

# Values shaping consumer interactions on social commerce sites within game retail

**Master's thesis 30 ECTS**

Author: Anna Dunder

Supervisor: Anette Svingstedt

# Abstract

The game industry has continued to grow for decades and the social interaction trend has been growing for years in gaming. In retail, the e-commerce companies have been extending the social interaction trend to the e-commerce platforms and turning the e-commerce into social commerce. Even though the social commerce and gaming have aroused the interest of the researchers earlier, social commerce interactions have not been studied from the value perspective and how the consumer interactions are shaped by the consumer values. In addition, game purchases have not been studied from a value co-creation perspective even though the gaming has been discussed from a value co-creation perspective. This study approaches the console game retail by exploring how the game retailers support value proposition in the social commerce, how do the consumers reflect on the use of social interaction possibilities on these sites and how do the values shape these interactions. Ethnographic study was conducted in spring 2017, where 5 game retail site were analyzed, 12 Xbox and PlayStation console gamers were interviewed in Finland and in Sweden and one gaming group's chat was analyzed as part of the data collection. Content analysis revealed the game retailers offering several possibilities for the gamers to interact on their site from user reviews to participation in the streaming services. The discovered themes, why consumers used interactions, were the aspect of discovery, the aspect of offering the helping hand and the aspect of enjoyment. The study revealed how gamers, who had the possibility to interact privately on social commerce sites seemed to experience utilitarian, hedonic, social and altruistic values and these values shaped their interaction culture. The consumers, who only participated in the public social commerce interactions, only referred to utilitarian and hedonic values as part of their interactions.

*Key words:* social commerce, video games, value co-creation, consumer value, consumer culture theory

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# 1 Introduction

*“First video game console was Nintendo 8-bit “...”. We played a lot and it was kind of gaming that one my friends always came to my place to play. I had one friend, whom we played a lot with and we sat on the living room’s floor and played the Nintendo games, just the two of us.” – Tuomas, 31*

When consumers played video games in the 1990s, friends sat next to one another when challenging each other in Super Mario Bros. and Zelda games. The social gaming was part of many gamers after school activities already in the 1990s and games were exchanged with friends to be able to share the enjoyment that the game had offered. When fans of Super Mario and Zelda grew up, the gaming industry grew up with them and gameplay possibilities expanded from couch cooperation to online multiplayer games (Kuo, Hiler & Lutz 2017). For the past years, video games have been developed around the social gaming aspect, especially over the Internet, where friends and strangers are connected through the virtual world with headsets and multiplayer online games without the need of leaving home (Jansz 2005). As earlier studies have revealed, video games offer emotional support and the sense of belongingness for the gamers (e.g. O’Connor et al. 2015).

Gaming offers hedonic consumption for the gamers, though the game industry has been focusing tremendously on social interaction and the trend is still going strong (Davis, Lang & Gautam 2013; Hawley 2016). The dividing line between social media and game functions have been disappearing and popular games, such as Destiny and Minecraft, have encouraged players to interact during gaming, which has broadened the experience from entertainment to social experience for the gamers (Hawley 2016). Co-operation with other gamers is way to succeed in these games (Hawley 2016).

As social motive is strong in gaming (Jansz 2005), game retail has followed this trend by enabling consumers to interact with each other when purchasing games. While console games have been offering social interaction possibilities for years, game retailers have stretched these social elements also on the e-commerce sites, to create value for the consumer by offering similar elements to the purchase stage. Since many e-commerce companies today are focusing more and more on the social aspects on the sites, e-commerce platforms are developing into *social commerce* (Yadav et al. 2013). The social commerce can be seen as subcategory of an e-commerce, where social elements, such as user reviews and ratings are ways to enable better service for the consumer and help the consumers to make better purchase choices (Yadav et al. 2013; Zhang & Benyoucef 2016). For the

company, social commerce offers a way to utilize the social connections that the consumers have, and to gain profit from it (Yadav et al. 2013).

Even though the social commerce is not limited only to game retail, the similarity between social elements in gaming and on the store sites makes game social commerce an interesting study object. Games are something that consumers choose to spend hours of their time with and the game industry offers hedonic products for consumers to do this (Marchand & Henning-Turau 2013). From a retail marketing perspective, games have become a huge part of the entertainment industry together with the movie and music industries by offering hedonic experiences (Marchand & Henning-Turau 2013). Additionally, the game industry's success can be seen in the retail sales: in 2015 game retail's total sales were 4284 million SEK in Sweden with annual 24 % growth rate, where digital sales took the biggest share of the sales with 3299,4 million SEK (Dataspelbranschen 2016, p. 6; Association for the Nordic Game Industry. 2016, p.3).

From the consumer perspective, gaming is a hedonic and social experience (Abbasi & Jamak 2017). The gamers, who play on consoles, have the possibility to choose to interact with other players while playing to enhance the experience and value outcome (Marchand & Henning-Turau 2013). As earlier studies regarding gaming have highlighted the social aspect as part of the gameplay value, rather than how consumers perceive the value of social interactions in game purchases and how they reason the use of interaction possibilities on social commerce platforms, when purchasing games, more research on social aspects is needed. Therefore it seems, that earlier academic research hasn't addressed the topic regarding the game purchases, which is why this thesis focuses on the issue by studying game social commerce from the value creation, and possible value co-creation perspective and interprets how consumer values shape the consumer interactions on these social commerce sites.

## 1.1 Defining console gaming

To be able to study game retail, it is necessary to define the underlying concepts. The Oxford Dictionary defines a game console as “a small electronic device for playing computerized video games” (Stevenson 2010). Video games are referred as, when a consumer plays these games on a video game home console, such as Xbox, Nintendo Wii or PlayStation or on handheld devices such as Nintendo DS (Marchand & Henning-Turau 2013). These games can be played alone, together with friends, as online multiplayer or like in the 1990s, side by side sharing the couch and the TV screen. Game genres vary from first-person shooter action games, roleplaying to sport and platform games (Marchand & Henning-Turau 2013). Today, even virtual reality games, also called VR games,

are offered on game consoles such as PlayStation (Sony 2017a) to make the game experience even more authentic for the consumer.

Game commerce is a two-sided market, where console developers and console game developers are both creating the experience for the consumer (Marchand & Henning-Turau 2013). The gamers, the consumers of these console games, have the possibility to choose from multiple platforms, the “hardware” side, developed by Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo, as well as from game developers, the “software” side, such as Rockstar Games, EA and Ubisoft, to create the entertainment value they are looking for (Marchand & Henning-Turau 2013). Xbox and PlayStation networks are marketplaces, where a consumer can access the store, where games are sold as well as third party apps, such as Twitch, to watch game streams or apps like Netflix, to watch movies (Sony 2017b; Microsoft 2017). In addition, the marketplace offers subscription services, referred to as membership, giving access to online multiplayer possibility in addition to exclusive membership benefits such as monthly free games (Sony 2017b; Microsoft 2017).

As multiplayer gaming is about bringing social interactions as part of the gameplay, similarities can be seen in social commerce, where the consumer’s game purchases are supported with social elements and buying a game can be more than a simple transaction for the consumer. Retailers are expanding their selection of Web 2.0 elements on the e-commerce platforms and/or taking a bigger role on social media channels to interact with their consumers (Hajli & Sims 2015). Social commerce is a one way to connect the power of the consumer’s social ties to the e-commerce platform (Zhang & Benyoucef 2016).

## 1.2 Defining social commerce

Social commerce started in 1990s, when big retailers, such as Amazon and Ebay, added the first social features to e-commerce sites (Friedrich 2015). Consumers were able to evaluate products and deepen the knowledge of other users by sharing their own experience (Friedrich 2015). When e-commerce retailers have adopted more and more of these elements, it has aroused interest, not only within practitioners; but also in academic circles and social commerce publications have grown in the past decade (Busalim & Hussin 2016). The phenomenon has been studied in several fields, such as marketing, sociology and computer science (Friedrich 2015).

As social commerce research has gotten more attention over the years, mutual understanding of the social commerce concept is yet to be found. Definitions have varied over the years, however two major types of social commerce are the most

often referred ones in academic journals. Social commerce can be a social media site, such as Facebook, where consumers can interact as well as make purchases on the site (Liang & Turban 2011; Zhang & Benyoucef 2016). Social commerce can also refer to a retailer's online store on the website, where social elements have been added to enable better service for the customers (Zhang & Benyoucef 2016; Liang & Turban 2011). Busalim and Hussin (2016) highlighted, that the following four characteristics of social commerce distinguished social commerce from traditional e-commerce: *interactivity, collaboration, community and social aspects*. In this thesis, the social commerce definition follows Liang & Turban's definition (2011) and social commerce concept refers to an e-commerce platform, where social elements are embedded into the platform, making it a social commerce. Consumers have a possibility to access and use the interaction possibilities offered by the social commerce retailer on the online platform.

### 1.3 Earlier research on social commerce user behaviour and gaming

As several companies today offer online forums for the gamers to interact with the company and share their ideas (Goh, Heng & Ling 2013), electronic word of mouth has become an important information source in online shopping and consumption (Yoo, Sanders & Moon 2013). User roles might vary even when using the same media platform for the interactions. Social commerce is one possibility to support consumption activities with peer-to-peer communication and to make value proposition for the gamer.

Prior research on social commerce has broadened the understanding of user preferences on technical elements (e.g. Huang & Benyoucef 2015) or the value outcomes of social commerce (Kumar et al. 2010), however less focus has been given to the how value is created on social commerce platforms and especially in game retail. User behaviour in social commerce has got very much attention (e.g. Bai et al. 2015; Crossler & Sharma 2014); nevertheless quantitative studies have been dominating and descriptive studies have not been as popular as quantitative ones (Busalim & Hussin's 2016; Zhang & Benyoucef 2016).

In earlier research, importance of social elements, such as online reviews, was discovered as important part of consumer decision-making (Akar & Topcku 2011; Hajli 2015). Liang, Ho, Li and Turban (2011) highlighted, that when consumers adopt social commerce, social support from online friends is an important factor. Amblee and Bui (2011) have studied role of electronic word of mouth in purchase decisions and Liang et al. (2011) discovered social support as main factor of users social commerce intention. Pöyry, Parviainen and Malmivaara's study (2013)

revealed, that consumer motives to interact on company hosted social media sites can have hedonic and utilitarian motivations, however motivations shaped consumer behaviour on the site. Earlier research has also shown, that stronger engagement correlates to a stronger aim to use the social commerce (Pagani & Mirabello 2011). A pioneering study on consumer motivations to use social commerce was conducted in a grocery retail setting by Li, Liu and Tukkinen (2014), however grocery retail motivations might differ to other products, such as gaming. Food purchases might have a utilitarian need, when games are bought; it is for the entertainment need.

Console gaming has also been in the research focus earlier. Davis, Lang and Gautam (2013) discovered in their study, that hedonic consumption affects game consumption and game purchases. According to Hamari, et al. (2017), social incentives are strong within in-game purchases, for example when a consumer purchases in-game content, such as add-ons or extension packages for the games. Nonetheless, values shaping the social commerce use have not been studied with a qualitative approach and in an online console game commerce setting. As game retail grows and retailers are developing the e-commerce sites to social commerce, it is essential for the retailers to understand how the value is created from the consumer perspective on social commerce sites in game retail and how consumer values shape the interactions the consumers take. With this, retailers can develop marketing plans and design better services for the gamers to help with their purchase decisions. As Heinonen et al. (2010) refers, companies should try to get involved in consumer lives to support the value creation, instead of only making it possible for customers to become part of the company's life. Designing services from the consumer perspective is one way to do this.

## 1.4 Research issue

Supporting the consumer interactions can be seen as one possibility to be part of the consumer's life. As mentioned, being part of the consumer's life might strengthen the consumer's value co-creation, according to Heinonen et al. (2010). Retailers have tried to connect the consumer's social interaction needs and desires to the retail platform by offering social interaction tools to enhance the purchase experience. As the consumer value theory describes, consumer experience's main outcome is value (Babin, Dardin & Griffin 1994). Furthermore, consumers have endless possibilities to access different kinds of information through various media channels to support their consumption choices (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Due to this, it is important to understand how consumers use and reflect the collaboratively created value of the social interactions regarding game purchases. This has not been studied in the academic research earlier.

As Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) described, it is important for the companies to understand the dialogue they are having with customer. Social aspects in gaming have been studied earlier, however how values shape interactions in social commerce, has not come up in the earlier literature. Game retail sales keeps growing and retail has become more and more social and digital, but how are game retail companies creating value for the customer in the interactions and how do customers perceive the value of these interactions. Social interactions are bursting in social commerce platforms (Zhang & Benyoucef 2016), however what is the value of social interactions for the consumer in their game purchases and how can e-retailers support this, when designing their marketing strategies and supporting the consumer's value creation.

## 1.5 The aim of the study and research questions

Due to the incoherent nature of the studies on social commerce research, it is possible to say that social commerce research has a gap regarding value creation that shapes the consumer social commerce participation. In addition, game purchases have not been approached from the interactions point of view. The aim of this thesis is to explore interaction possibilities offered by console game retailers, describe the values that are created collaboratively in social commerce interactions and reflect on how consumer values shape these interactions. This study also answers the call on qualitative approach of social commerce research that was highlighted in earlier social commerce articles (Zhang & Benyoucef 2016; Busalim & Hussin 2016) as well as on the call for the marketing and consumer behaviour studies in connection to gaming (Seo et al. 2015). This thesis also deepens the understanding upon the consumer's value co-creation in game retail interactions.

This study attempts to answer the aim with the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the console game retailers support value creation on social commerce sites?

RQ2: How do the gamers reason their participation in the offered value creating activities on console game social commerce sites?

RQ3: How do the consumer values shape the social commerce interactions in console game retail?

## 1.6 Social commerce console game stores as empirical setting of the study

In this thesis, social commerce concept refers to onsite e-commerce platforms, where social elements are embedded into the e-commerce platform. Consumers have an access to the interaction possibilities, the social elements, on the online retail sites. A similar definition has been used by Liang and Turban (2011) as well as Huang and Benyoucef (2013). This thesis leaves out social media sites, which are often used as social commerce sites (e.g. Facebook and Instagram), from the research scope and focuses only on game retailers with social commerce.

