story of the game, with one in three participants mentioning the role of music in the establishment of a narrative, a finding that was congruent with the demographic data, which revealed that 30% of participants associated music with the game story. There were participants that found that “tying a specific memory to something as encompassing as an entire story or character arc can be difficult; I tend to remember EXPERIENCES, as enveloping as the stories the music
had enhanced.” The directive nature of music in the narrative context also proved important for a participant who believed music “can help bring you into the story more. In certain ‘worlds' it can help establish the surroundings or if there is a certain point in a story your trying to get across the music can pull you in that direction.” For another participant the memories were overall a broad memory of the gameplay experience through “playing the game. The emotional tone of the story.”

It was also evident that complex use of music, namely music that had clear themes and motifs that had clear narrative connotations, in games with long, elaborate storylines left a more lasting impression on audiences. Ergo, the prevalence of mentions of RPGs and adventure games, such as Final Fantasy, Chrono Trigger, and The Legend of Zelda, was identified as the product of the remembrance of a story that was often described as belonging to the player him/herself.

**Franchises.** As mentioned in chapter 3, one of the associations created between audiences and soundtracks is that with the aesthetics associated with franchises. When asked what the role of music was in a game, a small number of respondents mentioned the continuity of the sound of a franchise, or the recurrent use of successful songs in sequels. However, when asked about the memories evoked through game music, participants painted a more elaborate picture on the influence of franchises on game music consumption. For participants, their appreciation of a franchise was triggered by a single song from one game, many times by not mentioning the specific game, but more general aspects of the franchise. This was particularly evident in the case of the Pokémon series, where the music played an important role for participants in the way they remembered the game: “The music in the Pokémon games stands out as the first game music that made me stop playing the game and just listen to it”. This was also the case for another other participant in particular who would “play the
old Pokémon Gameboy games for the music (and I love them)”. The music and sound effects found in *Pokémon* were found to be important contributors to the aesthetics of the game: “The battle music and the sounds that go with the attacks. I like walking around to the route music to and often play it in my head, and the pokécenter/shop music.”

What is typical to the *Pokémon* series is the release of similar games in different editions, which are essentially the same game but with small differences in the evolution or availability of pokémon, creating a sense of homogeneity in the franchise, one that is also reflected musically. A similar situation arose from respondents that elicited music from *Final Fantasy*, with recurrent themes such as the victory fanfare, which, as mentioned by this 20 - 25 year old casual gamer, will be “forever etched in my memory.” However, in this particular case, the aesthetics of the game were almost as important as the game music with game aesthetics averaging 2.85 versus 3.1 for game music when asked to rank the level of importance of game elements with 1 being the most important and 4 being the least important, taken from the data on *Table 1*. *Final Fantasy* players gave a score of 2 for both game characters and story which could point towards the type of storytelling and narrative that is used by these games as opposed to the visual aesthetics as being the main motivators to listen to music outside of the game.

It was expected that game franchises would have more of an impact on the consumption of participants due to the higher sale volume of serialised franchises, which would have given the impression of a loyal base audience that would feel identified with these elements. It was found that franchises and serialisation had an impact, but it was overshadowed by strong character and narrative associations hinting more towards a sense of familiarity towards a game than the brand itself. Although it was found that the serialisation of games and their music did create an inviting familiarity, elements such as characters and
narrative have stronger bonds and connections when it comes to out of gameplay consumption.

**Emotions.** The emotional connection between players became a recurrent theme in the responses of participants, who would remember the feelings or mood they had during gameplay when listening to soundtracks. These emotions were usually connected to associations that were created with the game through story, characters, and gameplay. However, the emotions that were felt or the longing to feel those emotions through the consumption of music was seen in nearly 2 out of 5 participants, making this intention to relive these emotions a significant connection between audiences and music outside of gameplay. Several participants expressed the importance of music as a means to recreate emotion, and for this participant, such was the case with “The Ballad of the Wind Fish’, from *Link's Awakening*, is probably the first piece of game music I'd ever heard that brought a tear to my eye because of how well it fit with the plot. [It reminds me of] forever leaving behind a very special place filled with special people, never to see them again, but at the same time knowing that all is well.” Another participant expressed wishes of revisiting emotions through game soundtracks: “[I listen to soundtracks] to recreate the emotions I felt when first listening to the soundtrack, either just for my own enjoyment, or because I want to create those emotions for another purpose (for instance creating art that has a certain feeling to it).”

The videogame soundtrack appeared to be a catalyst of emotions that were closely related to character, narratives, and experiences that were born from gameplay, as was the case for this participant, for whom the soundtrack brings back memories of “playing the actual game and the emotions the music evokes. For example, Aerith's Theme from *FFVII* is an emotional piece played when that character dies in the game.” Therefore, emotions are an
important factor in the motivation for the consumption of soundtrack, due to their tie-in with game elements and experiences that would naturally be created with music. The important element in this association is the involvement with the game and the involvement with the narratives, characters, and stories that are found in the diegesis.

**Experiential associations originating outside of gameplay.** Although there is a clear pattern that highlights the experience of gameplay there are important mentions and tendencies of consumption via a third party, which are still rooted in the personal experience, or appreciation of music as opposed to it being a social motivator. These personal experiences were usually linked to people, events, or places, whilst other responses reflected the appreciation of a moment through the description of mood, setting, weather, and colours. Within participants who elicited memories out side of the game, over half of the respondents (59%) found that these memories would be linked to other people; a significant proportion (40%) elicited memories of a particular event in their lives; and one in ten associated music with a specific place outside of the game (e.g. the living room, the car, the house, my room). This tendency, though not pertaining to the majority of responses, gives the foundation for a concept I would call ‘secondary association’, where audiences listen to videogame music by being in a specific place. This concept is closely related to nostalgia, although it does not necessarily reflect a longing to return to a halcyon time, ‘secondary association’ would relates more to a mind-set, mood, or a combination of different events where music is not a part of a game, but a part of a space that transcends diegesis. These motivators mostly arose in the survey responses from the recording of a memory, sometimes vivid, and sometimes general, of a moment in time in which the participant came in contact with game music. There was also the case of people that experienced game music as a part of their job, for
example such was the case of one 20 - 25 year old casual gaming participant who admitted to being a game orchestra conductor.

