

Comparing LGBTQ+ and Non-LGBTQ+ Video Game Consumers to Understand the Impact of LGBTQ+ Images on Brand Resonance

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This study aims to explore the relationship between LGBTQ+ culture in video games and brand resonance, aiming to understand to what extent the use of LGBTQ+ cultural assets can affect brand awareness, quality, and loyalty between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ consumers. An online survey collected data from 488 people, and a proposed model was tested using SEM multigroup analysis. Findings show that the impact of the “LGBTQ+ cultural assets” differs between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ consumers. The results of this study suggest the LGBTQ+ culture in a video game is the key predictor of brand loyalty among LGBTQ+ consumers.

Keywords: videogames, LGBTQ+ consumers, cultural assets, brand loyalty, and brand awareness

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BRANDS

The LGBTQ+ consumer is a growing target market, having a purchasing power of over \$3.7 trillion dollars (Wolny, 2019), and with only 7.2% of adults in the United States (U.S.) identifying as a part of the community (Jones, 2022). Specifically looking at the gaming industry, a good portion of those working in that industry identify as LGBTQ+, accounting for about 21% of workers (MacDonald, 2022). The popular video game platform Steam even has a Steam Curator channel dedicated to providing reviews about games that are LGBTQ+ inclusive, with a following of over 17,000 users (Steam, n.d.).

Even though the LGBTQ+ group has a great purchasing power and is a large portion of the gaming community, 65% of LGBTQ+ gamers do not feel there is proper representation in video game characters (Nielsen, 2015). The video game industry is a powerful revenue generator; its global market value in 2021 surpassed the \$178 billion mark (Clement, 2022b). Video games can be played over a multitude of different devices from a television and hard console to smartphone devices, making them quite accessible for different population segments. However, it is reported that only 28% of gamers are completely heterosexual, and it is unknown what percentage are part of the LGBTQ+ community (Sliwinski, 2007).

It is important to understand that consumers will continuously purchase from brands if there is a high level of brand resonance (Keller, 2009). However, there is a scarcity of research regarding the brand resonance of video games (Burgess & Spinks, 2014), and a lack of studies addressing the LGBTQ+ consumer. Specifically determining the power of LGBTQ+ culture in relation to brand resonance for video games will help marketers and the industry to include proper representation.

The purpose of this quantitative study is to explore if there is a relationship between LGBTQ+ culture in video games and brand resonance. Specifically, this study aims to explore to what extent the use of a LGBTQ+ cultural asset on video games can affect brand awareness, quality, and loyalty. It further looks at to what extent can an LGBTQ+ cultural asset compete with video entertainment value and graphic aesthetics in their relationship to brand resonance. In addition, this study also aims to explore to what extent these relationships differ when LGBTQ+ versus non-LGBTQ+ video game consumers are compared.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Video Game Industry

Video games have been consistently growing in popularity. In 2013, U.S. consumers spent \$21.53 billion dollars on video games, ranging from the content, hardware, and accessories (Taylor, 2013). By 2022, consumers in the U.S. spent upwards of \$47 billion, surging particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Clement, 2023a). Just in January 2023, video game earnings in the country were over \$4.35 billion in revenue (Clement, 2023b). The number of U.S. video game players is staggering at 188.9 million people (Clement, 2022d). They also play these games frequently; a survey of 2,201 U.S. adults found that 18% of them play between 3 and 6 hours every week (Clement, 2022a). Further, another survey found that, on average, video gamers play for 8 hours and 27 minutes every week (Combs, 2021).

Purchasing Factors of Video Games

The principal reason why people seem to play video games is for general entertainment, with 63% of adults citing having fun as the reason they play (Entertainment Software Association, 2022). However, this is not the only motive as to why individuals engage in video game playing. Several studies have established escapism, or the tendency to seek out video games to avoid the stresses of ordinary life, as a strong motivator for playing (Kim et. al., 2017; Blasi et. al., 2019; Deleuze et. al., 2019; Lee & Chen, 2023; Fraser et. al., 2023). This became even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when several people sought this comfort in video gaming (Morris, 2021). What makes the area of gaming so unique is that it allows for immersion, permitting the consumer to interact with the narrative, as the ending of the game can only be achieved due to player interaction (Oliver et al., 2016). Further, newer games permit the player more control, with different endings that depend on the decisions that each individual player makes (Morris, 2021). Video game narratives also allow the player to experience different emotions, whether it be sadness due to a character's death, or even falling in love after spending countless hours investing in the storyline (Sheridan, 2015). Video games can even be a source of entertainment for the family, as parents find it an easy way to bond with their children. A total of 77% of surveyed parents stated they engage in playing video games with their children at least once a week (Entertainment Software Association, 2022). Parents also see benefits of video games; 86% agree that they can be educational, 88% consider they aid with collaboration skills, and 91% consider they help to develop problem-solving skills (Entertainment Software Association, 2022). There are even health-related organizations that recognize that, though limits on gaming time are important, video games do have positive effects, such as developing problem-solving skills and improving hand-eye coordination (Ben-Joseph, 2022; Cleveland Clinic, 2022).

