For every "game over" there is a "play again": Analysis of user preferences regarding 7th- and 8th-generation video games consoles

Emílio José Montero Arruda Filho[*], Igor de Jesus Lobato Pompeu Gammarano

Business Administration Graduate Program - PPAD, University of Amazon (UNAMA), Av. Alcindo Cacela, 287, 66060-902 Belém, PA, Brazil

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This article presents a qualitative analysis of data obtained via semi-structured interviews on the preferences of users regarding 7th- and 8th-generation video games. The study evaluates the factors that influence consumption choices regarding these video games, with a focus on the Xbox 360, Nintendo Wii, PlayStation 3, Xbox One, PlayStation 4 and Wii U platforms. Nine profiles of consumption are identified, measured according user values and consumption preferences from the participants analyzed. The results of the analysis are arranged according to defined categories that describe the phenomena studied. The study concludes that factors such as love for the brand, technological convergence, social positioning, perceived risk, and attraction to the design of the equipment influence the process of use and consumption with respect to the technological devices studied.

1. Introduction

In 2012, a survey on the consumption behavior of iPad users in five Latin American countries was published by de Gammarano, Arruda-Filho, and Farias Filho (2012). This research aimed to explain consumer preferences in each of the five countries analyzed, using theories to describe the motivations for consumers to use technological devices in order to obtain social status (Katz & Sugiyama, 2006), justify their hedonic use through the utilitarian features of the devices (Okada, 2005), and the users' interest in similar products (Gill, 2008; Harris & Blair, 2006; Nunes, 2000).

Since 2014, some of the phenomena that were identified in the above research have also been noted in relation to devices developed by the video games industry (Cabras et al., 2017; Greenhill et al., 2016; Sjöblom & Hamari, 2016; Teipen, 2017). In an exploratory phase of this research, studies concerning users of current video games identified several aspects pertaining to their justification and preference for using integrated devices, such as: "I bought a PlayStation 3 and now I can watch movies whenever I want!", "When I finally buy an Xbox 360 with Kinect, I will finally be able to lose weight and have fun at the same time," and "My Ps3 makes me [a] better [person]."

Such considerations are not related to the game itself, but to convergent factors within the devices that are not in line with the fundamental concept of video games, which is to develop an environment of diversion and game connectivity. In light of this, the current study seeks to answer the following question: What characteristics embedded in 7th-/8th-generation video game consoles motivate users to adopt one console over others?

The objective of this study is to enhance understanding in the field in order to assist retail companies to understand the use and

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[*] Corresponding author.
   E-mail address: emilio.arruda@unama.br (E.J.M. Arruda Filho).

consumption preferences and trends of their customers, with the aim of providing consumers in the games industry with products that meet their expectations and desires. In addition, this study is relevant to literature pertaining to the consumption behavior of users of entertainment technology, since such research is still relatively rare, even if there is an interesting relation with the studies of the digital self (Belk, 2013; Parkinson, Millard, O'Hara, & Giordano, 2017), social status (Eisenman, 2013), and emotional values versus rational consumption (Lee, Lee, & Garrett, 2013). In general, a practical implication of the research is related to the comprehension of tendencies to high technology management concerning aspects that enhance consumers' perceived value and usage, embedded in new multifunctional products to the market (Chayko, 2014; Ozcan & Sheinin, 2015).

During the last decade, several concepts have been considered as responsible for choices and usage changes with respect to new technologies, with a focus on understanding the relationship between the discussed theories and the symbolic or real meanings for users of latest technologies, which are constantly evolving in the market. These concepts include technological convergence (Gill, 2008; Kim, Lee, & Koh, 2005; Lee et al., 2013; Nunes, 2000; Sawng, Lee, & Motohashi, 2015), social positioning (Arruda-Filho, Cabusas, & Dholakia, 2010; Belk, 2016; Katz & Sugiyama, 2006; Watkins & Molesworth, 2012), devotion to brands (Ahuvia, 2005; Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2013; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Mohammadian & Karimpour, 2014), interest in the design of products (Nichols, 2013; Cotroneo, 2005), and risk perception (Lin, 2008; Weber, 2001).