**Nostalgia as a motivator for metaludic consumption.** Nostalgia was a predominant element that drove the consumption of game music outside of gameplay, as participants sought to relive their childhood, elicit memories of bygone times, or generally feel a longing for the past. During the survey analysis, metaludical memories that were elicited that were related to specific events (gameplay, characters, people) were assigned to either associations or social motivators. Broader responses, such as ‘good times’, ‘being young’, ‘those days when…’, and responses that mention ‘nostalgia’ outright were categorised under this heading. 47% of respondents had nostalgic memories when listening to game music: over a third of them answered ‘nostalgia’ without specifying any particular memory, 22% connected their nostalgia to their emotions in the game, and another 22% related this nostalgia to other people. When participants were asked why they listened to soundtracks outside of the game, 25% said that it was because of nostalgia (17%), to remember a moment (28%), to remember a moment in time (20%), and to bring back memories of from their past (50%). This result shows a clear connection between the yearning of nostalgia and the consumption of game music outside of the game, and said nostalgia was rooted predominantly in events that occurred outside of gameplay and connections with events and other people that were around during the time when this music was experienced.

There are specific elements in these findings that show the different triggers for experiential nostalgia, such as this 20 - 25 year old hardcore gamer’s nostalgic response, “being young and having not a care in the world”, denote the basic concept of experiential nostalgia, to want to return to a time long past, whilst this 36 - 44 year old hardcore gamer’s response, “my childhood, my room, basic nostalgia”, is more specific about time and space.
Although the applications of nostalgia in videogame and videogame music marketing are the subject of another study, it is worth mentioning that these different nostalgic triggers can be used in future game design and marketing to reach audiences beyond gameplay by tapping into the nostalgic nature of the experience, whether it was a social or individual experience and the important, specific aspects of these triggers. The answers to these questions might not always be simple as is seen in the response of a 20 - 25 hardcore gamer: “[I listen to game music] TO INVOKE THE SPIRIT OF THE PAST IN THE PRESENT!
YEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH! \m/”. Or, as this 26 - 35 hardcore gamer wrote: “I like to be able to relive the feelings I get from the music when away from my consoles.” Another 26 - 35 hardcore gamer wrote. “It's a combination of things. For some games it's just the raw nostalgia of remembering a simpler time when I was younger and had less on my plate to stress myself out. For others it's genuine enjoyment of a beautiful arrangement and occasionally I enjoy attempting to play it on my own piano or guitar”.

As a motivator for the consumption of videogame music, nostalgia was found to be an important element in the experience of listening to music beyond gameplay, with participants remembering moments in their lives, people, and an overarching halcyon. It is known that there are certain developers and publishers that use the fabrication of nostalgia as a main theme in their games. However the memorability of music, whether it was intentionally created to trigger nostalgia, and how this would affect the re-playability of a game past its shelf life is a notion that could be considered in future studies. Data analysis proved inconclusive regarding the preferences of respondents in terms of the source of the music and the fidelity to the original piece, that is, if audiences felt more nostalgic if the sound file used was an original excerpt or a remake/rework of the song, or if they would be more inclined to consume music if it was truer to the original experience, and this would prove to be an interesting area to explore in future studies.
Discussion of Sociocultural Motivators

The consumption of videogame music outside of the game motivated by social motivators and cultural imperatives was also explored in this survey, revealing that several participants found that listening to game music reminded them of other people, or took place in a social context, usually with friends and family. A distinction must also be made between sociocultural motivators and social gaming, where the latter refers to the gamers who do not have a deep engagement with the game plot, and those who play online social media games, or games that do not necessarily have a defined ending. Although these gamers engage in social practices due to the nature and format of the game (e.g. sharing scores, giving game gifts to other players), these interactions do not evolve through the experience of gameplay through music.

As discussed in chapter 4, videogames have become increasingly social with online gaming and the rise of gaming events aimed at audiences. This, of course, does not detract from the social interactions between gamers in the 80s and 90s, as more open and direct interactions would take place in specific venues, such as arcades or a friend’s living room. The analysis of the participants’ responses shows that these practices are still engrained in the memories of surveyed audiences, though these reflect more the associations that are created with the game and experiential nostalgia. Social motivators, however, are still present as a part of metaludical consumption, but this section will focus on describing how music serves as a social cohesion element in the responses of the surveyed population.

Passive association: social interactions as social motivators. Despite this focus on the social aspect of music, social interactions stood out in the survey as an added element in the motivations for the consumption of soundtrack. These interactions were either the initial,
experiential association (or the nostalgic trigger for that matter), or the memory of someone else’s experience: a concept that I labelled earlier in this chapter as ‘passive association’. Passive association does not describe the motivation for the consumption of soundtracks, but it denotes the familiarity that allowed for the initial access of the listener to create an association. These are passive in nature, as they are not directly referring to a direct experience with the game, but rather a second-hand experience that was facilitated by a third party, namely friends, relatives, and other people of importance. What is important about this association is the bond that it creates between individuals, which in turn transforms this individual experience into a social construct, where the soundtrack is the common denominator in an experience, relationship, or bond. These passive associations were found to be a secondary motivator in the consumption of soundtracks, a layer beneath the elicitation of memories, which were usually tied to another experiential motivator. Responses such as “[I am reminded of] My boyfriend playing this on portable gaming devices in bed beside me” and “[I remember] My child racing bikes in the dirt (on the computer) and cheering for himself - occasionally using language I do not approve of” are examples of answers to the survey question that revealed connections that could also be categorised as nostalgic motivators, however they are cemented in an original interaction with someone else, which lead to the social categorisation in this study. One example in particular showed the workings of passive association, which was the response of a 26 - 35 non-gamer, who created an association with a person that introduced her to game music: “I listened to GTA because my boyfriend "borrowed" it from the PBSFM music library and I really loved quite a few of the tracks. In some ways it was a musical education.” Therefore, game music audiences, which are not necessarily gaming audiences themselves, can find the interaction with gamers or the consumption of game music a common element between individuals, one that may influence
their interactions with others and elicit memories that can conduce to metaludical consumption.

**Singularity.** In chapter 4, the concept of sociocultural singularity was explored, and it was defined as the importance that an item, or the possession of such item, had in a social context. To explore these interactions, the survey was designed to establish the kinds of interactions that participants had socially with game music through a series of questions that aimed at determining the role of game music for audiences inside and outside of the game and their participation in social gaming events. As expected, audiences found that music was a cohesive element within the gaming culture, with 42% of participants perceiving music as a commonality in the experience that can be talked about and shared. The key factors in singularity lie in the appreciation of music as an element with cultural capital and the consumption, or possession, of said element to be just as validating socially to the point where collective consumption is accepted, shared, and celebrated. Therefore, three aspects of social motivators were taken into account for the analysis of the survey responses: social (i.e. peer to peer) interactions, social events, and online participation.