There are also different ways to define the entertainment value of video games as a whole. Many find that video games are artless, unintelligent, unable to convey real ideas or expressions (Oliver et al., 2016), and are connected to entertainment in a way that only conveys pleasure. Yet, they are also connected to representing meaning in one's life, being connected to showing significance in life, feelings of compassion, and appreciation (Oliver & Bartsch, 2011). Video games are known to ease a person's mind off the stress

in their lives, giving one a fun challenge to accomplish, and a goal to fulfill if life feels out of hand (Henry, 2012; Morris, 2021).

A valuable definition of entertaining video games comes from Oliver's research regarding the topic: "Entertainment appears to frequently consist of stories that highlight fundamental values... or depictions of the human condition" (Oliver, 2016). This appears to be reflected in purchasing habits; the Entertainment System Association announced that one of the top factors for purchasing video games was due to an interesting story or premise, with 35% of respondents stating this was the reason for purchase (Entertainment System Association, 2022).

LGBTQ+ Culture

The term LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and other terms used to describe a person's gender identity and sexual orientation (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, n.d.). These are terms that represent people who have gender or sexual identities "that differ from the heterosexual and cisgender majority" (UCF, 2014). According to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, Lesbian refers to the sexual identity of a person (usually a female) who is attracted to women, although some people who identify as genders outside the binary of male/female choose the label for the lack of terminology (n.d.). Gay refers to a person who is attracted to someone of their same sex; this is usually used to refer to men, but not always, as some women also employ the term, for example (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, n.d.). Trans refers to the gender identity and/or expression for people who find their gender is different from their sex assigned at birth (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, n.d.). Bi refers to a sexual identity of a person who is attracted to two or more genders (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, n.d.). Queer can refer to a sexual and/or gender identity that is not describable, as people feel other terms do not apply to them. It is also used as a political statement of going against the heteronormativity of society, and it is important to understand that queer should not be used as all-inclusive, as some members of the community view the term as offensive and as a slur (UCF, 2014). The Q can also stand for Questioning, a term used to describe individuals who are questioning their gender identity and sexual orientation (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, n.d.). Intersex refers to individuals "with one or more innate sex characteristics, including genitals, internal reproductive organs, and chromosomes, that fall outside of traditional conceptions of male or female bodies," which is not to be confused with the term Trans (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, n.d.). Other terms include Asexual and Intersex. Asexual is a term used for individuals who do not experience any sexual attraction (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, n.d.). Although some other letters have been added, the + refers to other gender/sexual identities such as, but not limited to: various romantic orientations; Genderqueer/Genderfluid/Genderflux; Agender/Asexual/Aromantic; Two-Spirit; Non-binary; Pansexual; Gray; Demisexual (UCF, 2014).

LGBTQ+ and Gaming

In 2006, a study of 10,000 respondents published by the University of Illinois found that only 28% of respondents considered themselves as completely heterosexual (Sliwinski, 2007). A study on gaming carried out by Nielsen found that 10% of video game players who are over the age of 18 identify as LGBTQ+ (Henderson, 2020).

Very few studies have been conducted to determine the number of LGBTQ+ gamers currently, with previous information not including the different gender identities. A recent study by Statista, for example, only disaggregates gender by male and female (Clement, 2022c). With approval in LGBTQ+ acceptance reaching 72% in the United States (Poushter & Kent, 2020), it may be thought that media markets are only now showcasing LGBTQ+ culture (Fingerhut, 2016; Nielsen, 2021; Guttman, 2023); however, video games have included LGBTQ+ culture since the 1980s (Fiorellini, 2021). Despite strict guidelines for not publishing certain content, Nintendo released Super Mario Bros. 2 in 1988, featuring Birdo – a character that identified as female and preferred to be named Birdetta as stated in the original manual (Crystal, 2012). This sentence was censored, which has led to people being unable to determine the gender of Birdetta.

Despite this, video games have continued to represent society's willingness to accept what goes against 'heteronormative' culture – a societal system that constructs heterosexuality as the default sexuality (Krobová et. al., 2015).