To be able to understand value creation and consumer values shaping the use of social commerce and interaction possibilities, the empirical setting was narrowed around console game consumers. The author's own interest, when purchasing console games, also gave the input to explore the topic further.

In recent years, many social elements have been added to e-commerce sites in game retail, changing the sites to social commerce. The social elements made the study object interesting, since the author's own use of the social interaction channels was minimal and lead to the question; how other consumers use the interactions. Social commerce can be seen as facilitation of virtual community through value co-creation as described by Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric and Ilic (2013) in their study about the virtual communities. However, for the customers to be able to co-create in social commerce, customers need to be aware of the different possibilities that are available before and after the purchase; the whole purchase process. This led to the author's interest in, why consumers use the interaction possibilities on social commerce stores and how value is created through those interactions.

Both Xbox and PlayStation online stores on the consoles offer various possibilities to interact with peers as well as with the company. In addition, similar social elements have been added to various other e-retailer sites selling console games. In console games, Association for the Nordic game industry report revealed PlayStation and Xbox holding the biggest market shares in the Nordic countries in value and in volume, compared to other consoles such as Nintendo or PC (Association for the Nordic Game Industry 2016, p.3). These findings influenced and guided the study's empirical selection and narrowed the study's empirical focus on the consumers, the console gamers, who played with Xbox and/or PlayStation.

Qualitative empirical data was collected in Finland and in Sweden to enable broad data from a consumer perspective. Document analysis regarding interaction possibilities on social commerce sites was conducted on five social commerce retail sites, including the Xbox and PlayStation stores. The aims of the document

analysis was to understand the interaction possibilities that are offered for the consumers on social commerce sites in Sweden and Finland and reflect on the value creation that the retailers offer. Findings were also used to build a foundation for the interviews with social commerce users. By interviewing social commerce game site consumers, who owned at least one of the video game consoles, Xbox or PlayStation, descriptions of values shaping social commerce use was gained by reflecting consumer interviews in connection to the theory. In addition, the author was able to analyse interactions in its natural setting by conducting a content analysis on a private gaming group's chat conversations. Members of the group gave authorization for the data collection.

## 1.7 Contribution of the thesis and the outline

This thesis tries to describe and understand the console gamers' social commerce interactions use by exploring consumer practices through the consumer value creation and consumer culture theory perspectives. As earlier social commerce research has been mostly quantitative, this thesis tries to answer the call of qualitative research (Busalim & Hussin 2016) by exploring the interactions with qualitative ethnographic approach. In addition, by focusing on the gaming industry, the study broadens the academic research in this industry, which has not gotten that much attention over the years (Seo et al. 2015). This study contributes to the service management field by exploring the social commerce phenomena in the entertainment industry by giving the voice for the customers in the game retail and exploring their descriptions of social commerce interactions use.

In the service marketing, the emphasis is to engage the consumers in the companies' processes through value creation and co-creation (Grönroos 2009). As social commerce can be seen as a way to engage consumers in the digitalized retail, this thesis contributes to marketing research by offering qualitative and descriptive study on social commerce interactions with emphasis on consumer value. This study explores the interactions consumers take part in the social commerce platforms, which has not been studied earlier. Gaming and game retail have also gotten less attention in the academic research, even though game retail has been growing for the past decade and become an important part of the entertainment industry. This study also contributes to this academic discipline by bringing together game industry and service management and making a theoretical contribution to this research discipline.

As Haile and Altmann (2015) discussed in their paper, for the companies adding only technical features on software service platforms, this does not create a competitive advantage in today's business economy. To be able to compete in the market, value-creating services need to be integrated on these platforms. Social commerce can create competitive advantage in the digitalized game retail and as

societal relevance, this thesis supports the retailers in the entertainment industry by offering an exploratory description on the interactions, that consumers take part in. As gamers might have been a slightly neglected consumer group in the service marketing studies, this thesis tries to address this gap by focusing on console gamers. Retailers can use the findings to develop their social commerce from value creation and value propositions perspectives. Retailers in the entertainment industry can also use the study to design and facilitate better service offerings to their customers by understanding how consumers really use the interactions and support the cultural creation on these platforms.

In this thesis, social commerce interaction possibilities are approached with value co-creation and consumer value theories. First, the concepts of consumer value and value co-creation with consumer culture research are explained. Secondly, the qualitative methodology is introduced with emphasis on ethnographic interviews and document analysis. After the methodology, results are analysed and reflected in connection to value co-creation and consumer value theories. Final chapter summarizes the findings and gives managerial implications for the social commerce practitioners.

## 2 Literature review on consumer value theory & value co-creation allying with consumer culture theory

This chapter gives an overview of the theories that are used to discuss the social commerce interactions in connection to game retail. As the research questions highlight the consumer values and the roles and actions the consumers take in the social commerce platforms in game retail, it is essential to understand the consumer culture, that gamers are involved in. The social commerce platforms offer a place for value creation, which shapes the consumer culture that consumers take part in. Since, the value co-creation theory and consumer value theory are connected with consumer culture theory in this thesis.

First, value co-creation is introduced by using Service-dominant logic perspective and discussed in connection to consumer culture theory. Secondly, this chapter introduces consumer value dimensions that are discussed by using Sánchez-Fernández, Iniesta-Bonillo and Holbrook's (2009) theory on consumer value dimensions. The consumer value theory is adapted from Holbrook's (1999) original consumer value theory to be able to analyze consumer value in a service setting. At the end of the chapter, earlier research on gaming and social commerce in connection to the value creation is discussed.

### 2.1 Service marketing perspective on the importance of value

*The goal for marketing is to engage the firm with the customers' processes with an aim to support value creation in those processes, in a mutually beneficial way. – Christian Grönroos (2009 p.351)*

The customer management and communicating the company's service offering to the customers by creating value propositions to satisfy customer needs is the central goal of the service marketing, as described by Grönroos in the quote above (Grönroos 2009, p. 351). In the service marketing research, the Nordic School of Service Marketing, among others, has combined marketing research with consumption processes and focused on the interactions between the customer and company (Grönroos 2008). The aim of the service marketing research is to understand the dialogue the companies and customers are having and use the

findings to develop the companies service management (Grönroos & Ravald 2011). By understanding the customer's needs, companies are able to develop their service offering and improve their marketing and communication strategies. One way to develop service offering is to approach the services from the notion of value (Grönroos & Ravald 2011). All the services are seen as a resource integration, where actors engage themselves in the service activity and as a result co-create value for each other (Vargo & Lusch 2016).

While value and value co-creation have intrigued marketing and management scholars for decades (Grönroos & Ravald 2011), multiple aspects have been offered when discussing what value and value co-creation are (e.g. Vargo & Lusch 2004; 2008; 2016; Grönroos & Voima 2013). Marketing theorists have discussed the value co-creation process from the Service-Logic (Grönroos & Voima 2013), Goods-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch 2008) and Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch 2008) aspects. The consumers and companies' roles have shifted in the value chain process over the years and shaped the value creation, where tangible value e.g. from goods has been replaced by an intangible approach (Vargo & Lusch 2004).

## 2.2 The axioms of value co-creation

In service-dominant logic, the original terminology of the value creation theory has developed over the years. Vargo and Lusch (2004; 2006; 2008; 2016) have developed the value creation theory starting from a firm-customer centric view (Vargo & Lusch 2008) to an actor-to-actor perspective (Vargo & Lusch 2016). Even though companies are the service providers and they make the value proposition to the consumer, Vargo and Lusch (2016) highlight the aspect that the companies are the also beneficiaries in the value creation process, not only the consumer; therefore the actor-to-actor perspective is important. According to Grönroos and Voima (2013) the resources the customer uses in the consumption are dependable on the motivation the customer has.

When Vargo and Lusch discussed the value co-creation with service-dominant logic perspective, they defined value co-creation with eight foundational premises (FPs), which were published in 2004 in their article. A decade later in 2016, the authors developed the foundational premises and published 11 FPs, where five of the FPs were given axiom status that is cited in table 1 below.

	<b>Foundational Premises (year published), Axiom status in italics</b>
FP 1	<i>Service is the fundamental basis of exchange (2008)</i>
FP 2	Indirect exchange masks the fundamental basis of exchange (2008)
FP 3	Goods are distribution mechanisms for service provision.(2004)
FP 4	Operant resources are the fundamental source of strategic benefit. (2016)
FP 5	All economies are service economies. (2004)
FP 6	<i>Value is cocreated by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary.(2016)</i>
FP 7	Actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.(2016)
FP 8	A service-centered view is inherently beneficiary oriented and relational.(2016)
FP 9	<i>All social and economic actors are resource integrators. (2008)</i>
FP 10	<i>Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.(2008)</i>
FP 11	<i>Value cocreation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.(2016)</i>

*Table 1: Foundational premises and axioms in value co-creation, adapted from Vargo and Lusch's figure (2016, p.8)*

As seen in the table 1, Vargo and Lush (2016) see all the businesses as service economies, where actors, such as the company and the customer, integrate their resources and co-create value by taking part in the service offering. The value, which is created is context specific and it can be “literally created” or it can also “emerge for the customer” (Grönroos and Voima 2013, p. 138), nevertheless the company can never create the value; only the proposition of the value (Grönroos 2009). All the actors perceive the created value differently, because every actor in the process distinguishes and creates value from their own experiences (Grönroos & Voima 2013). A similar aspect is brought up by Vargo and Lusch (2016), in the axiom of value (FP 10), where they describe value as context-specific and unique, which is defined by the actor. Nevertheless, the companies can try to influence their customers with their value propositions by interacting with the customers in the co-creation and creating perceptions for the customers about the quality they receive by using the service, such as the social commerce platform.

Vargo and Lusch refer in their articles (2008; 2016), that value is always co-created. Nevertheless, Vargo and Lusch's statement has gotten critique from other authors, such as Grönroos (2008). According to Grönroos, value is not always co-created. Grönroos (2008) states, that the customer is creating the value, however if the company only provides resources such as gaming accessories for the

customer, the customer creates the value on his or her own by using the products, however the company does not take part in the value creation as co-creator. This is the underlying difference between the value creation and value co-creation (Grönroos 2008). Albeit, the company cannot create value on their own, a service provider can become a beneficiary of the value, as Vargo and Lusch (2016) defined.

An example, where a company can become a beneficiary in value co-creation are online chats on websites; the company makes value proposition for the customer by providing an interaction possibility, while the customer is visiting the website. By using the chat, the customer has the possibility to get additional information that he or she has not found from the website. The company can influence the information through the chat by giving additional information rather than leaving the information search in the hands of the customer. Both actors co-create the value that the customer gets from the online interaction. However, company can become the beneficiary of the value co-creation by keeping the customer on their site as well as by developing their services by using the information created in the chat discussions. In addition, Vargo and Lusch (2016) stress the importance of value co-creation as part of the company's strategy, since value should be the most important incentive for the business and the competitive advantage should come in second.

For the customer, value is created, when the customer can use the service (Grönroos 2009) and value is derived from the consumption experience (Babin, Darden & Driffin 1994). According to Holbrook (1987), in consumer research the focus is on studying consumer behaviour, which involves consumption by using a product or a service that provides value. To be able to understand value co-creation more comprehensively, the concepts of value and consumer value theory are further explored in the next subchapters.

## 2.3 Concept of value and the consumer's perceived value

Value has been defined in multiple ways over the years, such as perceived value, shopping value and consumer value (Khalifa 2004), undimensional as well as multidimensional (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo 2007). The difference between value and values has also been discussed for example by Holbrook (1999): value in singular form can be defined as outcome of the evaluation the consumer makes, however values in plural focus on the consumer's personal norms and goals, that they drive to exceed (Holbrook 1999). The reason, why value is an important concept in service marketing, is that value is seen as

stimulus for the consumer actions and as an outcome of the consumption experience (Babin, Darden & Driffin 1994).

Before consumer and company can be part of value co-creation, it's essential to understand why consumers choose to consume certain products; the perceived value the consumer gets by using the product or the service. According to Holbrook (1999), value exists in the interactions created by the consumer and the company and value is assessed in the social context of the production or the consumption activity. The customer's skills and knowledge, also referred as operant resources by Vargo and Lusch (e.g. 2008), are the main drivers for the value.

In 1991, Sheth, Newman and Gross defined a theory of consumption values to explain why consumers make certain choices in their consumption. The discovered theory was developed to explain, why a consumer chooses a certain brand over another or one product type instead of another (Sheth et al. 1991). Five consumption values were identified; functional, conditional, social, emotional and epistemic value. The axioms, the founding principals, where the theory was based stated, that each value is independent, however values can be part of the consumption on their own or together with other values. In the act of the consumption, the situation defines, which value or values influence the consumer's choices.

As mentioned, the five consumption values identified all have a different role in consumer decision-making. The functional value refers to the utility that guides the consumption choice, such as the utilitarian attributes of the product. Social value is referred, when a certain brand is chosen because of the status that the product gives, such as a car label or the social involvement, where the product or service is used. With emotional value, Sheth et al. (1991) refer to emotions and feelings that the product stimulates, such as choosing the same candy that the consumer had when growing up or as the authors refer, a consumer can even have a "love affair with their cars" (Sheth et al. 1991, p.161), although the primary function of the car could be the transportation aspect. Epistemic value suggests that the consumer's choice is guided by the curiosity of trying something new or the desire to learn, such as a new culture or a new technique in arts and crafts. Finally, conditional value supports the functional or social values with the perceived utility. Conditional value is present for example when sending Valentine's Day cards in February, since the cards wouldn't be fitting during any other time of the year.

In addition to Sheth et al. (1991) theory of consumption values, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) as well as Holbrook (1999) have discussed the perceived value in their articles. According to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), a consumer's shopping experience can be hedonic and/or utilitarian for the consumer. Utilitarian value is referred, when the consumer's shopping experience involves e.g. money saving aspect such as bargains and discounts, time saving aspect or

even a service standard. In online shopping, the easiness and the flexibility that the online shopping offers can influence the consumer from the utilitarian value perspective, as Childers, Carr, Peck and Carson (2001) discovered. Hedonic value instead emerges in the pleasure seeking, entertaining or emotionally driven consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982). The online shopping can for example be driven by the hedonic value, if the consumer can be involved in the interactivity, that the e-commerce offers (Childers et al. 2001).