**The value of game music on a peer-to-peer, social basis.** When participants were asked if they shared game music with others, 58.6% of respondents claimed to share music though not often, 25.4% did not share game music, whilst 16% did so very often, showing that 74.6% of the surveyed population in fact engaged in the social aspect of sharing music, a sharing that would in turn affect or trigger the consumption of other individuals. There was a slight fluctuation in the data when participants were asked if they were the recipient of shared music or the giver of soundtracks, with 39.1% of respondents claiming that they received more shared soundtracks than what they themselves shared, 27.5% shared more than what
was shared to them, and the remaining 33.3% claimed that they were not involved in sharing practices. This gave a variation of 8% from the initial sharing data, but this variation still shows that there is a significant social component in the sharing of game music within audiences. Data analysis revealed that the interactions between audiences were affected, through triggers to social interaction and the creation of sentiments of mutual admiration, in different levels: common experiences, character assessment, bonding, and musical appreciation.

When asked how possessing a soundtrack affected social interactions, respondents showed a very clear connection between having a soundtrack or listening to game music and how they interacted with other gamers, with 58% of participants indicating that game music made them closer, or initiated conversations with other audiences. Among these respondents 28% believed that when talking to other people about game music they would focus primarily on retelling the experience of gameplay, or as a 20 - 25 year old casual gamer describes: “I feel it makes them greater because you get to share your experience with others and discuss the music.”

22.5% of participants found that their view of others was affected by their consumption patterns, expressing feelings of admiration and respect for people that knew the soundtrack or the game. Some respondents felt videogame music connected people, such as a 16 - 19 year old hardcore gamer who expressed that “it makes me feel more connected to those who listen to video game music too.” Whilst for a 20 -25 year old casual gamer “game music, for me, acts as a nexus. It is something that helps me to know a person better (about his/her visions of life, tastes, etc.).” These two examples show two of the difference aspects of this singularity and admiration that is given to game music within audiences, one that revolves around the sense of belonging in a group and the other one that is the identification of common interests and the perception of others on this basis.
The identification of common interests and the creation of rapport was the main factor that influenced social interaction within audiences, with 45% of them describing the creation of social bonds between those that listen to, share, and talk about game music. As a 16 -19 year old casual gamer wrote:

[Game music] Allows us to connect on a level almost unrelated to the game. If you meet someone at a convention and start hanging out, and you can both sit on a tram and sing the soundtrack songs, it connects you. Or like with the Portal games, if you know all the words to ‘Still Alive’ or ‘Want You Gone’, then you gain more respect almost immediately to some people.

This behaviour was particularly important for respondents as it helped them find commonalities outside of the context of the game creating affinity and social scenarios where their experiences, love of gaming, and love of music can be expressed without inhibition.

The love and admiration of music was the second most important result in the social interactions of gamers, with 40.5% describing their love of game music and how social interactions would revolve around this common passion, from casual conversations to more complex and laborious interactions, such as the case of a participant that “became a member of the University of Maryland Gamer Symphony Orchestra by associating with other game music fans” or another who became a “part of a community of gamers and musicians that celebrate the music and its role in videogames.”

This admiration for music was contrasted with the third most notable effect of game music on social interactions: the value and appreciation of game music. This particular appreciation is different from the mere liking of game music, but relates to its cultural capital. A third (33.3%) of participants wrote that their social interactions were marked by the understanding and appreciation of the game soundtrack as something of use, value, and
something that would be understood in the context of gaming outside and inside gameplay. This particular result also highlights the importance of sociocultural singularity, through which the motivation for social consumption and sharing comes from the appreciation of music as a cultural object. Participants emphasised their response on the understanding and value of soundtracks in a social context in their responses. One participant believed that having game music affected social interactions as “I have a more in-depth knowledge of the game and the character interaction and I want to explain my thoughts to others who will understand.” Another respondent agreed that gamer interactions were affected by the possession of a game soundtrack: “I am able to share the value I perceive of the game even further with someone else.”

What was interesting about this result was that although a third of participants are a significant proportion, cultural value still is not a main driver in metaludic consumption, as opposed to the creation of rapport or the love of music.

**Social event participation as an expression of identification and singularity.** As a corollary to the peer-to-peer sociocultural motivators, expressions of collective identification through gaming and game music were also explored in the survey, showing that respondents participated, or wanted to participate, in gaming events, such as concerts, competitions, and conferences. As mentioned previously, 22.4% of participants had attended live videogame music performances, a small proportion but a significant number when put into the perspective of the size of the gaming demographic. The participation in game events also proved to be a meaningful social interaction for participants, with 33.7% of participants engaging in gaming events and 41.1% thinking about participating in future gaming events. Although game events and concerts were not at the forefront of the creation of associations, the willingness to be a part of these events shows the potential of audiences to further
participate and interact in a larger group or as part of a community, a finding that can be of use to the game industry in the furthering of metaludic marketing and promotion processes. Influence of social events proved to be not as influential as initially expected, yet still noteworthy, as there is openness and potential for further consumption in these environments.

Following. Sociocultural motivators for the metaludical consumption of soundtracks appeared to be influenced by the admiration and following of game music, particular composers, or certain themes and franchises, however, these motivations were rather unclear. First, a clarification must be made: motivators based on following may resemble experiential associations in the fidelity and identification that audiences find in franchises and music. However the collective, individual experience and identification with these different elements and the common denominator that gives way to a common foothold for social interaction merits the inclusion of this type of behaviour in the sociocultural motivators that are identified in this study.

The survey revealed that 56% of participants said they listened to videogame music because of the music itself, the quality of the composition and the relationship it had to the game, whilst an additional 12% mentioned their consumption was based on their admiration of the work of a particular composer. A further analysis of the responses of participants was required to understand where their loyalty was rooted, with results showing diverse and inconclusive evidence of one particular type of following other than a mixture of motivators such as the sound of a certain game, the game story, or the game experience. What this further analysis did show was that the majority of participants (nearly 4 in 5) followed game music as such, with several participants writing elaborate answers on the unique capability of videogame music in general. This 20 - 25 hardcore gamer explained his liking of game music in the following manner:
Because I identify with this music culturally, which is why most people listen to the music they listen to. I am a gamer, my friends are gamers, we're part of the gaming community, and videogame music is an art form we appreciate together. I also enjoy the variety of [musical] styles and hearing the different techniques used to convey different aspects of a game.

This finding appears to show that although the sounds and aesthetics of games were important in social consumption, the belonging of the music to a particular game prevailed over other elements, as if a soundtrack being ‘game music’ was the important term and label that drove consumption. Participants expressed their liking for this music, not a particular genre of it, with expressions such as “VG music is the only music I can get into. Popular music just doesn't have the feelings behind it that VG music does,” with this particular answer exemplifying a recurrent trend of participants preferring game music over popular music. The sound of game music also came up as an important factor: “[I listen to soundtracks] Because I generally enjoy how video game music sounds. There also tends to be quite a lot of it. This allows me to put it on and not worry about it looping for several hours”; however answers like this would allude towards the experience of gaming, as game music does not have a distinct sound due to the diversity of its musical styles.