Video games are thought to only be targetable to heterosexual males, considering reports showed that 41% of gamers in 2016 identified as being women (Entertainment System Association, 2016). That number has not increased much throughout the years, being 48% in 2022 (Clement, 2022c). The games themselves play into this male-centered narrative, usually ending with the hero finding his princess as a reward (Powell, 2017). Even when the players can change their character's avatars to fit themselves, there is still a level of heterosexuality involved as "[w]omen are designed to be attractive to watch, while male characters are attractive to play" (Krobová et. al., 2015, p. 3). Despite this, there is still a culture of "gaymers," who are players that identify as gay, that search endlessly for games that exemplify their existence and treat them as important. Research conducted by Krobová et. al. in 2015 revealed that players who identified as LGBTQ+ were not able to connect their gamer identities to the LGBTQ+ ones available. Interviews revealed that the gaming market is not an active part of LGBTQ+ culture, and games that include such culture are only played by a limited number of people. This research also determined that games including LGBTQ+ options for players to conduct their avatars need to be integral, well-written and not hidden options (Krobová et. al., 2015). LGBTQ+ gamers report not feeling represented in video games, with 65% finding that not all sexual identities have "[ample] representation among video game characters" (Nielsen, 2015). Even in recent years, a study by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media found that 84% of LGBTQ+ video gamers do not feel that their identities are well represented in video games; this makes sense, considering the same study found that less than 1% of characters in video games can be identified as belonging to the community (2021).

Some video games can positively portray LGBTQ+ culture: the company BioWare has two popular franchises known as Mass Effect and Dragon Age, that are highlighted for their inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters (Levengood, 2014; The Guardian, 2011). Since the first game of their series, players could choose to be in relationships with characters of the same sex (The Guardian, 2011). It has not come without backlash from the heterosexual male player, however, stating that previous BioWare games were designed "for the male gamer," although that is not the case (The Guardian, 2011). The senior writers responded to the backlash, stating that the majority is only used to being catered to, and when others receive options for equality, the majority view it as an imbalance, stating this makes them "deserve it least" (The Guardian, 2011).

From the list of games that highlight LGBTQ+ culture, some of the most prominent include: The Fallout franchise since Fallout 2 in 1998; the Fable franchise since 2004; the Sims franchise since Sims 2 in 2009; the Dragon Age franchise since 2009; the Mass Effect franchise since 2007; Elder Scrolls: Skyrim in 2011; and Fire Emblem: Fates in 2015 (LeJacq, 2015). The Borderlands franchise since Borderlands 2 has also included LGBTQ+ characters in their games (Tan, 2014). The 2015 Game of the Year – Undertale – included gender-neutral characters such as Frisk, and it was praised for its diversity, inclusivity, and validation of the community (Nightmare, 2015). Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic included the character Juhani – the first female character written in the Star Wars Universe who was a lesbian (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2015). The Metal Gear Solid franchise has included LGBTQ+ characters since Metal Gear Solid 2 in 2001 (Rezaee, 2015), and in 2006, the game Bully allowed for the character Jimmy to kiss girls and boys (LGBTQ Game Archive, 2015). The Saints Row franchise did not have a woman character until Saints Row 2, leading users to have a trans woman character in subsequent games (IGN Boards, 2014). Recent video game hit Overwatch has announced that the character Tracer, the one seen on the front of their game cartridges, is a lesbian, and they are looking to announce other LGBTQ+ characters as well (Medina, 2016). In 2015, Life is Strange was released, featuring a bisexual character (Biele, 2016). Lastly, there are LGBTQ+ characters throughout the 2013 post-apocalyptic zombie hit by Naughty Dog called The Last of Us (Kane, 2014). Recent efforts have been made to compile and curate a full list of video games with LGBTQ+ themes, such as the LGBTQ Video Game Archive developed by Dr. Adrienne Shaw, an excellent resource to peruse all LGBTQ+ video games since the 1980s (LGBTQ Video Game Archive, 2015).

In the recent game of the Dragon Age series – Dragon Age: Inquisition – BioWare hired trans gamers as consultants for writing the character of Krem, a trans male character (Dale, 2017). It was stated that, while the characterization was not perfect, it is helping the conversation of including trans characters in high quality mainstream video games (Dale, 2017). Yet, BioWare's recent addition to their Mass Effect series – Mass Effect: Andromeda – received negative feedback due to their negative representation of Hainly Abrams – a trans woman (Chalk, 2017). Since its release, BioWare has issued an apology for their thoughtlessness in the character portrayal (BioWare, 2017). However, recent reviews have stated that video game companies need to begin releasing diversity reports to show they are communicating about the people who work on projects (Mulkerin, 2017). The Game Developers Association analyzed over 1,000 individuals who worked in the gaming industry to find the demographics: “23% identified as female; 1.5% identified as male-to-female transgender; 0.3% identified as female-to-male transgender; [and] 3% selected other” (Mulkerin, 2017; International Game Developers Association, 2016).