Later, Holbrook developed consumer value typology in 1999, which can be seen in the table 2 below. Holbrook (1999) characterized consumer value from a self-oriented and other oriented point of view as well as from extrinsic and intrinsic value dimensions. By the extrinsic value, Holbrook (1999) referred to the economic and social values, where the value is derived from the consumer's external value, when in intrinsic value, the driver comes from within and can be described with terms such as hedonic and altruistic values.

		<b>Extrinsic</b>	<b>Intrinsic</b>
<b>Self-oriented</b>	Active	Economical value (efficiency/ convenience)	Hedonic value (play/fun)
	Reactive	Economical value (excellence/ quality)	Hedonic value (aesthetics)
<b>Other oriented</b>	Active	Social value (status/ success)	Altruistic value (ethics/morality)
	Reactive	Social value (esteem/ reputation/ materialism)	Altruistic value (spirituality/sacredness)

*Table 2: Consumer values by Holbrook (adapted from Holbrook 1999, p.12)*

Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo (2007) supported the Sheth et al.'s theory (1991), however they argued that some aspects were still missing, that were present in Holbrook's (1999) version (please see table 2). Due to this, the Holbrook's developed typology was updated by Sánchez-Fernández, Iniesta-Bonillo and Holbrook (2009), and the authors emphasised on how the new typology was aimed to fit better with the service context studies. As, Sánchez-Fernández, Iniesta-Bonillo and Holbrook (2009) developed Holbrook's consumer

value model (see table 2) further and defined six dimensions for the consumer value: *play*, *aesthetics*, *efficiency*, *quality*, *social value* and *altruistic value*.

By *play*, authors refer to the hedonistic, pleasure arousing consumption that can be characterized with terms such as fun and entertaining for the consumer, which is similar with the Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) definition of hedonic value. In the gaming communities, value of play can motivate the consumer to engage and create user-generated content in the game community and the game by offering a way to make the game even better for the gamer himself/herself or for the others (Roberts et al. 2014). With *Aesthetics*, consumption focuses on the intangible aspects, such as beauty, that brings pleasure for the consumer from an aesthetic point of view. Buying a painting, in a game, just as a decoration for the house could for example be driven by the intangible aspect of beauty, when the painting pleases the consumer aesthetically. With *efficiency*, the time and the money spent is compared to what the consumer gets in return, such as a product or a service or a service experience. *Quality* on the other hand refers to Holbrook's (1999) definition of excellence. Value of quality is accomplished, when the consumer can achieve a utilitarian goal with a product or a service used, such as the quality of the food in the restaurant or the quality of the retail staff at a luxury store.

*Social value* refers then on the manipulation of the positive impression towards other consumers. This can be for example a motivation to engage in non-transactional behaviour, such as writing user reviews online, which can give the consumer knowledge and reputation as a social value, as was discovered in an earlier study by Füller (2010). Consumers can for example gain a reputation in an online community, as the problem solver or the funny reviewer, but it can also simply be someone recognizing the engagement they have given for the company (Füller 2010). In gaming, Sjöblom and Hamari (2016) studied, the motivations of gamers watching Twitch and discovered, how Twitch streaming service is way to gain followers for those who practice the streaming, which can be seen as offering of social value for the streamers, however for the followers of the stream, the motivation to use the service came from the hedonic and information needs (Sjöblom & Hamari 2016).

With *altruistic value* Sánchez-Fernández, Iniesta-Bonillo and Holbrook (2009, p.102) mean "an other-orientated consumption experience valued intrinsically for its own sake as an end in itself". By this, the authors mean how helping others are the consumer's value drivers. By being concerned for other's wellbeing, affects the consumption choices that the consumer makes. This can be for example sustainable product choice, which does not harm the environment or doesn't use child labor, which supports the wellbeing of others through the consumption.

As the product choices are guided by the values, companies are trying to affect these choices by supporting the consumer's needs with value co-creation. As consumer behavior can be analyzed with consumer value dimensions, consumer

value can also be discussed from a value creation and co-creation process perspective, where both company and the consumer are part of the process. The next subchapter discusses the value co-creation from service-dominant logic perspectives with connection to consumer culture theory.

## 2.4 Consumer culture and value co-creation theories allies in research

When the Service-Dominant logic was published, the marketing research's focus was shifted from firm-centric value towards consumer-centric studies, aiming to understand consumer's value formation. However, this was not the first time that consumers were the focus of the research – consumer culture studies had been studying consumers and consumption for years. Skills and knowledge, which were highlighted by Vargo and Lusch (2004), were also mentioned in consumer culture studies; consumers' consumption acts were studied in retail venues such as flea markets, where skills and knowledge played an important role, as described by Arnould (2007).

Whether the consumption takes place in a flea market or at an IKEA store, both require skills and actions from the consumers to create value. Knowledge regarding what to look for and how to use the service are very much characterized in both services. Therefore, Arnould and Thompson (2005) stated, that Vargo and Lusch's (2004) value co-creation theory had similarities with consumer culture theory, as both were emphasizing value co-creation as the consumers joint effort to create meanings through context specific experiences. The experiences are the drivers for the value. Two years after Arnould and Thompson had published the historical overview of consumer culture theory, Arnould suggested in his own article (2007) that these theories should be referred to as "allies" of one another. The suggestion has also been supported by other authors such as Akaka, Schau and Vargo (2013). As this study's emphasis is on consumer actions, which the consumers makes on game social commerce sites, consumer culture theory gives broader understanding to study the interactions and values that are created in the social context of the marketplace.

Consumer culture theory has been characterized by the qualitative methodological approach to consumer studies, where the consumer actions are often studied in the connection of the marketplaces and cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Even though the consumer culture theory is referred as theory, it can be described more like an umbrella term for a variety of consumer research themes, rather than a grand theory (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Under the consumer culture theory umbrella, researchers have studied

dynamics and relationships among marketplaces, consumer activities as well as cultural values with an interdisciplinary approach (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Main emphasis on consumer culture theory is the effort to understand the sociocultural aspects of consumption, for example the consumer experiences, which are often shaped by social and cultural dimensions of consumption practices (Arnould & Thompson 2005).

Arnould and Thompson (2005) described consumer culture with the following quote: *“Much like a game where individuals improvise within the constraints of rules (Bourdieu 1990), consumer culture—and the marketplace ideology it conveys—frames consumers’ horizons of conceivable action, feeling, and thought, making certain patterns of behavior and sense-making interpretations more likely than others”* (Arnould & Thompson 2005, p. 869, also citing Bourdieu 1990 in the quote). Even though the cultural creation that is emphasized in the quote isn’t unique only for the consumer culture theory studies, the research conducted under the consumer culture theory umbrella has broadened the cultural, social and managerial perspectives of marketplaces that have been shaped by the consumption activities (Arnould & Thompson 2005). According to Arnold (2007) marketers’ actions have been approached as symbolic service offerings in consumer culture theory, which consumers use to produce meanings and cultural values through the consumption activity (Arnould & Thompson 2005).

To support the alliance between consumer culture theory and value co-creation theory, a good example is the axiom of how the value co-creation always includes the beneficiary. Consumer culture theory literature has shed a light on various consumption practices, where value has been the result of collaborative value co-creation (Akaka et al. 2013), which implies, how both theoretical approaches are focusing on similar aspects in the research. Similar to the consumer culture theory approach, discussion of the value co-creation has led to the important discovery, that the value for the actors is context specific and it is produced in the social context (Akaka et al. 2013).

Together with the discussion about the symbolic offerings, where companies are creating and co-creating the consumption experiences, Vargo and Lusch (2008) have highlighted the importance of the customer’s role in the value co-creation. In value co-creation, several actors, such as the company, the consumer and other customers, create value together by taking part in the service offering, sometimes being unaware of one another (Echeverri & Skålén 2011). By adding their own know-how to the value creation, customers are buying a symbolic service offering that is transformed to an experience, instead of only getting a product, and together co-creating the value with the company and the customers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2000; Grönroos & Voima 2013).

## 2.5 Value co-creation and consumer culture in gaming

Facilitating the value co-creation is important for the company and different activities, which the consumer can participate in, is one way of to enable co-creation (Hoyer et al. 2010). In gaming, the value creation process combines the game developers, console providers and the customers, where value is created through the game experience (Marchand & Henning-Turau 2013). Game developers create a game as value proposition, the console providers support the technical solutions and the gamers bring their skills and know-how, when playing the game and defining their value-in-use for them (Marchand & Henning-Turau 2013).

Earlier research found out how the gamers are looking for enjoyment (Shin 2010) and social interaction from the online gaming (Cole and Griffiths 2007). As Marchand and Henning-Turau (2013) emphasized, e.g. game experiences are for example co-created, where gamers are the co-producers of the experience together with the game developers. In addition, the games can become a social platform for the gamers to interact with friends and might even substitute other social communication platforms, such as WhatsApp (Marchand & Henning-Turau 2013). Though, as the primary service of the game is to create hedonic experience for the gamer, whether it is “gamefulness” or even “mastery” experience, the hedonic value is individually produced and shaped by the gamer’s skills and knowledge, the operant resources (Hamari & Huotari 2017). The customer combines his or her own resources with the company’s or another actor’s resources.

As highlighted by Akaka et. al (2013) and Vargo and Lusch (2008), value exists in the interactions that the consumer has with the company and with the peers. Therefore, Marchand and Henning-Turau (2013) point out that the gamers can use the games social interaction for playing purposes as well as other daily interactions. The social and cultural dimensions and how the gamers use the media platform in their game consumption can shape these interactions and gameplay interactions can become so meaningful, that the gameplay becomes secondary and engagement in the game community becomes more important. Earlier studies have for example revealed, when studying the content creating gamers in the branded game communities that storytelling was the motivator for the engagement (Harwood, Uwins & Garry 2015). Games can therefore be much more than way to entertain the consumer, games can act as a platform to interact with peers and enable cultural creation (Seo, Buchanan-Oliver & Fam 2015). As mentioned by Seo et al. (2015) computer games have become meaningful part of today’s consumer culture, where games can be much more than hedonic enjoyment and become part of consumer’s social life. Since, all the actors in the game retail shape the gaming culture the gamers are involved in. Hence, the

interactions are the key in the service management, where the company and the customer let each other to take part in the practices and engage with other's experience (Grönroos and Voima 2013).

## 2.6 Value co-creation in social commerce

As gaming is very much built upon value co-creation, the social commerce value creation and value co-creation are very much present. The social interactions that the consumer can participate in on the e-commerce platform, making it a social commerce, can be seen as a retailer's value proposition to co-creation of value. Social interaction elements on the social commerce site are supporting the customer experience on site and these social interaction possibilities can even personalize the experience for each consumer by offering a way for an interaction. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) described interactions as an open access dialogue with the consumer, which characterizes the social commerce interaction possibilities as well. The open dialogue reduces risks for the consumer and interactions are built upon transparent information (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004). Positive and negative views, as well as information, can be shared by using the social interaction possibilities and the communication can create value for the gamer, him or herself, as well as for other consumers and for the company (Kumar et al. 2010).

Earlier research has also discovered how strong an influence online reviews can have for consumers buying video games, however the writer, who has written the review, plays an important role. Cox and Kaimann (2015) discovered how professional reviews have a stronger influence on consumer's purchase behaviour and are more valuable for the consumer compared to peer reviews in video game purchases. Nevertheless the authors highlight that professional reviews are often available before the game is released when in peer reviews, the reviews are done after the game is released (Cox and Kaimann 2015).

With the tremendous possibilities for communication, the Service-Dominant Logic approach has changed the consumer relationships from one-way interaction to co-creation (Kumar et al. 2010). Dialogue however needs consumer participation to be able to create value. In an online setting, the user participation and the roles the consumer can take vary, according to earlier studies (Springer et al. 2015; Phang et al. 2015; Ma & Agarval 2007). As said by Phang et al. (2015), only a small amount of visitors take part in posting and consumer roles vary from lurker to active users. With active user Ma and Agarval (2007) refer to a user, who for example posts or reviews products online. Lurkers on the other hand are participants in the online communities, who don't contribute in posting other than reading or observing others in these online forums (Phang et al. 2015). Nevertheless, a lurker can be an active participant and follow conversations actively, however does not take part on the communication as producer (Springer

et al. 2015). As the online setting has extended the interactions, which consumers can take part of, remarkably, both lurkers and participants are needed in the social commerce. Therefore, the value creation has become dependent on both parties; companies cannot create value alone without the customers (Grönroos 2011).

To summarize, the value co-creation consist the value proposition, which has been defined as value offering from the company side, and the consumers are defining the value-in-use as part of the value creation process. (Grönroos & Voima 2013). When company and customer are both involved in the value process, value co-creation happens as an interaction. These interactions are socioculturally influenced, since the interactions are creating a consumption experience for the consumer and through using the social commerce offering, the consumer has the possibility to produce social and cultural values. In value creation, a customer constructs value to support the consumer's wellbeing, however value creation can also result as a negative and turn to value destruction (Echeverri & Skålén 2011). Value-in-use, or consumer value, is always temporal, since value creation needs time and the customer evaluates value from functional as well as emotional, social, environmental aspects (Norman and MacDonald 2004). However, if a customer cannot use the service, the outcome regarding value-in-use is zero (Grönroos 2008). Value creation is a complex matter, where the customer's value-in-use is connected to the "when, where and by whom" value is created (Voima, Heinonen & Strandvik 2010).

To explore how consumer values shape consumer's value co-creation in social commerce, a qualitative study was conducted in spring 2017. The next chapter goes through the ethnographic approach taken and reflects on the research methodology chosen.

## 3 Research design

As the study's aim is to discuss value co-creation and value dimensions in connection to social commerce interaction culture, the study was approached from a constructivist ontological stance. To be able to explore how values shape the consumer interactions, interpretivist epistemology is used to construct interpretations of value co-creation in the game retail and in the social commerce setting. This chapter goes through the research approach, the selected multi-method ethnographic and netnographic material collection and the sampling of the data. After the sampling of data, data analysing is described. At the end of the chapter, quality of study is discussed with ethical considerations.