There were instances in which some respondents identified composers, although their allegiance was accompanied by other associations or sentiments of nostalgia. This 26 -35 hardcore gamer was particularly emphatic on the music not of a composer, but the music of a particular publisher and their series:

Often it is because I enjoy the work of that particular composer. Other times it may be because I'm feeling particularly nostalgic. Some cases such as the Piano Collections released by Square Enix are because I enjoy these
arrangements even if I did not particularly enjoy the soundtrack in the context of the game.

Whilst another 26 - 35 casual gamer described his admiration for composers, but his true motivation lies in gameplay and nostalgia:

Many reasons. Some of the music is just technically amazing; I would point to the works of Yasunori Mitsuda and Nobuo Uematsu for that. Most of the time, though, the music conjures emotions and memories from playthroughs for me; I can listen to the music of *Descent: Destination Saturn*, for instance, and remember the long hours I spent fighting for humanity in the tunnels of solar mines. I can listen to the music from *Final Fantasy 7*, and remember the exact scene where it occurs, and how I felt at the time; or the music from *Pokémon*, and remember all the hours I spent in the town or area the music corresponds to, and how I built a team of Pokémon to fight for good. It's like it's the soundtrack of my childhood, and by listening to it again, I can relive those times.

The one constant in the responses of participants was the liking of videogame music in general, which would also suggest that these participants listen to a variety of game soundtracks, as 1 in 5 participants mentioned the music of more than one game in their responses and a majority would refer to game music in general when asked about their motivations for consumption as opposed to the music of a specific track. It would appear that this finding is a blend between following and singularity motivators within sociocultural motivators, where all game music has value for how it allows for the interaction between
gamers, and also game music is worth following, because it unites players under the commonality of a gaming experience with which they feel represented and identified.

**Discussion on Marketing Motivators**

The third component of the proposed consumption model for soundtracks was the influence of the videogame industry’s marketing practices on the consumption practices of game audiences. This influence is one that is particularly hard to determine, but glimpses of the influence of the theories stipulated in chapter 5 were present in the responses of some participants, as participants would focus more on the music as opposed to the actual acquisition process, affecting the accuracy of the study. The marketing imperatives behind the consumption of soundtracks were investigated in the survey as a ramification of their online participation, their consumption preferences, and the associations that are created within gameplay. At this stage in the discussion, the intertwining of all three approaches to the consumption of soundtracks becomes clear, as audiences have an initial experience that arises from the contact with music during gameplay or outside of it. This experience is then expressed in social practices with the mutual identification of individuals as belonging to a certain group, and finally with the forces that created the initial experience in the first place and the effects that their decisions during the conceptualisation, production, and marketing processes had on the creation of associations and the social interactions outside of gaming.

Both the commodification practices of the industry and audiences, as well as the branding and marketing of videogames and their music were factors that contributed to the consumption of music.

**Commodification practices as motivators for consumption.** The commodification practices that were identified in the study were based on the mode of consumption of
audiences and the perceived participation of audiences in the creation of soundtracks. The mode of consumption simply refers to the way in which the audiences obtained the soundtrack, which were discussed earlier in this chapter, namely the acquisition of original soundtracks, internet streams and downloads that are formats in which the soundtrack becomes a physical piece. Concerts and gigs were coded under sociocultural motivators as the perceived commodification is adding to a collective experience in a far more direct way, as opposed to the personal perception of game music as an acquirable object. Participants consumed soundtracks mostly by acquiring the OST (83.7%), downloaded the game music (80.1%), and streamed the songs via YouTube (73.1%), showing a clear preference for a metaludic version of the music, which participants wanted to listen to without having to play the game again. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, respondents showed that they consumed music outside of the game environment for several reasons, mostly to enjoy the music, to relive the game experience, and to experience nostalgia. There was however another motivation for consumption that was found in respondents who consumed game music for other purposes, as background music, preferably if it was instrumental music. 70% of participants were found to enjoy listening to videogame soundtracks outside of the game, despite the heterogeneity of their motivations, as an object that was an obtainable abstraction of the experience felt in the game. This was somewhat antonymous to the views of 49% of participants who considered the music of a game to be the least elicited memory of music, although outside of the game the music did have a cohesive social nature for respondents. The survey did not specify the availability of soundtracks, that is, if the soundtracks were made available by the publisher and subsequently acquired by the audience. In the light of these responses, commodification appears to be a vital aspect in the consumption of soundtracks, as it determines the availability and the extraction of game music into an easily consumable item for audiences.
Branding and marketing. In the survey, two main elements were explored in terms of the effects of the branding and marketing of the game: the marketing of games through music and the impressions participants had of audiences being producers. Results showed that music played an important role in the marketing of games, or at least it was perceived to be so by participants, as game music was seen as the by-product of licensing agreements and carefully thought out music curating, much like in the views of a 16 - 19 year old casual gamer, who believes the use of music in the creation of a brand is “obviously an advertisement stunt for either the artist, game or both. It’s about ‘taking care of business’ not respecting the creative industry for its art nature.”

The survey found that over half of participants believed that the role of music in games was to create atmosphere and help with immersion, many of which claimed that the music itself was what made the game what it was. This 16 - 19 year old casual gamer saw music as what kept him in the game since it appears that “Crysis 2 was a lousy game, that it was a shame to have such excellent music wasted on it. More importantly though, I remember the music really being the only thing that was holding the game up, allowing me to ignore what I was seeing in front of me and instead craft in my mind what a game deserving of this music looks like.”

Conversely, this 26 - 35 casual gamer believes that it is the duty of the game developers and publishers to not only have quality music in games, but to foresee and predict the possibilities of music beyond the game:

A wonderful song enhances the experience and leaves a lasting impression that the imagery and soundscape can portray, while crappy, lazy, under-developed music gives a sense of the mundane, of having already done this, of disappointment, among other negative reactions. As a game is the sum of its
parts, a truly excellent, memorable game WILL HAVE damn good music, just as a game's reputation is only as strong as its weakest parts. Plus, nowadays with more ubiquitous user access to music instruments, lessons, how-tos and remixes (not to mention the costs inherent in the production stage), it is an area that needs held accountable, to reward valiant effort and punish unimaginative laziness, that should evolve and always strive to make the experience more memorable. A similar question would be: Why do you think it is important to review the control scheme and interface of a game? It's all connected, man.

At the core of these responses lies the creation of a distinct gaming experience that related to characters, places, games, and franchises. Music that evoked imagery brought the listeners back to elements of the game that were purposely intended to be remembered by publishers. In the case of this 20 - 25 hardcore gamer, the music evoked imagery of the advertisement of the game, and the iconic soldier on the Battlefield 3 ads.