Therefore, this study will analyze a list of games that include representation of LGBTQ+ characters and determine if these games lead to consumers being loyal to the specific brands.

Brand Resonance

By having a brand, companies can increase sales, establish an image, and create relationships between consumers and the company (Badrinarayanan, 2016). To have strong equity, a brand needs to lead consumers to being loyal – to continue purchasing products from the brand and leading them to paying premium prices (Jung, 2014). Brand equity, as defined by Keller in 1993, is “the effect of brand knowledge on customers’ responses to the marketing of a brand” (Keller, 1993). To have success in a business, a brand must be aware that consumer satisfaction is key (Nam, 2011; Arholdt et. al., 2019; Ziyahd et. al., 2020; Dhillon et. al., 2021). Keller defines brand resonance as “the nature of the relationship between consumer and the brand” (Keller, 2009). It is the highest level of brand building, and reaching this will allow brands to have intense relationships with consumers (Badrinarayanan, 2016; Arholdt et. al., 2019; Delima et. al., 2019; Nainggolan & Hidayet, 2020). Having high brand resonance will lead consumers to have intense and active loyalty, high levels of attachment, feeling part of a community, and feeling engaged with the brand (Jung, 2014; Kusmayanti, 2022). Brand resonance can be categorized into four types: attitudinal attachment – the consumers’ willingness to purchase; behavioral loyalty – repeated purchases; sense of community – close relationship from brand to consumer; active engagement – the consumer’s willingness to invest (Tsai, 2014). To reach brand resonance, a brand must reach awareness – “the driving force (that leads to) learning, consideration, and choice” (Keller, 2009; Jung, 2014). Once a consumer has brand awareness, it will lead to perceived quality (Keller, 2009). Brand quality is the consumer’s opinion about the brand and how it will fulfill the expectations of the consumer – reflecting the consumers’ opinion and how the brand reflects excellence (Jung, 2014). Once there is brand quality, it will follow Keller’s brand resonance model to brand loyalty (Keller, 2009). Brand loyalty is “the degree of attachment to consistently purchase products” (Jung, 2014). This is an important factor for companies when conducting business through a brand, as it will lead to determine their strategies for product development and consumer relations (Badrinarayanan, 2016). Therefore, this study will define that reaching brand resonance means achieving brand awareness, high levels of brand quality, and resulting in brand loyalty based on previous studies.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Keller introduced a model for brand resonance that states when a brand has high brand resonance, it will lead consumers to being loyal to the brand through continuous purchases and an easier willingness to pay premium prices (Keller, 2009; Jung, 2014). To reach brand resonance, the consumer must first have brand awareness, which will act as a driving force in making purchase decisions, considerations, and choices. After brand awareness, the consumer will evaluate the brand, leading to the brand quality – the consumer’s image of the brand’s excellence. Lastly, depending on the brand quality, the consumer will reach brand loyalty (Keller, 2009).

In previous research, Jung used the brand resonance model to test if the image of a country led to brand awareness and fulfilled expectations, resulting in brand loyalty. The Country Image was determined to be a cultural asset and was tested to determine how it affected the brand (Jung, 2014). It also tested the technological advancement of the brand as well as the fashion equity as purchasing factors, and these three factors were used to test how it affected brand awareness, how brand awareness affected brand quality, and how brand quality affected loyalty. Figure 1 presents a proposed model.

Based on Jung's Brand Resonance model, this study proposed a cultural asset based on LGBTQ+ cues utilized in the video game – and proposed to test its effect on brand awareness. Due to the nature of video games, the two other purchasing factors of video game purchase have been changed to the top factors: entertainment value and graphic aesthetics (Appendix A). Using this model, the authors would determine the effect “cultural asset” had in video games and how certain LGBTQ+ video games lead to brand resonance. Based on Jung's empirical work, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: *The cultural asset of LGBTQ+ Culture positively affects the Brand Awareness of video entertainment, visual aesthetics, brand quality, and loyalty.*

H2: *The cultural asset of LGBTQ+ Culture positively affects the Brand Awareness of a video game greater than the Entertainment Value and the Graphic Aesthetics.*

H3: *Video Entertainment, Graphic Aesthetics, and Brand Awareness affect the brand Quality.*