### 3.1 Constructivist ethnographic approach

The qualitative multi-method constructivist stance characterizes the study, as it has been approached with ethnographic and netnographic techniques. In a qualitative study, the researcher is able to answer questions, such as “what is the value for the consumer” and “how is it reasoned by the consumer”, however from a subjective point of view (Silverman 2013, p.6). Using the abductive way of reasoning, the researcher is able to go back and forth with theory and data, which deepens the understanding and interpretation of the data (Bryman, 2012, p. 401). Reichertz (2010, p. 4) explains abduction as “intended to help social research, or rather social researchers, to be able to make new discoveries in a logically and methodologically ordered way”.

Interpretations of values shaping the consumer interactions in gaming commerce are reflected from a constructivist standpoint. According to Silverman (2013, pp. 37), in constructivism, people construct knowledge based on their experiences and experiences are interpreted subjectively; ontologically speaking the world is socially constructed and each person constructs the world differentially. Since this study is focusing on reflecting and interpreting data from a subjective perspective (Elo & Kyngäs 2008), the constructivist stance taken, can be justified.

In ethnography the data is collected as part of people's everyday life to be able understand the studied object or phenomena (Silverman 2013, p.49). Earlier, ethnography was widely used in anthropology, where a researcher was able to join the studied community for longer periods of time to familiarize himself or herself with the culture studied (May 2011, p.153). Nowadays, the digitalization has

changed the retailing and the consumer-retailer interface (Hagberg, Sundstrom & Egels-Zandén 2016). To be able to study online consumption, Kozinets (1998) developed netnography, by adapting the ethnographic approach, to study online forums and chats. As this thesis' focus is on social commerce, in the online setting and in the interactions, the study combines the ethnographic and the netnographic approaches to study social commerce and the consumer values that are generated in the online culture of the game commerce.

The choice of the qualitative ethnographic approach enables the researcher to explain and describe the gaming culture from value perspective, which is the focus of the study. When the study focuses on the interactions in specified social practises (Knoblauch 2005), focused ethnography is justified; in this thesis focus is on interactions of the social commerce. In short-term focused ethnography the emphasis is on studying a specific part of the culture, such as the value of interactions in game retail, instead of trying to describe the whole culture of social commerce (Pink & Morgan 2013). Short-term focused ethnography gives access to rich data in a short period of time (Pink & Morgan 2013) and in this thesis this has been gained using netnographic content analysis as well as ethnographic influenced interviews as data collection, which were gathered during two months.

## 3.2 Collection of primary data

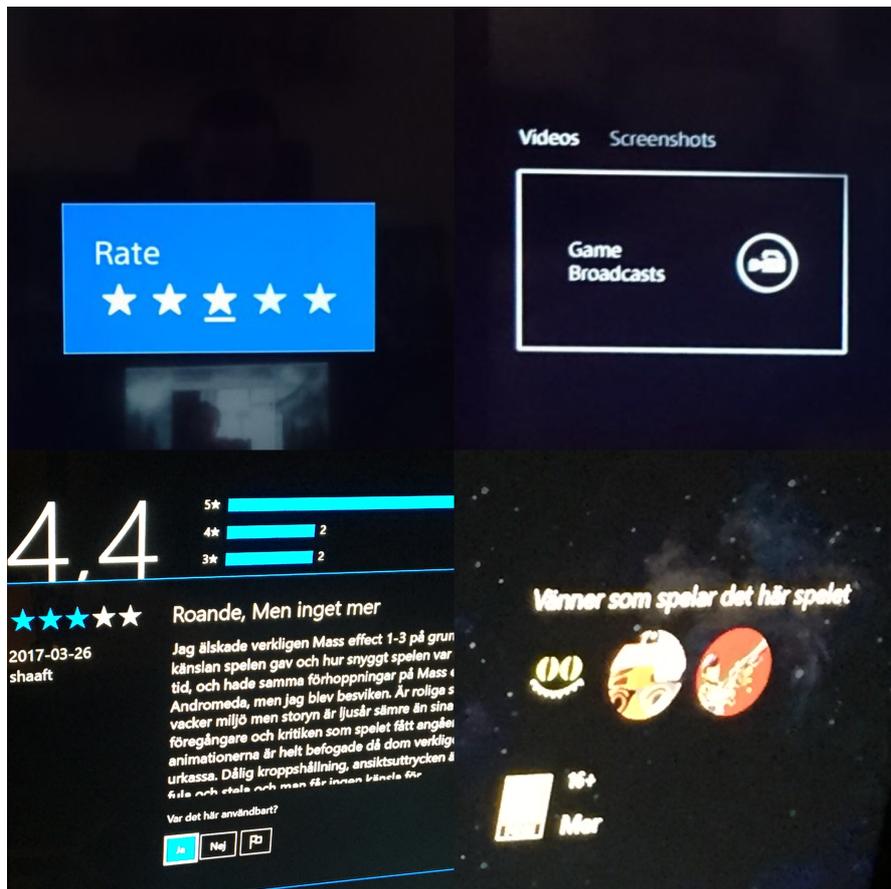
In ethnographic research, the aim is to understand everyday life, the culture, in its natural setting and see the world through the eyes of the consumer (Elliott & Jankell-Elliott, 2003). The researcher looks for a small sample of people, who can give "rich" data for the study and describe their lives (Pink & Morgan 2013). In-depth interviews are one way to understand consumer behaviour (Elliott & Jankell-Elliott, 2003). Due to this, the study started with a literature review and with qualitative content analysis on social commerce sites. Secondly, the console gamers were interviewed and interviews were analysed with content analysis. At the end, a private gaming group's chat was analysed with content analysis.

### 3.2.1 Literature review and sampling method of the retailers and the interviewees

As mentioned, the data collection of the thesis started with literature review on value creation, consumer values, gaming, as well as on social commerce. These were used as a theoretical basis to build an understanding of the earlier research. In order to find relevant research publications, topics were explored using the online search engine, LUB search, to which access was given by the Lund University. The keywords searched were: value, consumer value, value co-creation, consumer culture theory, social commerce, social e-commerce, gaming

and video games. Results were filtered by only using peer reviewed journals and books.

In the retailer sampling, purposeful sampling was used. Since PlayStation and Xbox have had the biggest market shares in the Nordics, according to recent studies (Association for the Nordic Game Industry 2016), PlayStation store and Xbox store were chosen as the focus points of the study. Also the researcher had access to both of these stores from the consoles. The newest console from Nintendo, the Switch, was launched during the data collection, which may have affected the market, however it was excluded from the study, since the Switch was launched in March 2017 (Nintendo 2017) and the data collection for the study had already begun. Regarding Nintendo store, the researcher did not have a similar access, which was the reason for the exclusion of the Nintendo store. The choice of the social commerce retailers was guided by popularity and country; chosen retailers were large, commonly known and to whom the interviewees might be potential customers. Detecting social commerce retailer from traditional e-commerce retailer was done by following the *interactivity, collaboration, community and social aspects* offered, which have been the defining characteristic of a social commerce, according to Busalim and Hussin (2016). Discovered technical elements supporting the interactions on social commerce were e.g. user reviews, game streaming, and chats for gamer groups as well as for customer service. Some of the interactions possibilities are shown in the collage below, the picture 1.



Picture 1: Some interaction possibilities on game social commerce sites

In addition to the Xbox and PlayStation stores, three other game retailers with social commerce were chosen as part of the study. One social commerce retailer (Retailer A) was available for both Finnish and Swedish consumers, one for Finnish consumers (Retailer B) and one retailer was only available for the Swedish consumers (Retailer C). The retailer sampling can be seen as purposeful. Nevertheless, the permission to be part of the study was not asked, which is the reason why the chosen Scandinavian retailer names are not published. However the reason to publish the names of two console retailers is due to number of consoles on the market: changing console names (e.g. to console A) wouldn't make the retailer anonymous, since the number of console manufacturers on the market is three at the moment, each having few different models within one brand (e.g. PS 3 and PS 4).

Purposive snowball sampling was used to select interviewees. According to Bryman (2004, p. 202), a snowball sample resembles a convenience sample, although the researcher does not know all the participants. However the researcher contacts the relevant consumers, who might be suitable for the study and allows the consumers to invite their fellow peers that fill the requirements. Sampling is not selected to be representative as the purpose of the study is not to make generalizations. Therefore snowball sampling is considered relevant for the study. Requirements for the interviewees were that they played Xbox and/or PlayStation

game consoles and were familiar with e-commerce stores with social elements. Activity level of participation in social commerce interactions was not part of the selection. In addition, one gaming group's chat was selected as part of the sample as the interviewees brought up the group and authorized the author's access. The sample for the gaming group chat was also purposive, since the private gaming group was used on a social commerce platform and it was part of the gaming experience of the gamers. The researcher also approached another private gaming group, however the access was not granted for their game conversations.

### 3.2.2 Qualitative content analysis on social commerce sites

The second step was qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is used to analyse text and objectively analyse phenomena (Elo & Kyngäs 2008). According to May (2011, p. 211) in qualitative document analysis, the researcher approaches documents from the study aim and interprets the documents from this perspective. In ethnography, The Internet can be used as naturally occurring data to gain access to a study object (Silverman 2013, p. 57) and give meaning to the communication, and understand the reasons behind the communication (Elo & Kyngäs 2008).

In this study, five social commerce stores related to game purchases were studied. Selected online retail stores, were checked with authenticity, credibility and representativeness in mind. According to Bryman (2012, p.544), when selecting the documents, the researcher should keep in mind the authenticity and credibility, meaning that the website is not false and the sites are not modified for the study. This was confirmed by only using websites that were big retailers in the Nordics and the interviewees could easily be their customers. Also using two social commerce stores, which were accessed via console, the authenticity and credibility, could be confirmed. Representativeness was kept in mind by selecting several stores for the study to be able to get the bigger picture of social interaction possibilities.

The motive for document study was for the author to gain deeper understanding of the multiple possibilities the console game social commerce offers for value creation through interactions. In content analysis, categories are used to describe the data and these categories originate from the data (Elo & Kyngäs 2008). This supports also Silverman's (2013, p. 54) suggestion, to study texts in detail and to have a clear approach when studying texts. Even though the author had some prior experience regarding the studied platforms, deeper and more comprehensive understanding was needed. The question asked, when exploring the commerce sites was: "How do retailers support value creation through online interaction possibilities" & "How can I, as a consumer, participate in the conversation on this site e.g. share, comment or ask questions ". Findings, which were also photographed, were used to guide the conversation in the

upcoming interviews and make sure all the possibilities for the interaction would be dealt with in the interview and no option would unintentionally be forgotten.

### 3.2.3 Interviews and content analysis

In addition to the content analysis, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted in Finland and in Sweden with Xbox and PlayStation console gamers, who bought games from social commerce stores at least occasionally. In ethnographic study, interviews can give access to information that might not be possible to access otherwise and give the possibility to enable conversation with the consumers (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.102, 110). One test interview with a game consumer was held before starting the interviews to test the themes and the interview guideline. The in-depth interview method was also dependent on the consumer input, since some of the consumers were a bit reluctant to describe the gaming as broadly as the author hoped. This led to the change of the interview technique in some of the interviews from in-depth to closer to semi-structured to keep the interviews flow going. As a result, 12 qualitative interviews with ethnographic influence were held with the game consumers in mid-April and in the beginning of May. Three of the interviewed consumers were also part of the studied private gaming group. Seven of the gamers were from Finland and five were from Sweden. The slightly higher number of Finnish consumers was due to some cancellations by the Swedish consumers. Interviews were conducted in Finnish with Finnish consumers and in English with Swedish consumers. Interviews lengths varied from 50 minutes to 90 minutes and were held via Skype or FaceTime.

Finding female gamers for the study became challenging since the sampling revealed less female gamers. In addition, the potential female gamers, who were referred by other consumers, did not always identify themselves as gamers and doubted themselves if they would be suitable for the study. This led to the unwillingness for some of the consumers to participate in the interviews. Out of 12 interviews, only three were with female consumers, which can be seen as delimitation on the study. A detailed list of interviewees can be seen in the table 3 below.

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender (M/F)	Location	Game Console	Date of the interview	Length of the interview (minutes)
Ville	36	M	Helsinki	PS 4	12.04.2017	95
Juha	38	M	Helsinki	PS 4, Xbox 360	18.04.2017	50
Sanna	28	F	Helsinki	PS 4	24.04.2017	50
Karoliina	27	F	Tampere	PS 3	05.05.2017	55
Pekka	34	M	Tampere	PS 4	12.04.2017	50
Jukka	34	M	Helsinki	PS 4	26.04.2017	65
Tuomas	31	M	Helsinki	PS 4	20.04.2017	55
Anton	28	M	Stockholm	Xbox one	24.04.2017	50
Ida	22	F	Stockholm	PS 4, Xbox 360	07.05.2017	60
Ben	30	M	Stockholm	Xbox one	13.04.2017	55
Alex	28	M	Norrköping	Xbox one	19.04.2017	50
Peter	25	M	Stockholm	Xbox one	16.04.2017	70

*Table 3: List of the interviewed consumers*

In all the interviews, photographs of interaction possibilities were shown to the participants to illustrate the referred interaction possibility. Photographs also helped to make sure, that interviewees as well as the researcher both referred to the same communication channel and to prevent a misunderstanding of communication possibilities. The interviews were built upon on different themes. In the interviews, the author asked the gamers to describe their gaming and what kind of games they liked to play. In addition, descriptions of the consumers' game purchases were inquired about. With the descriptions, the author was able to understand the consumer's preferences regarding games and, which were used as examples, when asking follow-up questions regarding the social commerce interactions. All the interviews dealt with gaming and game purchases and how consumers use interaction possibilities on the social commerce sites. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and translated by the author. The author translated the Finnish quotes, which were used as examples in the analysis chapter to English (please see the Appendix 1 for translations) to illustrate the Finnish gamers' views. As exact expressions are difficult to translate from one language to another, the content of the interviews was the focus, not the exact expressions of the interviewees. Translations can therefore be justified and using Finnish language in Finland helped the Finnish consumers to express their thoughts more vividly.