The creation of a brand through music was also due to the thematic nature of music, and although these elements resemble both experiential and sociocultural associations, it is worth noting that the decisions and deliberations of developers and publishers, in stylistic, musical, graphical, and narrative aspects of game design, were acknowledged as being deliberate or recurrent by over 80% of participants.

Another finding of the survey was that just over half of participants believed that their opinions were heard by producers when they gave feedback for soundtracks, with divided opinions on whether this had no impact on the creative process, or if feedback and comments were taken on board for the creation of new patches and sequels. The responses of those that believed that their feedback was noted strongly suggested that participants believed they were
making contributions to the quality and implementation of game music in order to improve soundtracks, maintain the quality of music, acknowledge the music, ergo supporting the composer; and to improve the gaming experience. Note that only 16% of participants admitted to reviewing soundtracks online.

**Summary**

The survey that was conducted as a part of this study validated the proposed model for the consumption of game soundtracks, by identifying what was important for audiences on the personal and social level, and how they felt they were influenced by the decisions made by game producers. In the area of experiential associations, audiences felt engaged with the game world and the game experience, as well as highly motivated by feelings of nostalgia and remembrance of certain points in time. Sociocultural associations saw the cohesive nature of music, with the majority of respondents believing that music gave them a commonality with other gamers, which in turn allowed them to build rapport with other soundtrack audiences. Game music was also found to be the motivator itself for its consumption, with gamers finding that the love of game music itself and its connection to a gaming experience was a prime motivator. Similarly, with the other two approaches well established, the marketing imperatives in soundtrack consumption showed the clear creation of brands and imagery through the thematic use of music, as well as the effects of the extraction of music from the game was not only the definition of metaludical consumption, but also the practice that allowed for music to disseminate.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Earlier in this dissertation I compared videogame fandom to football fandom, and finding that the culture around it is similar in many ways: strong community and loyalty (either emotional or by being present) in the participation of activities among other elements, but what was distinctively palpable in videogame fandom was that the participatory and appropriation elements of the community and the individual were not only based on spectating but participating. With this I do not intend to say that gamers are prone to becoming digital *ultras*, ready to *swat* other players that annoy them, but that the level of engagement with the diegetic world makes the experience of gaming a very personal one, that can easily be appropriated, and leaving a long-lasting mark on the individual. A fascinating outcome of this survey is the realisation that videogame music has a lasting long-tail effect, with audiences making connections with videogame music and eliciting memories from games that were played years ago. This, of course, is used by the videogame industry by making the push for retrogaming, with gamers being denied backwards compatibility in new consoles, and being offered instead ‘moderately priced’ old games on online stores. But if there is a lesson to be learnt from this study, it is that videogame music is a very powerful element in gaming, for audiences and for producers can benefit greatly from its reuse and reinterpretation. Another key theoretical concept that is taken out of this dissertation is the concept of individual experience being the catalyst in a chain reaction of psychological processes that result in the likelihood of future elicitation through the use of music. Memory,

\[13\] *Swatting* is a term that refers to one individual calling the police to the residence of another gamer, usually making authorities believe that there is an armed individual and possibly hostages, forcing US police to deploy S.W.A.T. teams, thus its moniker.
as it turns out, is at the heart of the practices of revisiting, replaying, and reinterpreting musical and ludic performances that are of importance to game communities and individuals.

As seen in this study, videogame music is an integral part of the videogame experience, and as this study shows, it is also an important aspect beyond gameplay, a practice that is of utmost importance to this study. Metaludic consumption of videogame music presents questions of the original gameplay experience, the essence of interactive music, and the motivations for listening to music out of its intended, interactive context. Practices such as purchasing videogame OSTs, downloading soundtracks, attending game music concerts, and appropriating game music are just some examples of the kind of consumption that takes place beyond gameplay, and which allows for the creation and reaffirmation of experiences, associations, fan bases, and revisiting of the game and its different elements beyond the initial musical experience, therefore, becoming an important topic to understand the future consumption, marketing, and production strategies in order to prolong the life of a videogame.

This study proposed a model that describes the motivators behind this metaludic consumption taking a three part approach that is backed by the responses of participants of an online survey, but to contextualise this study other elements of gameplay and videogame music were explored to allow for the understanding of the background of the use, role, and appreciation of videogame music. This final chapter summarises the key concepts that are explored in this study, including a brief summary of the consumption model proposed by the study and how these theories were reflected in the responses of survey participants.
A Summary of Key Concepts

The Videogame Soundtrack

The evolution of game music and audience perception of games music. Modern videogame music is the result of a process that has evolved from the rudimentary sound coding of *Space Invaders* to the recorded and programmed music that exists today. Spanning from MIDI compositions, orchestral soundtracks, and licensed songs, videogame music is a term that cannot denote a specific genre as it is comprised of a myriad of musical styles; it is a term that describes the use of this music in a specific medium. But the term was used for years to describe the music of videogames, particularly in its early days, due to the technological restrictions of the various game platforms that rendered game audio in 8 and 16 bit sounds, which marked a generation of audiences and created an image in the general public that associated games with pixelated images and synthesised sounds. The contrast between early game music and modern game music is striking, and although some of the appeal of nostalgic consumption of game music is the sound of vintage sound cards, consumption is also driven now by the perceived ‘compositional and sonic quality’ of contemporary game music.

Another key factor in the consumption of game music is the knowledge of the history of game music and the perception of audiences of the medium and its different elements. Today, the videogame industry enjoys a solid position as the most powerful entertainment industry, however, this is largely due to the several factors, such as the ageing of the gaming demographic of the 80s and 90s, as well as the multimedia and cross-industry licensing agreements that have helped the game industry rise in the market. These two factors have begun to shift the perception of older generations that videogames, as a form of entertainment, were inferior particularly because of the rudimentary computer technology that was used in the early periods of game history, which led some to believe that games did
not merit any serious attention from industry and the general public. The evolution of videogames, and the growth and ageing of their demographics, contributed to the spreading of the popularity and acceptance of videogames in the broader society, making older games (i.e. the games that gamers grew up playing) objects of nostalgic value, which are available to be consumed again. This scenario presents itself as one that is open for the exploration of consumer behaviour and as a new avenue for revenue for the game industry, using videogame music as the trigger for nostalgic consumption.

The role of soundtracks in videogames. As discussed in chapter 2, videogame music plays a crucial role in the development of many videogames, particularly in the creation of the diegesis, game narrative, and emotional direction. The creation of setting through music is a powerful tool of immersion through the exotification or representation of pre-existing notions and associations that audiences have created prior to gameplay. As a narrative tool, videogame music interprets the images on screen either through themes or motifs that allude to the psyche and personality of game characters, as well as directing the emotions that the audience should feel as narrative cues that forward the plot of the game. The results of the study show that game audiences acknowledge and feel identified with the music and emotions that are portrayed aurally in the soundtrack, especially in games with complex stories such as role-playing games. This study, however, does not look at the practices of playing videogames without a musical soundtrack and how this affects the marketing and design of game releases, albeit the practices have been already explored by Zehnder and Lipscomb.