H4: *The impact of Brand Quality positively affects Brand Loyalty.*

According to the theory of planned behavior, if a person holds strong beliefs about a determined object that will facilitate a behavior, then the individual will have a stronger attitude and intention to behave positively in favor of the object (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980, Sheeran, 2002). It is, therefore, assumed that video game consumers who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community will have more positive attitudes toward LGBTQ+ cultural assets. This, in turn, might affect the value added to the use of LGBTQ+ cues on video games, impacting brand resonance. Therefore, the final hypothesis aims to explore the difference between LGBTQ+ and Non-LGBTQ+ consumers and the importance of including LGBTQ+ culture in video games:

H5: *The cultural asset of LGBTQ+ culture in video games will have greater value in self-identified members of the LGBTQ+ community than non-LGBTQ+ video game consumers*

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodology

The research conducted was a quantitative online questionnaire created through Qualtrics to analyze the purchasing factors of video games based on Keller's Brand Resonance Model. It consisted of a convenience sample to reach respondents who could state they have played video games that include LGBTQ+ culture, which was followed by asking them to select games that were part of a franchise with multiple LGBTQ+ games or single games outside a franchise, or by stating games they have played that were not listed. The survey was distributed worldwide through social media such as Facebook and Tumblr, and through a Twitter promotion from a LGBTQ+ writer and host of the popular podcast The Sewers of Paris, Matthew Baume (Baume, 2017). It was also promoted at Florida State University's Student Life Center's Gaming Community and was distributed online to reach the respondents who would have access to the internet and can play video games.

Sampling

The population of interest was consumers of the video game market, specifically ones who have played a video game with LGBTQ+ culture. This was determined by screening the respondents at the beginning of the self-administered survey by asking if they have played a video game with a character that can be identified as being part of the LGBTQ+ culture. If they chose that they did not, they were not administered the remaining questions of the survey.

At the time of data collection, a total of 524 respondents answered the survey, with only 488 responses able to be analyzed due to respondents not answering all questions or not having played LGBTQ+ video games. The ages ranged from 18 to 85 and older who voluntarily participated in the survey: 59% were aged between 18-24; ages 25-34 were 35.2%; the next age was 35-44 with only 4.5%; and those 45 and older only accounted for 1.2% of the sample (Appendix – Graphs: Graph 1). There were a range of different sexual identities: Bisexual – 33.8%; Homosexual/Gay – 32.8%; Asexual – 20.7%; Pansexual – 19.9%; Heterosexual/Straight – 9.2%; and Other – 9% (Appendix – Graphs: Graph 2). The race of the participants had low variation: White – 87.5%; Hispanic – 10.3%; Other – 7.2%; Asian – 6.4%; Black/African American – 3.9%; Native American/Alaskan Native – 1.8%; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander – 0.8%. Of the total respondents, 18.8% identified as transgender. Respondents played a variation of selected games given to the respondents, in addition to listing other games not able to be selected.

Instrument

A six-factor model of brand resonance was used to determine if the cultural asset of LGBTQ+ character representation has more impact on consumer's brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Jung, 2014). The factors for cultural asset, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty were used in the instrument. The other factors, fashion equity and technology advancement, were replaced with the entertainment value and aesthetic appeal of video games (Appendix A).

To test for the entertainment of a video game, an aspect from Schlinger's Viewer Response Profile (VRP) was used regarding entertainment (Schlinger, 1979). The VRP defines entertainment as the degree in which something is "pleasurable, enjoyable, and fun to watch" (Schlinger, 1979). It is composed of Likert-type items on a 7-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

To test for the attractiveness of the game's design, the experiential value scale (EVS) was used to test the dimension of aesthetic appeal (Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon, 2001). It is composed of Likert-type items, where it has been placed on a 7-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

DATA ANALYSIS

Validation of the Measures

There was a total of six scales used for this research: LGBTQ+ Cultural Asset; Entertainment Value; Graphic Aesthetics; Brand Awareness; Brand Quality; and Brand Loyalty. To validate the study, the suggested criteria for reliability would be 0.70 using Cronbach's Alpha. All scales were determined to be reliable. The LGBTQ+ Cultural Asset scale comprised seven items ($\alpha = .784$). The entertainment value scale consisted of seven items ($\alpha = .916$). The Graphic Aesthetics scale consisted of six items ($\alpha = .897$). The Brand Awareness scale consisted of six items ($\alpha = .844$). The Brand Quality scale consisted of six items ($\alpha = .866$). Finally, the Brand Loyalty scale comprised six items ($\alpha = .925$).