After the interviews were transcribed, audio recordings were deleted from the computer and 180 pages of transcriptions were analysed using qualitative content

analysis. In the content analysis, the focus was on reflecting the values that shape the social commerce interactions in game commerce and how consumers reason their participation in those interactions. Analysing was twofold, where first value creation process was divided to analysing categories (value proposition, value creation/value co-creation and value-in-use) and in the second phase, consumption values (such as hedonic and altruistic value) were used as analysing categories.

Categorizing is seen as the most critical part of the analysing phase, according to Elo and Kyngäs (2008). Elo and Kyngäs (2008) also stress that the researcher should decide if latent content, such as laugh, silence should be included on the analysis and reflect the hidden meanings behind the text. As this thesis's aim is to reflect the values that shape the interactions, the interpretations and hidden meanings were included in the content analysis.

### 3.2.4 Qualitative content analysis on private gaming group's chat discussions

A qualitative content analysis was also conducted in private gaming group's chat discussion parallel with consumer interviews. The gamers' interactions were studied in the private chat group that was "naturally occurring" and established by the gamers themselves a few years earlier to support their gaming. Due to the digitalization, the digital world is part of the consumer's life as the "real" world and conversations that occur face-to-face can continue nowadays in the virtual world (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, pp. 138-139). This was the reason to also include virtual conversations in the research scope to get a broader understanding of the interactions that gamers have.

In ethnography, it is important that chosen methods that are used for the study are authorized by asking permission and access from the people that are studied (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, pp. 3-4). In addition, negotiation on why access is needed and what the purpose of the research is, needs to be made clear for all the members (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.58) Moreover Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.79) mention, that the researcher's role is good to consider before gathering data.

In this study, the author explained the aim of the research and promised full anonymity to the gamers and not to interfere with the flow of conversation and only be a non-participant observer in their conversation. The gamers were promised a dinner as a thank you for the participation. All the group members (4 consumers) accepted the terms of the agreement and promised to continue the conversation just as before the researcher's involvement. Also the hashtag #nofilter was suggested by the group members, when agreeing with the researcher's participation, which described the openness the group had towards the researcher.

Data collection of the private chat group conversations lasted 5 weeks and was timed near a new release of a popular game, which the group had been discussing for months. With the timing it was possible to gather data before, during and after the game launch and to get a broader understanding of interactions connected to bigger game purchases. The conversation in the group was active and occurred daily resulting in 90 pages of gathered data. The communication was mostly conducted in Swedish. Even though the author is not a native speaker, the understanding of Swedish is at an advanced level, which did not cause barriers in understanding of the content. However, the researcher realizes, that not being a native speaker, interpretations of the interactions might differ from a native speaker. Nevertheless, the author was able to check the expressions /meanings from a group member, when analysing the content, if uncertainty would come up. Being accepted as part of the group, it was possible to collect data on how consumers interacted in their private gaming group and to obtain deep and authentic access to the naturally occurring data. As many of these types of chat groups are closed from the public and are based on friendships, according to gamers, it would have been difficult to get similar data from somewhere else. Also by seeing the interactions in real life rather than only being told about the interactions, supported the research aim and the data collection.

After the data collection, the conversation was printed out and analysed from two perspectives: from value creation perspective and consumption value perspective. The content analysis was done after the interviews to be able to reflect the consumer's descriptions of the use of the gaming group and to interpret how consumer values shape the interactions in the group. The document was approached with a value creation perspective to be able to understand how value is created in the private chat group and how it is shaped by consumption values (hedonic, utilitarian and altruistic values), which were the themes that came up in the interviews as reasons for the private gaming groups usage.

### 3.3 Collection of secondary data collection and quality of the study

During the thesis data collection, secondary data was also used. During the literature review, as a base for understanding the social commerce phenomenon, recent literature reviews were used to check, that no potential articles, that could be used for the thesis were forgotten, if LubSearch's keyword search did not show all the results. This is due to the shattered research and different definitions of social commerce. Secondary data was also used, when referring to statistics of game sales in the Nordics. Interpretations of the collected material were done from the constructivist standpoint. When analysing the findings, content analysis was used as the chosen method.

### 3.3.1 Quality of the study

The purpose was to reflect and construct an understanding of consumer values shaping social commerce game site interactions, however the results are context-specific and should not be transferred as such to other social commerce context. The results of this study are not meant to be generalized as they would be in a positivistic approach (Bryman 2012, p. 47).

Analysis of the data has been done in an interpretative way, meaning that how the researcher interprets the data also affect the findings. This is in connection to the constructivism, since the world we see is socially constructed and people have their own view on how the culture is analysed. However, four quality criteria can be used to the present the trustworthiness of the study: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Howell 2013, p.190). Credibility has been gained by using a multi-method approach to reach the aim of the study. Transferability of the study is emphasized in transparency, how the study is conducted together with thick descriptions, which are shown in the analysis. Dependability is shown by the thesis process, where the supervisor has been involved through the whole process by auditing the study throughout the journey. With confirmability, the author can show in the analysis the authentic data and how the interpretations are made with quotes and pictures from social commerce store. As Howell mentions (2013, pp. 188-189), qualitative research aims to be trustworthy, which implicates that “access to knowledge and meaning has been realised”. As collected primary and secondary data support the study’s aim, and research questions are carefully answered, the study’s aim can be achieved.

### 3.3.2 Ethical considerations

As ethnography provides easily accessible data, ethical considerations are good to keep in mind when collecting data (Silverman 2013, p. 57). In this study, ethical considerations were important and emphasized from the beginning. No pressure was put on consumers to take part in interviews, supporting the voluntary participation and all the consumers knew what the study was about, meaning the consumers gave their informed consent, when signing up. As mentioned earlier, the interviewees were contacted personally and in the messages the purpose of the thesis was explained, how the author got the contact information of the interviewee (e.g. recommended by a friend) and what would the participation mean for the consumer as well as the wish to audio record and transcribe the possible interview. In addition the aim and the recording permission was mentioned and explained again, for the interviewees, in the beginning of each interview. The author also promised to delete audio recordings from all the devices, when the thesis was handed in. These ethical considerations also follow the guidelines emphasized by Bryman (2012) and May (2011).

The social commerce sites used were public and accessible for all the Internet users. The retailers that were used as example were left anonymous in this thesis, except for the Xbox Store and PlayStation store as the stores were accessible through the game console and characterized by the consoles technical solutions. Anonymity for other retailers was chosen because, the thesis was not done for any specific company and making retailers anonymous was better for the analysing part because emphasis was not on the stores, rather on the social interaction possibilities. Leaving console game stores without the anonymity was intentional since those were used as part of the sampling and the number of video game home console manufacturers that exist is very limited, which would make the anonymity impractical as well.

For the interviewees, anonymity of identity was promised in the beginning. This was important to be able to promise a comfortable interview for the consumers where they would be able to speak freely. Also, other people that were mentioned during the interviews were promised anonymity to protect their identities. The consumers agreed, that age and location could be mentioned with changed names. In addition, possible comments regarding their activities that might be considered a grey area and which might break some laws were left out from the research scope. This was done to protect the interviewees and leaving out those comments from the thesis had no effect on the data analysis, since the comments were not meaningful for the study. In content analysis regarding the private gaming group's chat, the same anonymity was promised for the gamers as in the interviews. All the data was handled only by the author and after the research, all the collected data was disposed of.

## 4 Empirical study

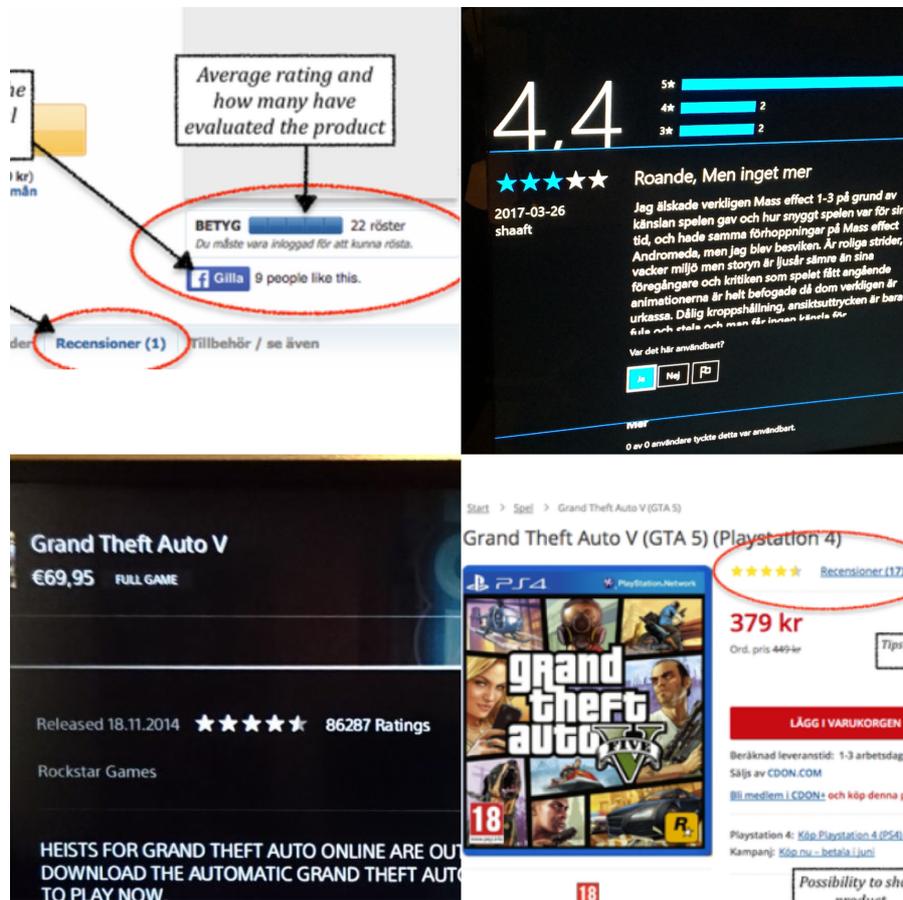
Content analysis on the game retail's social commerce sites revealed several possibilities for interactions for the consumers. The following subchapters discuss the findings from retailer and consumer aspects and research questions are answered in parallel. Reflecting the discovered themes with value co-creation and consumer value theories in parallel aims to build a holistic view on the social interactions on game social sites. Discovered themes from the consumer interviews were the aspect of discovery, offering the helping hand and the aspect of enjoyment. First, the aspect of discovery is discussed from the evaluation possibilities and the consumer's role point of view. Second aspect, offering the helping hand on the game sites, is discussed from a gameplay co-creation perspective. The final theme brings the aspect on enjoyment into the discussion.

### 4.1 The aspect of discovery: evaluation possibilities on social commerce sites

As the consumer's game choices can be guided by the consumer values, the game retailers are trying to influence these values by offering various evaluation possibilities, which can be interpreted as value proposition for the gamers (Grönroos & Voima 2013). This study's data collection on game social commerce sites revealed retailers offering various user reviews for the consumers as a way to access information and to interact with one another – for the aspect of discovery. Hence, the evaluation possibilities illustrate, how several actors, as described by Vargo and Lusch (2016) can be part of the value co-creation process in game social commerce sites, where actors combine their resources and knowledge in the service activity (Vargo & Lusch 2008; Grönroos 2008).

On the social commerce sites, game retailers presented evaluation possibilities often by emphasizing user reviews with star ratings or numeric scales and the user reviews were shown together with game's product information. In addition to star ratings, four retailers offered comment possibilities with the star rating, where consumers could comment the game, together with the star rating and possibly explain the decision behind the given review, such as the \*\*\*\*, which can be seen as supporting the consumer motivation to participate in the value creating activity, as highlighted by Grönroos and Voima (2013). Other customers could also like and unlike the consumer's comments by clicking the thumbs up/down signs. As Marchand and Henning-Turau (2013) mentioned, the game experiences are co-created by the game developers and the consumer and in a similar way the game

information can be co-created by the game developers and the peer reviewers, as can be seen in the picture 2.



Picture 2: User reviews on game retailer's social commerce sites

All the evaluation possibilities can be understood as a way to facilitate co-creation through the interactions on social commerce sites (Hoyer et al. 2010), which is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the social commerce, as mentioned by Busalim and Hussin (2016). For the customer, who has not yet made the purchase, the user reviews can be a way to access peer generated information, which can be understood as “literally created” value (Grönroos & Voima 2013, p.138). For the consumer it can be a way to express the consumer’s own thoughts by evaluating a game, such as giving a game \*\*\*\* stars, which is a good example of value, that “emerges” for the consumer (Grönroos & Voima 2013, p.138).

By offering the user reviews with liking, a retailer is offering a two-way communication on the site and enabling the customers also to take part in the conversation and the community, even if they have not purchased the game. This can be seen as an offering of quality (Sánchez-Fernández et al. 2009) through community aspect (Busalim and Hussin (2016). Communities are a way to engage

the consumers on the platform, as came up in the earlier study (Füller 2010), however the value co-creation is naturally dependent on the activity of other gamers on the platform.

From the retailer perspective, the information offering can also be seen as a step towards value co-creation strategy (Vargo & Lusch 2016), where the notion of value is a way to improve the service offering for the customers (Grönroos & Ravald 2011). Thus, co-creation of the interactions can also be a way to create competitive advantage towards other game retailers through the offer of efficiency (Sánchez-Fernández et al. 2009).