The consumption of game music. Game music consumption is manifested in various ways and it is determined mostly by the audience's level of involvement with the game and other
players. Original soundtracks, file downloads, internet streaming, live performances, and remixes are just some of the means by which game music is consumed by both gaming and non-gaming audiences. Gaming audiences are more likely to listen to game music during gameplay, thus creating associations with elements of gameplay; non-gaming audiences would consume game music either by listening to the music being played by someone else, through music sharing, or even may be unaware that the music they listen to is used in a game due to the modern licensing practices of the videogame industry. In this study, the consumption of videogame soundtracks is observed as a practice that is initialised by the game producers, consumed during gameplay, and beyond gameplay consumption is instigated by the desire of the audience to revisit this music or bolstered by the game industry through promotion, marketing, and merchandise.

Consumption Model

Based on the theory of the role of music in videogames and the different perception of music inside and beyond gameplay, a consumption model is proposed in this study, based on the nature of the interaction between game music and audiences, and the phenomenon of metaludical consumption, which was also observed, thus triggering the need for this study. Through the observations of gaming behaviour and the collection of literature available on the practices of videogame communities, gameplay, game fandom, and the videogame market; a methodology is put forward identifying the motivators of gameplay experience, sociocultural interactions, and marketing imperatives as the reasons behind metaludical consumption. The model put forward in this thesis was corroborated by the online survey that accompanied the study, which explored the behavioural and consumption preferences of respondents. Their responses were analysed according to the proposed methodology, concluding that it was in fact a proper reflection of metaludic consumption.
The experiential component of the thesis is based on the associations that are created between music and the videogame and how this was reflected in metaludical consumption, namely those that arise from personal experiences with either the game or the music itself. The survey found that these motivators are by far the strongest and most influential, as the personal experience of music either during or beyond gameplay impacted heavily on the identification of the participant with the music in the game. It was found that game elements such as story, music, characters, images, and game aesthetics heavily influence the memorability of game music and facilitate metaludical consumption through a process of familiarisation. The second element that influenced consumption was nostalgia, with game music evoking the sentiment of longing for times past.

Experiential associations are created with music and are based mostly around the game elements of story and characters, and are born out of the audience’s interaction with the game, and this personal interaction is what leaves a lasting impression in audiences. Musical associations are largely due to the thematic uses of music, which are then repeated several times during gameplay, creating clear sonic signposts of the character, the personality of this character, and the abilities or actions that can be performed in the game. Other associations are also created with the game’s narrative, between the cinematic or high impact moments in the game plot, where the music is composed to enhance the images on screen, thus bringing back memories to respondents of specific moments in the game.

Nostalgia, especially that which was tied to memories of periods of time or people that were close to the participant at the time, also proved to be a significant and contributing factor to the familiarity that was created in order to consume music outside of a game. The experience of videogames at a younger age, or the memories of such times, have proven to be important factors in the consumption, design, and marketing of videogames, even to the extent of influencing musical composition, especially in the case of game franchises. The
results of this study show that audiences particularly evoke nostalgic sentiments towards particular moments in their life (especially childhood), other people, and the act of playing a game, through the vehicle of soundtracks.

The sociocultural side of the methodology explored the social aspects of gaming and the common denominator of gaming culture as such, and how music worked as a cohesive element within these interpersonal interactions. As shown throughout this study, videogames have increasingly become openly social activities, with online gaming and growing gaming communities. This, of course, does not undermine the strong social interactions that surrounded gaming in its early stages, with MUDs and arcades being the focal point of social interactions. Within sociocultural motivators, it was found that there was interest in bonding socially as gamers, and that the identification of ‘being a gamer’ through game music was an integral part of making and maintaining some interactions among participants. This aspect of social singularity, the concept of cultural capital through the knowledge or ownership of game music, is a defining cohesive social element. The second aspect of sociocultural motivators, ‘following’, revealed that there was an increased loyalty to game music in general. There was some interest in particular composers, however, the interest was mostly aimed towards listening to ‘game music’ as being important.

The third element of the methodology was the marketing imperatives of the videogame industry and their effects on participants, how videogame music is used in gaming, its effect on audiences, the consequences of music as a commodity, and the creation of brands through music. Therefore, two main elements were identified: ‘branding and marketing’ and ‘commodification’. Commodification was the first instance in which the participants consumed music, particularly with the extraction of music from its original form to advertise videogames, or to promote the music as a separate entity under the umbrella of 'game music' particularly in love events and soundtrack compilations. Subsequently the
availability of soundtracks (and the ‘blessing’ of the industry towards this practice) sees a boost in the consumption of music, with audiences responding to the release of soundtracks and the free promotional music that is sometimes released alongside games.

Branding and marketing practices were also seen in the responses of participants, with audiences creating associations with franchises and advertisement. Music, both licensed and purposely composed for games, is a powerful promotional tool, as perceived by audiences. The results find participants respond to both advertising music (and the imagery that accompanies this advertising) as well as in-game music, which was acting as a brand or audience identifier in the case of license music, and as a vital part of the aesthetics of on going franchises. Such was the case of games like Final Fantasy and Pokémon, whose recurring themes appeared to bring audiences back to the music and to the game.

Experiential, sociocultural, and market motivators interact with each other culminating in the consumption of music outside of the game, with some motivators influencing some audiences more than others. Therefore the methodology presented, the model for the consumption of game soundtracks (depicted in Figure 1), aids the understanding of how these different forces interact outside and inside gameplay, showing that it is not only about the interaction of the audience with the music, but also the environment, the people around at the time, and decisions made before the development of the game that are what bring people to listen to music that was not initially intended to be played outside of the game. An exception to this is the use of licensing agreements, which already include music from outside the game to introduce to games, but original game music is increasingly seen as a worthwhile marketable piece of metaludic merchandise. This consumption model presents the inner mechanics of game music consumption when it occurs, however it does not extend to instances when game music consumption does not happen during gameplay or metaludically, which would call for further study.
Review of this Study

This study demonstrates the importance of videogame music beyond gameplay, and the relationships formed between consumer, producer, and product, as well as the interactions that occur amongst these different actors. As a topic of research, videogame music is still in its early stages and this study contributes not only to this area, but future research that also looks into the relationship between interactive digital technologies and their audiences, and how music can become a catalyst for audience retention or a binding element within social groups. Bonds created between audiences and soundtracks, such as the creation of nostalgic sentiment throughout the associations with people, places, and the moments in time when the music is heard (e.g. nostalgia), have a strong impact for the consumption of soundtracks and future game music design in the creation of diegetic spaces and game design. These bonds can be focused on the creation of communities and faux nostalgia/retro sentiments (i.e. a childhood that never existed or sounds that are somehow associated with a preconceived, familiar, and collective past) that can allow for these associations to arise. Although these practices might not be news for the videogame industries or to game researchers, what this study brings is a basis and a fundamental explanation that will serve as a platform for future studies. Another by-product of this study is the understanding of the workings of music consumption and the potential prolongation of shelf life of videogames through the association of music outside of the game, and a means of reaching broader audiences through passive association through an aural medium. The implications of compositional techniques and passive associations in metaludic music consumption and the attention grabbing of audiences through sound (much like the techniques used by arcades) are areas that can be addressed in future studies as well.