Based-Model Testing

In order to measure the impact of the perceived LGBTQ+ cultural assets toward the brand of the video game, in relation to video entertainment, visual value, brand awareness, brand quality and brand loyalty, a based-model was proposed (See Figure 1). The model was tested using a structural equation model (SEM) with AMOS. The results indicated the chi-squared divided by degrees of freedom was acceptable to the sample size, within the recommended range of 1 to 2 ($X^2/df = 1.93$) (Hair et al., 1998). The Goodness of Fit Index was above the acceptable level of .90 (GFI = .948). The Normed Fit Index was above the recommended number (NFI = .958), indicating that 95% of the observed measure co-variance was

explained by the based-model (Bentler & Bonnett, 1980). The Tucker-Lewis Fit Index (TLI = .974) which works as a measure of reliability coefficients for the model as a factor (Tucker & Lewis, 1973) was over the recommended value of .90 (Hair, et. al., 1989). The Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .979), which explains the difference between the model and the independent model without co-variable (Hu & Bentler, 1999), was over the recommended level of .95. Overall, the fit indicators suggest the based-model had a good fit and can be used to explore the coefficient paths between variables. See Fit measures in Table 1.

TABLE 1
FIT INDEXES AND CHI-SQUARED COMPARISON

Measure	Model- Based	Modeling LGBTQ+ Membership	Recommended Values
X ² / DF	1.93	1.68	< 3
p-value	p=.000	.000	
ΔX ²		15.76 (p=.202)	(Not signif.)
GFI	.948	-	>.90
CFI	.979	.970	>.90
TLI	.974	.963	>.90
NFI	.958	.930	>.90
RMSEA	.047	.037	<.080

Note: Recommended values are based on Kline, R. B. (2005), Principles and Practice of structural equation modeling.

The regression weights of the full sample based-model ranged between .06 and .52. The effect of “LGTBQ cultural assets” was significant at .000 across all factors, thus H1 was supported. However, contrary to what was hypothesized, “LGBTQ cultural assets” had a significantly greater impact on “video entertainment and visual aesthetics” than on “brand awareness.” Therefore, whilst H1 is supported, H2 is rejected. Next, the path coefficients between “video entertainment > quality” and “quality > brand loyalty” were not significant at .05; therefore, H3 is only partially supported. That is, the full sample based-model showed that “LGBTQ cultural assets,” “visual aesthetics,” and “brand awareness” affect “brand quality,” whilst “video entertainment” does not. Finally, in the case of video games portraying LGBTQ culture, the results showed no significant relationship between “brand quality” and “brand loyalty,” thus, H4 is rejected. Interestingly, regression weights indicated that the “LGBTQ cultural asset” is the most determinant predictor of “brand loyalty” ($\beta = .52$; $p=.000$). The regression weights are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
MULTIGROUP COMPARISON REGRESSION WEIGHTS

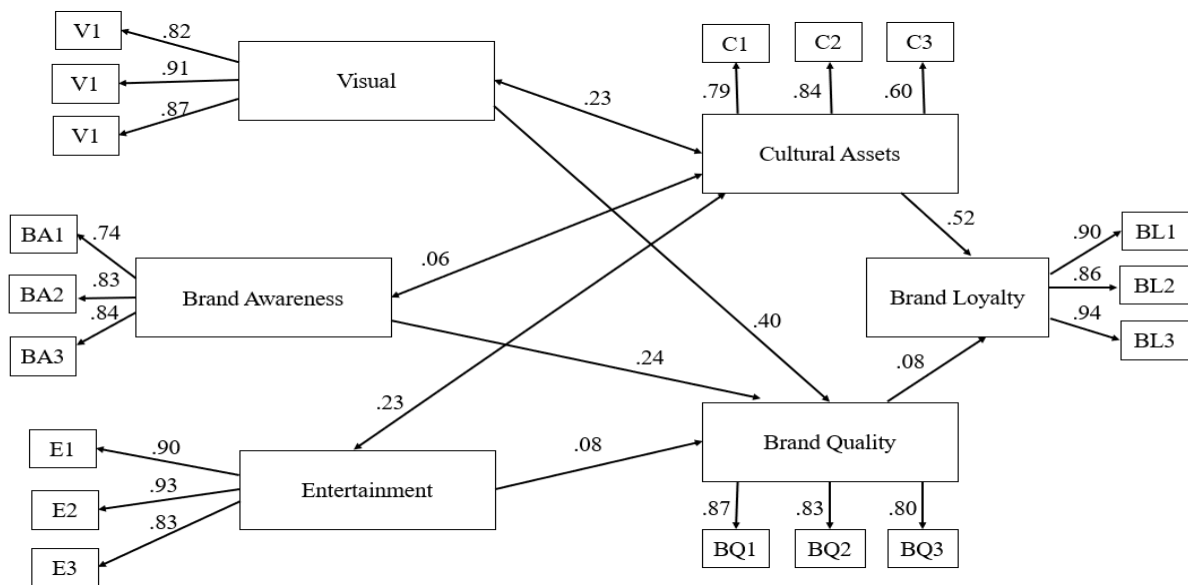
Standardized Regression	Full Sample MODEL	LGBTQ Sample Model	NON-LGBTQ Sample Model
Cultural > Visual	$\beta = .23$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .20$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .38$ ($p=.000$)
Cultural > Awareness	$\beta = .06$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .04$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .11$ ($p=.000$)
Cultural > Entertainment	$\beta = .23$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .16$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .56$ ($p=.000$)
Cultural > Quality	$\beta = .23$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .20$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .27$ ($p=.031$)
Awareness > Quality	$\beta = .24$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .22$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .31$ ($p=.007$)
Visual > Quality	$\beta = .40$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .44$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .40$ ($p=.001$)
Entertainment > Quality	$\beta = .08$ ($p=.120$)	$\beta = .01$ ($p=.827$)	$\beta = .24$ ($p=.034$)
B-Quality > Loyalty	$\beta = .08$ ($p=.083$)	$\beta = .01$ ($p=.302$)	$\beta = .28$ ($p=.043$)
Cultural > Loyalty	$\beta = .52$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = .56$ ($p=.000$)	$\beta = -.14$ ($p=.070$)