When the gamers were interviewed, the importance of user reviews came up in all the interviews. For the gamer, the games could act like a stimulus (Babin et al. 1994), to take part in the user reviews on social commerce sites, however the interviewed consumers rarely took part in the activity. For the interviewed gamers, user reviews were often also a way to access information, when browsing games and evaluating how the value of play was balanced with the value of efficiency (Sánchez-Fernández et al. 2009). The reviews gave a possibility to compare the price with the possible game experience, as described by Ida and Sanna below:

*“ ... after a while you get all the reviews from other people who have played it. So it will help you make the decision if you should buy it or not. So I believe it’s a good reason to wait awhile (when the game is published).” – Ida, 22*

*”You pay a surprisingly lot of attention to the reviews nowadays. If the bad review catches you eye immediately, so it’s a bit like is the game any good. Well, I think the review and game price as well as what kind of game that determines a lot when buying. You do read the reviews with the lens of what are the others saying about the game. And usually there is some short (description) and even these trailers, which you often check. Those already tell you a lot. It tells me quite well, if is it worth buying. – Sanna, 28*

User reviews as well as professional game reviews were a way to satisfy the gamer’s information need, however the game retailer’s offering regarding the reviews was only partial and often professional reviews were left out from the platform. This sometimes led to dissatisfied consumers, since all the gamers used other websites on Internet to support their information search, which is similar to the findings of Cox and Kaimann (2015), who discovered that professional reviews were more valuable than the peer reviews for the gamers. As Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) mention, various media channels are available to support the consumers’ consumption choices, which challenges the retailer’s information offering. Nevertheless, when consumers already had a game in mind, user reviews were described sufficient enough. Therefore, user reviews can be understood as value creation instead of co-creation (Grönroos 2008), since the customers only

used the information provided by the retailer in these situations and did not engage themselves with the activity other than lurking the information.

Interviewees did however point out, that the information search had its drawbacks sometimes, when the reviews took a bigger role in the gamer's decision-making process, than they would have wanted. When a peer or official game magazine reviewer evaluated the game from their personal perspective and the reviewer did not enjoy the game as much as he or she had hoped for, it was not seen as value creation for the gamer, since it might turn into value destruction (Echeverri & Skålén 2011). User reviews were seen an important, however also powerful, since reviews had the ability to end the consumer's information search or influence game purchase on the retail site, as could be seen on Ville's and Anton's quotes:

*"... when you've heard about some game and you've checked that from PS Store, it might have been given only couple stars. Then it might turn to, that I'm not interested in it anymore and I don't want to search for more, if it's so bad."*

*– Ville, 36*

*"... I am quite concerned by review scores and what magazines or websites give as a score, before I buy a game. And that's.. I'm a bit annoyed by that because I can't really buy a game that has got bad reviews even though I might suspect that I personally might like it. While the reviewer might not have. For various reasons, I mean a good review helps you to get a picture, if this game is worth money I'm going to spend on it. On the other hand, I'm not like.. if I don't try something myself I never know if I personally would like the game or not. Which is.. I mean the culture is that way kind of annoying because so much hangs upon what review the game will get." – Anton, 28*

## 4.2 The aspect of discovery: the consumer's role and authentic reviews on social commerce sites

Another aspect with the discovery theme was the consumers' roles and how they participated in reviewing the games. The possible hedonic experience, which the game had offered (Abbasi and Jamak 2017; Hamari & Huotari 2017), could be re-lived and re-experienced by sharing the positive and negative feelings by using the evaluation tools on a game retailer's site. By writing a review about a game, the gamer could share his or her own consumption values (Seth et al. 1994) and could also be a way to help others with their purchase choices by offering additional information about the game. Nevertheless, the gamers described themselves being active lurkers, as described by Phang et. al. (2015), when

searching for information, however they did not actively participate publicly in the game retail communities. For them, co-creation of value by exposing themselves was rarely part of the culture and the consumers did not see the value of publicly reviewing a game. Even though the retailers had opened the door for this with user reviews, questions and answer's sections as well as with chat options, exposure was not something that the gamers enjoyed and the quality of the chat and the customer service was lessened for the gamers.

Further, when discussing with gamers about their own participation in game reviews, some of the gamers were surprised about the possibilities the retailers were offering. It wasn't that the retailer was unfamiliar to them, some of the gamers were not aware of how to technically participate in the interactions on platforms where they were buying their games from. A similar finding was done in the content analysis. For example, some of the retailers showed the user reviews side by side with information the game company had provided. Therefore, the information the users had created and the visibility it's been offered by the retailer can be interpreted implying that the user reviews are seen as important as the official game company's information from value perspective, when value proposition is made for the consumer.

Nevertheless, some retailers however had placed the user-generated information to the lowest part of the site, which from customer perspective it took a lot of effort to find, which might be the reason, why the consumers were not aware of the service. As some of the retailer's value propositions have not been clear for the consumer in connection to user reviews, engaging in the provided interactions possibilities is not possible for the customer, if the customer is not aware of the service. Therefore the findings are not supporting the Grönroos' (2009) statement on how value is created, since the customer cannot engage in the service. The findings do support the Holbrooks's (1999) idea how value is created in the interactions, which is the reason why retailers need to communicate the service offering clearly for the customers. Unclear value proposition also raises a question, if the user-generated information was seen as valuable for the retailer as the general product descriptions and how retailers meant their value proposition to be understood.

On the other hand, if some of the consumers were not aware of the evaluation possibilities, two of the retailers also challenged the reviewing process by restricting the reviews and limiting the evaluation only on those products, which were purchased from that specific retailer. This might also be a reason, why reviewing lead to the confusion by some of the consumers. For example, PlayStation store and Retailer A offered evaluation possibility only on the products, which were purchased from the retailer's own site. Other retailers, such as Xbox store and Retailers B & C allowed the consumer to evaluate the product on their store, even if the product was bought from another retailer. Though, Retailer C showed "verified purchase" status next to the review, if the consumer who had given the evaluation had purchased the product from them. Verified

game reviews can be understood as retailer's way to make value proposition for the customer's by offering quality (Sánchez-Fernández et al. 2009), through transparent peer reviews. Nevertheless, the findings are in contrast with the earlier studies (Harwood et al. 2015) as the retailers seems to be restricting the storytelling, which was discovered the main motivator to engage in game communities.

Analysis on consumers' views showed how consumers experienced the restrictions as two-fold. The restrictions were seen as positive in a way that the consumer really needed to have the game, to be able to evaluate game. It was also seen as a way to make sure, that the information was given by a gamer, which actually had played the game. Nevertheless, half of the consumers said how they wanted their games as physical copies, when talking about big and expensive games, which limited e.g. the evaluation of those games. For example, if the consumer had PlayStation and bought a game as physical copy, he or she was not able to review the game in the PlayStation Store, since the game was not purchased there, as the store only offered digital copies. Restrictions were positive as well limiting, from the consumer perspective.

Still, for few consumers the more common role in public as a lurker was occasionally changed to active participant on a game review site. The reason for the shift was the extreme emotions that the games brought up, such as hedonic pleasure or huge disappointment, which were similar to earlier studies findings of the game experiences (Abbasi & Jamak 2017). Because of the extreme experiences, consumers felt the need to share it with other gamers, when they had the possibility to take part in reviewing. On other hand, the consumers who had not participated in the game reviews mentioned, how it could be beneficial to share the games that he or she had liked. However he or she had not had "the feeling" or the need to do it, in contrast to the other two consumers with extreme emotions, as can be seen in the quotes below.

*"The games I've really reviewed have been the games I've really been pleased with. That I have been wanting to say that this game is really worth of time and money." -Anton, 28*

*" And to be honest I usually only review a product if it's really really bad and I want to give feedback. I usually don't review something if I'm really happy about it. " – Ben 30*

*"You might not have the effort what it takes to review something. I have not thought about that. Maybe if they (companies) would motivate it somehow to evaluate those games, that you would to get some discount for the next game or get some points or benefits later on. You might be motivated, but I have not been evaluating for the common good." – Tuomas, 31*

The content analysis did however reveal, how some retailer's tried to engage consumers through user reviews using their marketing strategies and find a way for the consumer to come back to the social commerce site. For example Retailer A sent e-mail reminders about the review possibilities after the purchase, as can be seen in the picture 3 below. Retailer B on the other hand sometimes advertised user reviews on free newspapers delivered to every household in Finland. Retailer B had also combined the reviews with a lottery and emphasized the possibility to win a gift card as a thank you of the user review.



### **Du vet väl att du kan betygsätta och recensera dina varor?**

Klicka in på produktens länk nedan och skriv därefter några rader i fältet som heter recensioner. För visst är det mycket lättare att välja rätt, när man kan läsa om hur tidigare köpare upplevt produkten?

#### **Dina produkter**

*Picture 3: E-mail reminder for the consumer to evaluate products*

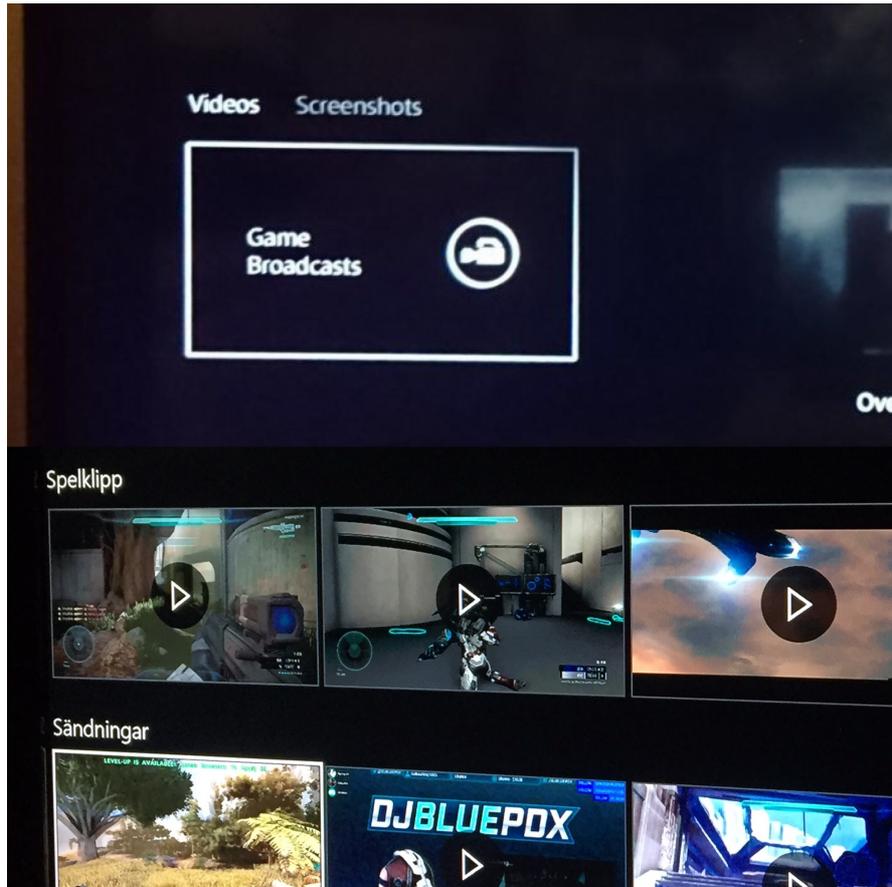
The different marketing strategies are an example of how a company's service offering can be communicated in connection to value propositions. As Grönroos (2009) emphasizes, marketing is a way to support value creation and to support the customer processes. In the game consumption, the only way to experience the game is as a consumer to play the game, however without buying the game, the consumer needs to access the information some other way and user reviews can be a way to do it. Therefore, communicating the service offer through a website or other marketing channels is a way to make the value proposition visible for the consumer. As the retailer cannot offer user reviews alone, the company needs to co-produce the value proposition together with consumers and professional game reviewers to be able to create value for the customer. Marketing can be a way to impact and enhance the service offering by making consumers aware of the service. Marketing the user reviews together with a bonus, can also be seen as a way to emphasize altruistic value for the consumer as well as efficiency, by offering something as a return for the time spent (Sánchez-Fernández et al. 2009). Since, the evaluation possibilities that are offered can be understood as value

propositions (Vargo and Lusch 2008). It seems though that value propositions are connected to the service processes of the companies, which is controversial with the idea, that companies should become part of the consumers' lives, as was suggested by Heinonen et al. (2010).

### 4.3 The aspect of offering a helping hand: Co-creation of gameplay

The second discovered theme was co-creation of gameplay, referring to how additional information was sometimes created by the other consumers on social commerce platforms and offered as value proposition on social commerce sites. Gameplay clips are similar to other visual services such as Twitch on console platforms. When the gamer's motivation to follow Twitch is often based on information and hedonic needs, according to the earlier study (Sjöblom & Hamari 2016), similar value-in-use descriptions were also provided by the studied consumers, when they were referring to the use of gameplay clips.

In the console game retail, official trailers are often offered as part of the game information. Still, trailers are made by the game companies and are sometimes theatrical rather than showing the actual gameplay. Since, some retailers have understood this information gap by offering user generated gameplay clips that show, how the actual gameplay is. For example, the Xbox console offered a possibility for the gamer to record the gameplay and share the clip with friends or the whole game community. In addition, the Xbox store site offered user created game clips on the store as part of the product descriptions, which can be understood supporting the consumption values of the consumer (Seth et al. 1991). Furthermore, the Xbox and PlayStation console stores had embedded the live streams (called as "Game Broadcasts" or "Sändningar") as part of the game descriptions on the store, which offered possibility to watch the actual gameplay around the world, if some gamer was streaming, as can be seen in the picture 4 below.



Picture 4: Live stream possibility as part of the game store

As the live streams were offered by the Twitch streaming service, Twitch offered a two-way communication possibility for the gamers, which can be interpreted as facilitation of consumer co-creation (Hoyer et al. 2010). Live stream, together with the chat possibility, were available for the consumers and streamers to communicate during the stream, which can be a way to enable cultural creation (Seo, Buchanan-Oliver & Fam 2015). In addition, the game clips and streaming provided the gamer an access to transparent information and could support the value creation from a quality perspective, as Juha's quote reveals:

*"... if there is no video about the game you are browsing, then it makes it somehow suspicious, but then you might not want to take the effort to check the game on the Internet, just to see how it is like. Yes it does affect. "* – Juha, 38

Although the earlier study (Sjöblom & Hamari 2016) on Twitch referred to the information need and hedonic value as the reasons, why consumers use these services, it seems, that these activities were also shaped by the altruistic use of social commerce for the interviewed gamers. This doesn't mean that information value or the enjoyment value would not be part of the interviewees' practices, as can be seen in the quotes from Anton and Ben below, however co-creation of gameplay also offered a helping hand for the other gamers.