There are limits to this study which have been mitigated through careful analysis and survey implementation, however there are still matters to be addressed when it comes to the
extent of the data collected. The number of survey participants does not represent the entirety of the gaming population, but a mere sample of the demographic, compounded by the method of distribution of the survey, and the language barriers that can be experienced by some participants, which further narrows the demographics of this study. However, studies have shown that the majority of game audiences are avid internet users, which validates the source of the data collected, and the survey resembled previous demographic data collected by other studies in terms of average gamer age and game genre preferences. As this data was collected online, without discriminating gender or cultural background, this thesis bases itself on the demographic premises of previous studies which consider audience gender to be near equal, and cultural background almost irrelevant as the ‘game culture’ overrides cultural barriers. Although the survey is satisfactory at identifying the methodology and corroborating its foundations, more specificity would have been required to identify the type of preferred version of the soundtrack (e.g. original, cover, remix) sought by audiences.

Overall, this study presents a model that can be used as a basis for future study and a benchmark for marketing practices before the development of a game, and the composition of its soundtrack, commences. There are areas where the consumption could have been studied at a much detailed level, such as the psychology behind the interaction with avatars and the empowerment of the player in the diegesis, the performance practices of live game music concerts, and the branding of nostalgia in new games; just to name a few. However, it is the intention of this study to present a broad scheme of elements that fit together in a wide range of game genres, audiences, and musical styles, allowing for a fundamental framework for future study.
Where to Now?

As mentioned earlier, the study of game music, veering away from game audio, is still in its early stages, which proves to be quite an exciting time for research to be conducted on the workings of game music inside and outside the game. This study answers fundamental questions on how audiences are driven to the consumption of soundtracks, but there are other questions that are beyond the scope of this study that beg for answers. The work of authors such as Karen Collins, Sean Zehnder and Scott Lipscomb, as well as Michael Cerrati provide an exciting framework for a variety of areas of research in game music that can help us understand the differences between the compositional and marketing approaches of game music in aims of bettering the practice of this widespread, and highly lucrative, art.

This study leaves some unanswered questions when it comes to videogame music consumption. The survey reveals a tendency of audiences to prefer videogame music due to its lack of lyrics, with several participants mentioning this trait as a superiority over popular music, which proved to be highly intriguing. Not all game music is devoid of lyrics, with games that had prominence in the survey, such as the Final Fantasy series and Bastion, including music with lyrical content. Whether instrumental music is preferred due to the more open interpretation that it can have in videogames, perhaps because of the interactive nature of the medium which allows players to create their own (though highly scripted) story, over music that overtly conveys a particular meaning, would be a remarkable study. Still on the differences between popular music and game music (or the lack yet perceived notion of difference) by audiences, participants of the survey also preferred to listen to game music as opposed to popular music as a means to evoke nostalgia. Studies on music nostalgia and the concept of retro, particularly the work of Simon Reynolds, is exceptional at describing how popular music creates the sentiment of nostalgia amongst music listeners and fans, and the value objects with cultural capital have to these demographics. A direct comparison between
game music and popular music and a comparative study on nostalgia between music that is presented in a game and music that is not licensed for one would also be an interesting branch out of this study; particularly when audiences include game music in their music libraries. The use of ‘shuffle mode’ in various media platforms would allow for game music and popular music to be included in the same context, that is, game music and popular music have the same odds of playing during shuffle mode, hence being put on the same level of importance or priority by the application’s algorithm. Despite this, surveyed audiences have a clear preference for game music, and the effects of this equalisation of music and the ‘skip vs. listen’ decisions made by audiences would be most interesting to explore.

As another corollary to the relationship between game music and popular music, there is also the topic of consumption practices of game music. Although this study laid out a framework, a model for the motivations for the consumption of game music, there is still much to learn about how this music is consumed. Questions about the fidelity of the resolution of the audio file or the trueness of the cover to the original music of a videogame is also a matter for further study, to understand how to create a more desirable metaludic soundtrack. This study has revealed the interest of audiences in the appropriation of game music by fans and the following game music has for the fact of it belonging to a videogame, thus the question of fidelity or the source of the music can also be interesting study for game publishers to better market game music merchandise post-release. Likewise, music consumption during gameplay, and the choice of not listening to music during gameplay is also a question that arises in this study, and although the effects of gameplay without music have been explored in previous papers, particularly the work of Lipscomb and Zehnder (2004), the effects this lack of gameplay consumption on the social interaction in the game and beyond, and how the game industry counteracts this musical deprivation to still create a solid memorability metaludically is a matter for future research.
As mentioned before in this study, there are other matters that are yet to be resolved in future studies, such as the role of musical memory in the relationship of videogame music and audiences, and how the type of memory relate to the type of music and the type of game. In this study, the survey revealed a strong connection between audiences and role-playing games, indeed because of the way in which these games are designed to make the players get involved with the game world, the complexity of stories featured, and the amount of time and dedication that it takes to complete these games. But other games, particularly party games, would be a good topic for future studies because of the emphasis on the collective experience of these games would elicit memories not of self-achievement and dungeon grinding, but one based on the people that play with you.

Other areas of future research can include the way in which music tuition is affected in young children through the use of videogame music. During the course of this study, several participants and colleagues expressed their interest in game music at a professional level, in the role of instrument teacher or coach. In various instances children would bring a piece of videogame music to their teachers and ask to be taught that particular score, which many educators saw as an incentive to get children to practise and enjoy the pieces they were playing because they were familiar. In the surveys, participants expressed how they got to know and love videogame music through their association with their students, and their later investigation of the origins of the scores, so there was an element of dissemination and sharing of music happening during these teaching sessions. I believe that the importance in this particular topic lies in the further ‘legitimisation’ of videogame music as a valid music to perform, specialise, and learn, due to the exceptional quality that many of these pieces have.