The Moderating Effect of LGBTQ+ Membership

A Multiple Group Analysis for Structural Equation was used across dependent samples to test the invariance of the groups while measuring the moderating effect of the participant's identification as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. In order to test Hypothesis 5 (H5), a Multigroup Analysis for each independent path was run to test the non-linear effect of "LGBTQ+ cultural assets" on brand "video entertainment," "visual aesthetics," "brand quality" and "loyalty" as shown in Hypotheses 1 and 3. Table 1 shows the fit indexes of the SEM multigroup comparisons and the chi-squared differences of constrained and unconstrained models within the model. The fit indexes LGBTQ+ unconstrained model shows a better fit for some measures than the based-model. The fit statistics and the chi-squared p-value and ratio are better for the Ethnicity model ($X^2/df = 1.68$). The fit indicators of this model were as good as the based-model. The Comparative Fit Index ($CFI = .970$) and Tucker-Lewis Fit Index ($TLI = .963$) were all greater than .90, indicating acceptable fit measures and low level of error for both models. Once more, the Normed fit Indexes ($NFI = .930$) was above the acceptable levels and RMSEA was .037, lower than the based-model. In sum, these results indicate the based-model had a better "fit" when it was moderated by LGTBQ+ membership affiliation.

In addition, the comparative chi-squared of the LGBTQ+ membership model path shows no significant differences between the constrained and unconstrained samples, indicating invariant measures and group differences. Specifically, the result indicates the influence of "LGBTQ cultural assets" on "brand loyalty" ($\Delta X^2 = 15.76$, $p = .202$) is not significant, which means that group differences exist. In other words, the effect of "LGBTQ+ cultural assets" on "brand quality" and "brand loyalty" might be weaker or stronger upon consumers' membership; that is, whether the participant is identified as a member or non-member of the LGBTQ community. Table 1 and 2 display fit indexes and the path coefficients for LGBTQ+ members and non-members in the model.

FIGURE 1
FULL SAMPLE MODEL REGRESSION WEIGHTS



The regression weights demonstrated that the "LGBTQ+ cultural asset" factor has a significant positive effect on "brand loyalty" among LGTBQ+ members ($\beta = .56$; $p = .000$), but none among non-LGBTQ consumers ($\beta = -.14$; $p = .070$). Therefore hypothesis 5 (H5) is supported. Conclusively, the results indicate that the impact of the "LGBTQ+ cultural assets" on "brand quality" and "brand loyalty" differs between LGBTQ- and non-LGBTQ consumers ($\Delta X^2 = 1.56$, $p = .210$). Whilst "video entertainment" and "brand

quality” are not key predictors of “brand loyalty” among LGBTQ+ consumers, these are significantly determinant in the model (at $<.05$) among non-LGBTQ consumers. Most interestingly, the results indicated, above all predictors, having an LGBTQ+ cultural cue on the video game is the most likely factor in creating loyal LGBTQ+ video game consumers.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

From the research, it is important to notice that the LGBTQ+ consumer is loyal to brands that include the LGBTQ+ culture. Games should include this culture to reach them. Video game brands that wish to target this market should concern themselves with increasing their brand awareness among the consumer as inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community. From the research, it was determined that LGBTQ+ culture led to brand loyalty – the ultimate pier of brand resonance – among LGBTQ+ consumers. Video game brands can use these findings to recommend pre-testing LGBTQ+ cues in games aimed to target the LGBTQ+ consumer with actual LGBTQ+ consumers. This can help avoid producing games/characters that, while meant with good intentions, result in bad representation – such as Mass Effect Andromeda’s initial release representation of the character of Hainly Abrams (Dale, 2017). It is also important for video game brands to provide diversity reports to show they are including LGBTQ+ minority groups in the production of their games.