*” I find it quite useful depending on who is streaming. There are many people who are just, you know the cutie pie sort of streaming or streaming and just yelling and shouting just to be funny as opposed to somebody who is trying to show you, you know, the game. Those are quite useful reviews actually. Gameplay tells you more than a review in some cases, because they are not modified, it’s actually how it happens. Those are not made to look better (than) they are.” – Anton, 28*

*“Oh no no no. I’ve never done that. I just look at others playing, if they are playing a game that has been released in the USA but not yet in Europe. I sometimes check that. Just to get in-game footage. To see how the game actually is.” – Ben, 30*

As mentioned in the earlier subchapter, consumers were able to provide information for other customers by evaluating games. These reviews could of course include gameplay information together with the consumer’s own experience of the game, however gamers were also able to record gameplay clips or share their live gameplay with other gamers and this was done to show how the game is for a friend, who did not have the game yet. Likewise, game clips were also recorded to be shared, if something funny happened in the gameplay, which came up in the private chat analysis. This also supports the earlier findings, how storytelling in content creation is a meaningful motivator (Harwood et al. 2015).

Similar to the role regarding the user reviews, the consumers’ role as the lurkers were highlighted in streaming, since none of the interviewed consumers took part in streaming publicly as producers of information (Ma & Agarwal 2007). Though, the consumer’s search for the utilitarian value in Twitch might turn into an aesthetic and playful service experience (Sánchez-Fernández et al. 2009), where the beauty of the graphics and pleasure of the game, overtook the search of quality, as is emphasized in the quotes below:

*“Another thing that I’ve noticed that I like that they really have integrated the Twitch TV as well. - - So I think that’s just great for information wise to see if you, if that’s something for you. It’s extremely easy to get hold of. It just shows up there and you can watch it for few minutes or hours if you like. To see if this is something for you.” – Alex, 28*

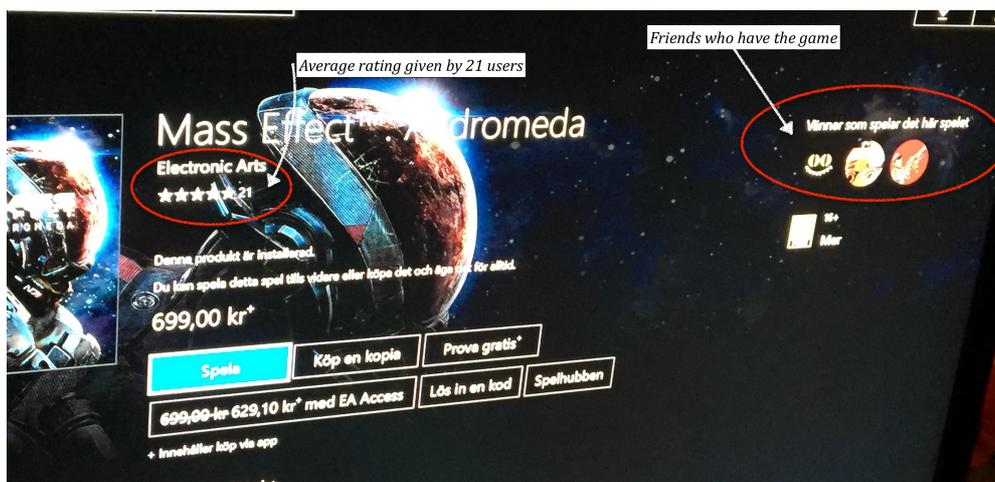
*“...it (information) might be the original motivation to go there, but it's also quite addictive and you suddenly notice that you've been watching those for a long time.” –Tuomas, 31*

As emphasized, both Twitch and user generated game clips can be seen as value proposition, where several actors are co-creating the value proposition through the

interaction possibility in an online setting. Game clips and streams are a way to influence consumer decision-making (Seth et. al 1991) in game purchases through offering transparent information. The importance of transparent information has been emphasised by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) as a way to reduce the risk for the consumer, when interactions are built as open access dialogue. The offering of user-generated information is also a way to make value proposition in connection to entertainment, aesthetics and social values (Sánchez-Fernández et al. 2009). Entertainment value by the offered game clips is created if the consumer sees the value-in-context amusing or playful. Aesthetic value on the other hand can appeal to the consumer, if the gameplay is visually pleasing and the social value is created for example, when the gamer streaming, it gains reputation among the consumers.

#### 4.4 The aspect of offering a helping hand: Social altruism, however privately

As social commerce focuses on the community and interaction aspects (Busalim & Hussin 2016), game retailers have utilized the social aspect in the offered value propositions as well. As part of PlayStation and Xbox consoles, gamer can interact with his or her online friends using voice chat (with headset) and messenger chat (with controller). These options do not limited to the game play, interaction possibilities were available even when shopping on the store site. To support the social aspect, the Xbox store showed the consumer, which of the consumer's friends had the game, when browsing on the Xbox store site, as illustrated in the picture 5.



Picture 5: Consumer's friends are showed next to the game on the store site

Furthermore, consoles offered a newsfeed about what other gamers from the consumer's own network were playing as well as what they were achieving in the games. When a gamer achieved something, it was shared to the gamer's friends on their newsfeed, which can be seen as value proposition for the other gamers and act as a game recommendation and social value (Sánchez-Fernández et al. 2009).

According to the private chat data, gamers discussed the games they played and the planned purchases with their friends and those discussions seem to be influenced, sometimes, by the interaction possibilities offered by the retailers, such as the picture 5 above illustrates. For example, others could bring up a gamer's activity on the private chat, when he or she had been collecting plenty of achievements earlier in the day in a game. However, this was usually done, when friends wanted to know more about the game that they didn't have and asked a review from one of the gamers. Social support seems to be important for the gamers, which supports the finding of the Liang et al. (2011) study.

As part of the daily process and sharing the consumer's personal goings-on with friends, game recommendations, game publications as well as reviews these were all appearing parallel to the dialogue that the gamers were having. This is similar to the earlier statement by Seo et al. (2015), how games can become important part of gamer's social life. Nonetheless, the analysis of the private chat group revealed, how game sites interactions were mostly a way to help friends and to socialize, as mentioned by one of the group members.

*“If we me and my girlfriend have played a game, I mention that. And say very good co-operative game thing. Or this game might not be very good in that sense. I do tip my friends. And other games as well. Every time I talk to them usually.”*

*– Ben, 30*

Altruistic value, as defined by Sánchez-Fernández et al. (2009) was emphasized, when gamers discussed about a new game that was being launched and they compared prices and delivery options between different retailers. This was done, to help others in the information search as well as for the social value; so that everyone could play together right from the start. In addition, gamers gave tips on how to design the character in game to help the members, who had not started playing yet and to speed up their game start by lending them the helping hand.

Nevertheless, game groups were not the only place, where consumers were able to discuss about the games. Whether it was during the gameplay, when friends from different cities joined via headsets for an evening together, or in private chat groups or in face-to-face discussions, game recommendations and reviews were shared in those interactions. Consumers shared tips about games with friends, who played and might like the game, even if the game was meant for

single-player. The shared tips could even be connected to different sales the retailers had, as can be seen in the quotes:

*”I played those Batman games. Those games are quite well done. Good games, even though the topic is Batman. So my friend... my colleague said that a similar game is MadMax. And it was on sale that time. What would I have paid for it... 15 EUR maximum. ” – Jukka, 34*

*”That's how you might find new games, when somebody praises something a lot. So, of course, that's how it starts to interest you. Or if somebody is playing some new game, that you've been considering and badmouths it. If someone trustworthy, TRUSTWORTHY friend says it's shitty, so it certainly affects and the game might not be worth buying.”- Juha, 38*

*”Quite often we have talked about games with the co-workers and they have recommended something, like hey, buy the game or all of us could buy the game, and we can all play together. ” – Tuomas, 31*

*“[How do you review games?] I would say face to face, like in a conversation. In a conversation with friends. I'm not so interested in letting other people know about what my particular feelings were about the game are. Unless I think they are somehow interested in it. Unless we share some sort of interest. “ – Alex, 28*

The quotes above highlight the importance of social aspect in gaming and how it shapes the value co-creation of the game purchases. As recommending a game can be seen as giving the helping hand through altruistic value creation, game purchases can also be a way to create social value for the friends, when a consumer buys a game because of the peers and for the social value, not because of the game. It seems, that gamers appreciate, if the suggestions comes from trustworthy friends, which refers to friends, who had a similar game taste and who knew each other well. This emphasizes how trusted friends seem to be more important than strangers' recommendations for the gamers. However with friends, recommendations might also be a strong incentive for playing together, as was described on Tuomas' quote above. Still, Tuomas wasn't alone; others such as Juha mentioned the social aspect, when purchasing a game:

*”I would say ... especially the social aspect is important, the game doesn't matter so much. If some friend suggests that we should play this and even if I wouldn't have been that into the game earlier, but I might still buy it, just to try it out as a group.” – Juha, 38*

Nonetheless, when retailers put themselves out there, the social value is not created the same way as it is with friends. As part of the retailer value propositions, Retailer B offered questions and answers regarding the product function, which can be seen as a similar way to offer social support for the game

purchases. On the other hand, Retailer A had a pop-up chat for customers, which can be used in a similar way as “ask about the product”, however the chat offered a possibility to approach the company with all kinds of dilemmas, from product information to logistical issues. Hence, altruistic value co-creation can be described as an important part of the social commerce use, where gamers’ roles change from the lurkers to active participants, when the interactions are private. However, asking a retailer was not used similarly as asking a friend regarding game purchases by the interviewees. Nevertheless, even though helping a friend was important part of the social commerce use, gamers were sometimes able to move out from their comfort zone and anonymously help one another, as brought up by Peter, when contacting a customer service:

*“... I think I contacted them once or twice times long time ago. It was mostly because they had some information about a game that was completely wrong. So I contacted them.” –Peter, 25*

Peter’s example shows why is it important for the retailer to have open access dialogue with the consumers. Even if most interactions focus on making value propositions to the consumers, when the retailer is genuinely interested in the value creation, retailer can also become beneficiary of the value co-creation, as described by Vargo and Lusch (2016).

## 4.5 The aspect of the enjoyment: creation of excitement through information access

The third and final recognized category was the aspect of enjoyment that was emphasized by the consumers. As a Twitch stream could turn from information seeking to hedonistic gameplay watching, gameplay streaming between friends had a similar affect. The gamers shared gameplay streams, when new games were launched or when friends were still undecided whether or not to buy the game. Though, the game streams were used also as a social way to keep the other friend company, while playing, even if physically the gamers were hundreds of kilometres away from each other. For example Pekka, one of the Finnish gamers described how cooking as a bachelor can be a lonely activity, but with game streams, you can socialize with your friends just by using headphones and experience a horror game even if you are not playing, as described in the quote:

*“Well, it’s more like while you are cooking, so you watch the game at the same time. Well, I don’t know. He played Alien games and other horror games. When you can hear all the gameplay sounds on your own headphones and he was playing Resident Evil and suddenly it (the ghost) just came from nowhere... oh boy, even here, home I flinched, when I was watching the boys playing... oh boy...” –Pekka, 34*

As the chapter has shown, game reviews, especially the visual reviews using streaming, are influential in game retail and very much consumer dependent (Grönroos 2011). Gameplay streams are a way to share the excitement and the value of play (Sánchez-Fernández et al. 2003) for friends and to co-create the experience without the need of leaving home. Gameplay clips and trailers are also a way for consumers to build-up excitement, when the game is not yet published. The analysis revealed, how gamers with tight knit gamer groups seem to discuss games long before the game is launched and co-create the value expectations together. Sharing news and trailers was a way to hype up the experience and make the game wait worthwhile, however the interactions may create false expectations and if the value co-created doesn't match with the game experience, it might turn into value destruction (Echeverri & Skålén 2011).

It seems though, that the value creation on user reviews is taking its first steps rather than replacing other forums as the main information source. As the interviews revealed, consumers do enjoy the service offering and the direction, where many retailers are going with streaming and user reviews, however the incentive to participate publicly seems to challenge consumers both on reviewing as well as streaming.

## 5 Conclusions and discussion

This chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the findings and answering the research questions. First, the three research questions are answered. Secondly, the theoretical and societal contributions are reviewed and at the end of the chapter, limitations of the study with further research possibilities are discussed.

### 5.1 Overview of the study

The aim of the thesis was to explore interaction possibilities in console game social commerce, describe the values that are created in social commerce interactions and reflect on how the consumer interactions are shaped by the consumer values. As the earlier user behaviour studies have been mostly quantitative in social commerce and the interactions offered on social commerce sites have not gotten enough attention from the researchers in the past, this study has tried to address the gap by focusing on the interactions from a qualitative perspective. In addition, this study has shed a light on game retail as part of the entertainment industry, which has not gotten as much attention as other retail fields such as grocery and fashion retail in the academic research. In addition, studies focusing on gaming have become more popular only for the past decade and the focus on earlier studies regarding gaming have illustrated considerably the value creation in gaming (Marchand and Henning-Turau 2013), the game experiences (Abbasi & Jamak 2017; Hamari & Huotari 2017) or have focused on certain services, such as Twitch (Sjöblom & Hamari 2016) or game communities (Harwood et al. 2015). The consumer's purchase behaviour has been studied earlier (Cox and Kaimann 2015), however more research is still needed. This thesis is one of the first studies drawing together the social commerce interactions and gaming from a value and consumer culture perspective.

As the social commerce interactions revealed to be important for the consumer, the interactions also showed the importance of the social dimension as part of purchase practices and were part of the gamers' social life. This topic has not been touched upon earlier in the academic research, as mentioned by Seo et al. (2015). As the entertainment industry has been growing for years and game retail growth has not shown any sign of slowing down, it is important to broaden the academic research of value creation to the entertainment industry and to the game purchases. This thesis has focused on the values shaping the consumer

interactions in game retail as well as describing the consumer culture created in these interactions.

The study was approached with qualitative research design, where ethnography and content analysis were used to describe the value creation on console game retail sites and to interpret the value creation the consumers were part of. As an answer to the first research question (*How do the console game retailers support value creation on social commerce sites?*), the content analysis on console game social commerce sites revealed how game retailers offered several interaction possibilities for the consumers as value propositions to evaluate products in text and in visual form as well as to interact with the company and other gamers through chats and streams. Value propositions on social commerce sites were often co-produced together, by the company and other gamers, however the possibility for the consumers to engage varied between the retailers and some retailers were even restricting the participation on the interaction activities by offering only authentic reviews or the evaluation possibilities were possibly hidden on the sites. However all the game retailers made an effort to create value propositions by offering a variety of interaction possibilities for the gamers to support their game purchases.