Another musical education area that can also be explored as a derivative of this study is the use of videogames to teach music and instrumental performance, and what kind of
relationships would arise from this method. A game like Ubisoft’s (2012) *Rocksmith* is an example of musical tuition through the interface of a videogame, using stages, graphics, and reward systems to help the player learn how to play guitar. This type of interface would help understand the relationships between videogames that include a performance and appropriation factor that is seen in many videogames, but with the added element of licenses popular music complementing the soundtrack, enabling for the experience to be similar to that of discovering new music, but with an added participatory layer. This could later be used to compare the different emotions and memories that would be created with music that is also found metaludically, and how the experience is different, or how the experience changes through the intervention of the medium of the videogame.

In this study, I also mentioned the possibility of approaching the consumption of videogame music through the use of autoethnography, which is certainly a topic that has not been approached thoroughly in academia, and would greatly benefit studies on niche groups of gamers and specific types of game music. In the topic of this study, the question of Autoethnographic research was not addressed as this was intended to be a dissertation that focused an interdisciplinary approach focused on game demographics and broader game music consumption motivators, and a formal autoethnographic approach would have detracted from the essence of this paper. I do, however, welcome future autoethnographic works on this topic and the use of this model as the base for future methodologies.

This study also begs for further scrutiny of the relationship between composers and audiences, and how videogame music composers use compositional approaches in the context of the game. These relationships could give further insight into the ways in which the producers design their material to be memorable and cater to videogame audiences. During the course of this study, interviews with composers were attempted, but proved extremely difficult to secure, leading to a refocus of the objectives of this study. The intended purpose
of these interviews was to ask composers how they targeted audiences when composing and how both producers and developers, and even audiences, influence the sound the music that was to accompany a game.

The purpose of this study was to highlight through its three motivators, factors about gameplay, social interactions, and marketing practices, that can be used not only for research but also for use in the videogame industry. There are questions that emerge from this paper that are pertinent questions that the music and videogame industries should consider for the future benefit of their practices. For the videogame industry, the expansion and diversification of their products, branching out from videogames alone to other interactive media in the form of apps is an emerging trend in the area of ‘gamification’. This refers to the delivery of a message (such as advertisement, training, or education) through the medium of the videogame with the purpose of it not being for entertainment only; this has become an ever-growing source of income for small game and app developers worldwide. In this scenario, questions about the role of music in gamified apps emerge in the areas of branding and marketing, and the overall part it plays the representation of the brand as a whole, and the options for the commodification and marketability of the music as merchandise.

The consumption of videogame music and the possibilities for it inside and outside the videogame are starting to become more apparent including dance games, music tuition games, licensing deals, and the overall metaludic consumption that occurs over the internet and in live performances. With orchestras and artists turning their eyes towards videogame music, the availability (and social acceptance) of game music is one that is yet to fully reach its full, possible extent. I believe that the main deterrent for mainstream consumption of game music lies in the misconceptions about videogames that still linger, and the root of this is the word ‘game’ and the early branding of them as ‘toys’, ergo, the more widespread the music becomes, or the inclusion of more ‘respected’, serious artists, bands, and orchestras
participate in the making and performance of game music, the more available and accepted game music will become. This, of course, follows the trend of labelling alternative games (or even gamified apps) as ‘serious games’, which will be perhaps perceived by some audiences as a worthwhile investment of time and money. But game music, and videogames themselves, are not all about profit and revenue (perhaps two necessary evils to keep an art alive), but as stories and diegetic spaces, vehicles through which memories are created and experiences lived.
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Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

1. Which age group do you belong to?
   - Under 16
   - 16 - 19
   - 20 - 25
   - 26 - 35
   - 36 - 44
   - 45 - 59
   - Over 60

2. Which of these describes you better?
   - Casual gamer (You play games every now and then, at home, at work, school, or on the go).
   - Social gamer (You play games on Facebook and other social media. Maybe Friends with Words, Farmville, Sims Social, or Bejeweled are also in the mix).
   - Hardcore gamer (You play games whenever you can. You are probably a member of a guild and like playing online with friends).
   - Not a gamer.

3. Have you ever listened to videogame music outside of the context of the game?
   - Yes.
   - No.

4. How do you listen to game music? (Choose one or more of the following).
   - Original Soundtracks (OSTs).
   - Downloaded music.
   - YouTube stream.
• Observing someone else playing a game.
• Videogame advertising (trailers, ads, etc.).
• Live concerts.
• External references (popular music, movies, etc.).
• Other (please specify)

5. Have you ever purchased, downloaded, streamed, or shared videogame music?
   • Yes.
   • No.

6. Is sharing Original Soundtracks (OSTs) something that you do regularly with others?
   • Never.
   • Not often.
   • Very often.

7. Think back to a particular piece of game music that stands out in your memory. What game is this?

8. When you listen to a game soundtrack, does it spark memories of the game?
   • Yes.
   • No.

9. What memories do you recall?

10. Does this soundtrack evoke any particular imagery to you?
    • Yes (go to question 11).
    • No (go to questions 12).

11. Please explain what imagery you see?

12. Thinking back to this particular game does it spark a particular memory of the game?
    • Yes (go to question 13).
    • No (go to question 14).
13. What memories do you recall?

14. Have you played this game?
   - Yes.
   - No.

15. Does this music convey a particular emotion to you?
   - Yes (go to question 16).
   - No (go to question 17).

16. Please explain the emotions you feel?

17. In your opinion, what is the role of music in videogames?

18. When you listen to a game’s Original Soundtrack (OST), rank which element do you feel more related to? [1 being the most important, 4 being the least important].
   - Game characters.
   - Game story.
   - The aesthetics of the game.
   - I am only interested in the music itself.

19. Does having a soundtrack affect your interactions with other gamers or people who listen to soundtracks?
   - Yes (go to question 20).
   - No (go to question 21).

20. How does it affect your social interactions?

21. Do you share your original soundtracks (OSTs) with others or do you tend to be the recipient of shared Original Soundtracks (OSTs)?
   - I share more than I receive.
   - I receive more than I share.
   - I don’t share Original Soundtracks (OSTs).
22. Regarding gaming events [competitions, expos, concerts, etc.], do you…[choose one of the following]:
   • Actively participate in or attend gaming events?
   • Seldom participate in or attend gaming events?
   • Wish to participate in or attend an event in the future?
   • Disregard gaming events?

23. Have you reviewed soundtracks on online spaces?
   • Yes.
   • No.

24. Do you think it is important to review the soundtrack of a game?
   • Yes (go to question 25).
   • No (go to question 26).

25. Why do you think it is important to review the soundtrack of the game?

26. What role do you think your feedback has in the creation of the soundtrack?

27. In summary, why did you listen to videogame music outside of the game?
Appendix 2: Survey Responses

See attachment