Managerial Implications

The most important insight to derive from this research is that LGBTQ+ culture does matter for this consumer group in video games. What needs to be understood is that this is a good thing, and it does not take much to become inclusive of these consumers. Showing support for LGBTQ+ as people and including opportunities for them to be themselves will lead to loyal consumers. It is important to create lasting relationships with consumers so they continue to purchase products, yet this goes beyond capitalist gains. This form of media can help change the world through ideas and showing that people are just that: people. If companies can focus on increasing brand awareness by being LGBTQ+ supportive, it will increase brand quality and lead to brand loyalty – brand resonance. Yet, this study showed that including the culture was the most highly effective way to obtaining loyal consumers. This does not have to lead to creating a game simply of LGBTQ+ culture. Having ways for players to choose this connection – through having options for same-sex relationships or through having character identifiers that positively represent different gender identities – can be made to allow users to play the way they wish to play without compromising a loss in other target audiences. It is important to understand that there are LGBTQ+ gamers, and they deserve to be treated with the same respect and outreach as any cultural group. There is certainly more to accomplish in the industry of gaming in reaching the LGBTQ+ gaming consumer and achieving proper representation. Let’s simply press start and go.

Limitations

There are some limitations regarding the research conducted. The survey respondents were collected using a convenience sampling technique, asking subjects that were known to the researcher or known to those sharing the survey. There was no pre-test conducted on the survey. Some of the questions may have confused respondents based on wording and being unable to return to previous questions and change answers. There was a difference in the games respondents have played in terms of genres, graphics, and how visible the LGBTQ+ representation was in the game. Respondents stated that this made answering questions difficult because they felt differently about each game selected. They also were confused by the separation of multiple games in a franchise to single games, as the wording led them to believe that the single games were not part of a franchise, even when some were. Also, due to the number of respondents from a certain race, we were unable to test differences between race demographics given the limited variation between respondents. A lack of variation in age – mostly in the millennial generation – led to a lack of variation in other questions, specifically education, income, and relationship status. The

questionnaire also did not give individuals an opportunity to provide their sex identity, leaving out a way to categorize individuals who may identify as intersex. Lastly, there were some respondents who did not identify as being part of the LGBTQ+ community, but they had selected sexual and/or gender identities that are considered minority identities.

Directions for Future Research

Many steps can be taken to further understand how to market to the LGBTQ+ consumer and better represent them. Future research could be conducted employing a random sample. A way this could be done is through brands randomly distributing surveys to users' game network accounts. There could also be another layout for this survey, considering the confusion some respondents felt and determining a better way to organize the questions. Future research could also analyze specific games that most users have played to determine which one users enjoyed most or which had better representation. It would be important to also analyze what the representation is within these games through a content analysis. What would also be beneficial to multicultural markets is analyzing the country of origin from respondents to determine the difference among consumers worldwide. Future research could be compiled to analyze the difference regarding brand resonance between age groups, specifically LGBTQ+ gamers who are Millennial or Gen X, as the latter was the generation that grew up with first generation video games. It would also be interesting to conduct further research regarding race/ethnicity of LGBTQ+ representation in video games regarding humans vs. fantasy characters. Lastly, it would be important to analyze trans representation specifically in video games, as there are not as many mainstream games that have trans character representation or allow users to make their avatars identify as trans.

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APPENDIX

Six Factor Brand Resonance Model (Jung, 2014)

Country Image - Cultural Asset

This country possesses its own cultures that are differentiated from those of other countries

This country has affluent cultural assets

This country has cultural symbols which represent this country.

Brand Awareness

I am familiar with this brand

I am aware of what this brand stands for

I have an opinion about this brand

Perceived Quality

In comparison to alternative brands, this brand has superior quality

In comparison to alternative brands, this brand offers consistent high quality

In comparison to alternative brands, this brand is the best

Brand Loyalty

This brand would be my preferred choice

I consider myself loyal to this brand

I would recommend this brand to others

Response Profile: Viewer Response Profile: VRP (Schlinger 1979)

Entertainment

1. The commercial was lots of fun to watch and listen to.
2. I thought it was clever and entertaining.
3. It's the kind of commercial that keeps running through your mind after you've seen it.

Experiential Value Scale: EVS (Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon 2001)

Visual Appeal

Y1.The way XYZ displays its products is attractive.

Y2.XYZ's Internet site is aesthetically appealing.

Y3.I like the way XYZ's Internet site looks.