This study used semi-structured interviews as the data-collection method (Manzini, 2003, 2004). Original qualitative data from this type of research strengthens explanation of the phenomena described, in such a way that the meanings and preferences can be interpreted in detail according to the perceptions and values indicated by users of the researched objects. In this qualitative scenario, we seek to understand the reason behind users' decisions or changes relating to symbols, status, prestige, and concepts involved in the scenario of the video game.

The present study is organized as follows. The next section details theories relevant to the phenomena under study, which pertain to predicting users' use and explaining their post-purchase experiences related to their emotional characteristics (social values) and risk perceptions with regard to the product, in addition to theories of devotion, convergence, and design. Following this, we present the method employed in collection and analysis of the data, describing the procedure, codification, and categorization. Consequently, our analysis is detailed, along with a description of the categories of users identified, with each category given a title that reflects the users' consumption profile. Finally, the conclusions are presented, along with the contribution of this study to the marketing field.

2. Theoretical background

Within the context of technological consumption, users often describe feelings of love, passion, and identification (a relationship) with respect to certain brands. These individuals present a deep emotional connection with the companies through self-identification with the values and characteristics that these organizations have, and the groups to which the individuals belong (sometimes known as tribes) have deep interactions with the brand (Ahuvia, 2005; Kunchamboo, Lee, & Brace-Govan, 2017; Mohammadian & Karimpour, 2014).

Users who connect emotionally with brands relate them with excellence in terms of the quality of the brands' products, and defend the image and reputation of the idolized companies at all costs (Albert et al., 2013; Batra et al., 2012; Pimentel & Reynolds, 2004). The passion that these users feel causes them to perceive products of other brands as inferior, and leads to an exaggerated sense of trust and loyalty in the preferred brand (Mohammadian & Karimpour, 2014). This group of users seeks to interact with individuals that share the same ideologies, and disagrees with the views of users who are not linked to their acclaimed brands (Okada, 2005). In addition, these brand devotees seek to pass on their ideas to the maximum number of people possible, with the aim of attracting more "followers" to their "cause" (Arruda-Filho, Cabusas, & Dholakia, 2008). These users feel that only devotees deserve to have the products of the elected brand, and embark on a journey to acquire all of the products that have already been launched by the brand, with the aim of demonstrating to other users that only those who love the brand can be fully aware of all the details linked to the worshiped company (Mohammadian & Karimpour, 2014).

While devotee users seek aspects linked to self-identification within the values of the brands, there is a group of users that seeks to possess the products in order to stand out socially (Belk, 1988). These individuals seek to purchase both physical and (in the case of video games) dematerialized goods – intangible – (Belk, 2013, 2014, 2017), with the aim of standing out and projecting a certain image. Obtaining social status is the ultimate purpose for these users (Arruda-Filho et al., 2008).

With respect to games consoles, owning those with high-value integrated aspects, that present unique characteristics (Katz & Sugiyama, 2006), or that allow users to convey to other people aspects connected to their social identities, are also factors that motivate them to possess certain games consoles. In the virtual social environment, users seek to position themselves socially, using avatars to express themselves and to interact with other users in the online environment (Chayko, 2014). These avatars provide a visual representation of the players in the virtual context (Belk, 2013; Seo, Kim, Jung, & Lee, 2017), and can be modified so that they are in line with the image the players wish to portray of themselves in cyberspace (Bennett, 2017; Peña, Khan, & Alexopoulos, 2016; Seo et al., 2017; Yee, 2014).

In this way, the interaction performed in virtual communities (Zhou, Zuo, Yu, & Chai, 2014) between avatars allows users to obtain items in the online environment that indicate to other individuals their status within the game. In addition, dematerialized goods (Belk, 2013, 2017) allow players to indicate the social groups to which they are connected by positioning them socially and influencing users' preference for devices that can provide them with such aspects of social differentiation (Katz & Sugiyama, 2006). Thus, it is clear that social positioning is achieved through social interaction, and is of primary importance in analyzing the consumption behavior of this niche of users (Arruda-Filho, Lima, & Lennon, 2014).

Another element that should be taken into consideration when looking at the use and consumption preferences of video games