As an answer to the second research question (*How do the gamers reason their participation in the offered value creating activities on console game social commerce sites?*), interviews with the game consumers as well as content analysis of the gamers' private chat revealed, how social commerce interactions offered the gamers a way to access information and answer their utilitarian needs. Peer reviews and especially the visual information, such as gameplay videos, when shopping console games, were very important for the gamers, especially in the browsing phase of the game purchases. The consumers were worried about spending money on games that were not worth buying, which often led to a broad information search and retailers were able to support this especially with star ratings and visual information. However, information search on other sites outside the retailer's platform was often conducted along with the information search on the retailer's site. This was due to the need of professional game reviews, which the game retailers did not offer. Nevertheless, the offered interactions on the social commerce game sites brought gamers the quality and the efficiency for the game purchases as well as offering hedonic escapism through the Twitch streaming service. These findings from game purchases point to a similar direction as Sjöblom and Hamari's findings (2016) on why Twitch is used among the gamers. Also the value of information is similar to Füller's (2010) and Cox and Kaimann's (2015) findings. Nevertheless, the consumers own role was rather passive on the social commerce sites, when the interactions were public. Though active participation in the discussions were more emphasized, when gamers were engaged in the interactions privately such as on his or hers own gaming group and when the reviews were only exposed to the private group.

To be able to answer the final research question (*How do the consumer values shape the social commerce interactions in console game retail?*), the study reflected the consumer descriptions with the consumer culture approach (Arnould & Thompson 2005) by describing the social and cultural dimensions in connection to the consumers' practices. The study discovered an interesting game purchase culture, where retailers offered interaction possibilities, which can be seen as symbolic value offering for the gamers and the gamers used the interaction possibilities to co-create value for themselves and for other gamers. These interactions were shaped by the consumer values; when interactions were used for utilitarian value creation, the emphasis was on the information search, however the interactions also offered hedonic escapism, when streams were watched for hours by the gamers. However, as mentioned, the gamers own participation was shaped by the distress of being exposed to critique and publicity, which led to the role of the lurker when using the social commerce sites publicly, which was also influenced by the consumer's value outcomes. Nevertheless, the interactions that gamers experienced in private gaming groups, together with the social value they got and the altruistic value they could offer, using the interactions seemed to be very important. Those gamers who had the possibility to engage in private gaming group interactions really utilized the possibility. The gamers, who had strong friendship groups to interact with, presented themselves as active gamers, when games were discussed, reviewed and/or glorified. Gamers with active gaming groups for example described, how the altruistic value was so important for them, that gamers wanted to help one another, when buying games. Interestingly, even if the gamer knew himself or herself very well and the likes and dislikes, when it came to game choices, they sometimes valued the social aspect of the gameplay so much, that they went along with game purchases, that they would have not wanted otherwise. As an answer to the final research question, the gamers who had the possibility to interact privately on social commerce sites seemed to experience utilitarian, hedonic, social and altruistic values and their interaction culture was shaped by these values. The consumers, who only participated in the public social commerce interactions, only got to know the utilitarian and hedonic values as part of their interactions.

## 5.2 Contribution to the research and practical implications for the game retailers

As service management research often discusses how to satisfy customer needs and create value for the consumers (Grönroos 2009), this thesis has contributed to the service management research by deepening the understanding of how interactions influence the value creation on the marketplace, specifically on social commerce platforms and how values shape the consumer interactions

and the practices consumers participate in. This study's theoretical contribution has been to combine two research fields, service marketing together with consumer behaviour approach to build a holistic view on value creation in the entertainment industry's digital era; specifically in game retail. Theoretically the study has answered the call of qualitative research on social commerce (Busalim and Hussin 2016) as well as supporting the future research agenda as was stated by Seo et al. (2015) by shedding a light on how gamers can participate and engage in the value creation through their game purchases by using the interactions offered by the retailers. The study has also broadened the social commerce research by describing user behaviour from a qualitative perspective and introducing a new consumer group, the gamers, to the social commerce research. In addition, the study has also contributed to the consumer culture theory studies by describing how value co-creation and consumer culture theory can be allies in the research as was discovered by Arnould (2007) and Akaka et al. (2013).

For the practitioners, this study has deepened the understanding of the consumer practices that could be taken into consideration, when designing the marketing strategies for the consumers and how to offer interaction possibilities on social commerce sites. In the case of the gamers, they seem to enjoy the private interactions that they have, however not all gamers have the possibility to share their experiences with friends and emphasizing the community for the lurking gamers could be seen as one way to involve also those gamers, who seem to be left out from game groups or are unable to enjoy the social aspects of gaming. The interactions seemed to be a slightly lonely community for those, who did not have friends to share the enjoyment with. By supporting the social value with the community aspect in the social commerce interactions might enhance the experience of the more independent consumers. In addition, only offering the interaction possibilities is not enough for the gamers and as this study has shown, the retailers should pay attention when making the service offering visible for the consumer and for the value to be created. This could also enhance the value outcomes on the sites as well as make the interactions more active on these platforms. Nevertheless, this study has described the issues the retailers might encounter, however this study can not give an action plan for the retailers to follow as such – the study only offers reflections regarding the issue that retailers can use to reflect and develop their service offering and possibly strengthen the consumer value creation, as described by Vargo and Lusch (2016) and Grönroos (2009). As Haile and Altmann (2015) emphasized, only offering technical features does not create the competitive advantage; value-creating services are also needed and consumers need to find them.

The thesis has also shown, that social commerce in game retail is taking its first steps rather than replacing other forums as the main information source. The gamers emphasized, how they did enjoy the interactions offered and the new ways to make informed game purchases, nevertheless the consumers did not feel the need to take their own actions and participate publicly. The question remains, how to enhance the public interactions on social commerce sites since the Finnish and

Swedish gamers seemed to value their private interactions. The topic could be studied outside of game retail with other entertainment products as well as possibly broadened to other industries. In the future, research focusing for example on how co-designing the interactions together with consumers would change the marketplace and exploring if the would bring new insight to the interactions could be addressed.

### 5.3 Future research possibilities and limitations of the study

As this study had a qualitative approach, the research design can also be seen as a limitation of the study. The study's sample was small and purposive and the findings cannot be generalized as the findings are interpreted in the context and are context specific. Despite the qualitative research design, the study has made an important theoretical and societal contribution by describing the values shaping the consumer interactions, which could not have been reached, if the topic would have been approached with a quantitative methodology.

For future research, the study offers many possibilities to broaden the topic within the entertainment industry as well on other industries. As the number of female gamers was limited, it naturally can be seen as limitation of the study, which also has influenced the findings. Though, future research could draw attention to the female gamers and their interactions in social commerce to see if the findings are similar to this study's findings. Also, when interviewing the female gamers, they brought up the aspect of how gaming seemed to be more of an unspoken hobby for the female gamers, which could be addressed in the future since this study cannot answer the question why the unspoken hobby was emphasized by the interviewees.

This study described the social commerce interactions, that gamers in Finland and in Sweden had, however due to the time limitations, the future studies could be extend to other countries or other industries as well. This would also help to get a broader aspect of the roles consumers take and how do the consumers justify the use of social commerce interactions in other countries as well as in other industries. In addition, specifically regarding this study, interviewing the social commerce retailers in console game retail would also broaden the understanding of the retailers' aspect, since this study only addressed the social commerce retailers with the content analysis, which can also be seen as a limitation of the study. With the retailer aspect, the marketing strategies behind the offered interactions could be addressed.

In addition, the study only had access to one gaming group's private chat, which can be limiting to the study's findings. In the future, other consumer groups, which are used as part of the social commerce platforms, could be studied. As the research has touched on the consumer reflections of the social commerce practices, future research could also approach the topic from a practice theory perspective.

As a limitation of the study, there are also other services offered on social commerce sites, such as Mixer service in gaming, which was left out from the study. Microsoft launched Mixer, a competitor to Twitch streaming service in May 2017 (Dingman 2017), which was left out of the author's research scope as the data had already been collected when the service was launched. The future studies could also address all the interaction possibilities offered on these platforms. Further, the Nintendo gamers, with Nintendo's newest console launch Switch (Nintendo 2017), could be part of a consumer group study, when studying game purchases. This could also be addressed on how the values shape interactions with other generational gamers such the millennials, who were not part of this study.

As the study has been subjective, it is important to keep in mind that the findings are not sole truths, rather implications of what could be addressed in future research regarding game purchases and when trying to influence social commerce consumer culture from a value perspective. The study has deepened the understanding of social commerce interactions in service marketing and discovered an interesting consumer culture as part of the entertainment industry, that could be studied more in the future.

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# Appendix 1: Summary of original quotes from the interviewees with author's translations

The cited quotes are bolded and the original quote is under the cited quote, if the quote has been translated from Finnish to English.

**“ ... after a while you get all the reviews from other people who have played it. So it will help you make the decision if you should buy it or not. So I believe it's a good reason to wait awhile (when the game is published).” – Ida, 22**

**“You pay a surprisingly lot of attention to the reviews nowadays. If the bad review catches you eye immediately, so it's a bit like is the game any good. Well, I think the review and game price as well as what kind of game that determines a lot when buying. You do read the reviews with the lens of what are the others saying about the game. And usually there is some short (description) and even these trailers, which you often check. Those already tell you a lot. It tells me quite well, if is it worth buying. – Sanna, 28**

*Author's translation from: ”Kyllä niitä tulee nykypäivänä katsottua yllättävän paljon myöskin niitä arvosteluja. Että jos niinku siinä heti pompsahtaa silmään, että on arvioitu tosi huonoksi, niin kyllä se vähän niinku on sillein että okei, että onkohan tämä sitten minkään.. tai mistään kotoisin. Tuota, mutta joo, kyllä varmasti se ja varmaan pelin hinta tietysti kanssa ja tuota minkä tyyppinen peli. Kyllä niitä tulee luettua vähän niinku sitä, että mitä siitä pelistä sanotaan. Että yleensä siinä on joku lyhyt sellainen (kuvaus) ja jopa näitä trailereitakin on välillä niin niitä tulee katsottua. Että sitten se jo kertoo todella paljon. Se kertoo jo aika hyvin, että voisko tämä olla yhtään sellanen, että kannattaako tätä hankkia.” – Sanna, 28*

**“... when you've heard about some game and you've checked that from PS Store, it might have been given only couple stars. Then it might turn to, that I'm not interested in it anymore and I don't want to search for more, if it's so bad.” – Ville, 36**

*Author's translation from: “... kun on kuullut jostain pelistä ja oot käynyt katsomassa PS Storesta, niin se on saattanut saada vain pari tähteä. Niin sitten saattaakin olla, että ei kiinnostakaan ja ei jaksa katsoa sen enempää, jos se kerta on niin huono.” – Ville, 36*

**“... I am quite concerned by review scores and what magazines or websites give as a score, before I buy a game. And that's.. I'm a bit annoyed by that because I can't really buy a game that has got bad reviews even though I might suspect that I personally might like it. While the reviewer might not have. For various reasons, I mean a good review helps you to get a picture, if this game is worth money I'm going to spend on it. On the other hand, I'm**

*not like.. if I don't try something myself I never know if I personally would like the game or not. Which is.. I mean the culture is that way kind of annoying because so much hangs upon what review the game will get.” – Anton, 28*

*“The games I've really reviewed have been the games I've really been pleased with. That I have been wanting to say that this game is really worth of time and money.” -Anton, 28*

*“ And to be honest I usually only review a product if it's really really bad and I want to give feedback. I usually don't review something if I'm really happy about it. ” – Ben 30*

*“You might not have the effort what it takes to review something. I have not thought about that. Maybe if they (companies) would motivate it somehow to evaluate those games , that you would to get some discount for the next game or get some points or benefits later on. You might be motivated, but I have not been evaluating for the common good.” – Tuomas, 31*

*Author's translation from: “Ei ehkä jaksa nähdä sitä vaivaa, että viitsis käydä antamassa. En ole kyllä miettinyt tuota asiaa. Ehkä jos motivoitais jotenkin arvioimaan niitä pelejä, että sais jonkun alennuksen seuraavasta pelistä tai sais jotain pisteitä siitä, että sais jonkun hyödyn myöhemmin. Se vois ehkä motivoida, mutta en ole kyllä käynyt arvioimassa yleisen hyvän vuoksi.” - Tuomas, 31*

*”... if there is no video about the game you are browsing, then it makes it somehow suspicious, but then you might not want to take the effort to check the game on the Internet, just to see how it is like. Yes it does affect. ” – Juha, 38*

*Author's translation from:” ... jos ei ole videota jostain pelistä mitä sattuu selaamaan, niin sitten se on heti jotenkin epäilyttävää, mutta ei välttämättä jaksa sitten lähteä Internetistäkään hakemaan, että minkälainen tämä on. Kyllä se vaikuttaa. ” – Juha 38*

*” I find it quite useful depending on who is streaming. There are many people who are just, you know the cutie pie sort of streaming or streaming and just yelling and shouting just to be funny as opposed to somebody who is trying to show you, you know, the game. Those are quite useful reviews actually. Gameplay tells you more than a review in some cases, because they are not modified, it's actually how it happens. Those are not made to look better (than) they are.” – Anton, 28*

*“Oh no no no. I've never done that. I just look at others playing, if they are playing a game that has been released in the USA but not yet in Europe. I sometimes check that. Just to get in-game footage. To see how the game actually is.” – Ben, 30*

*“Another thing that I've noticed that I like that they really have integrated the Twitch TV as well. - - So I think that's just great for information wise to see if you, if that's something*

***for you. It's extremely easy to get hold of. It just shows up there and you can watch it for few minutes or hours if you like. To see if this is something for you. " – Alex, 28***

***"...it (information) might be the original motivation to go there, but it's also quite addictive and you suddenly notice that you've been watching those for a long time." –Tuomas, 31***

*Author's translation from: " ... se on ehkä alkuperäinen motivaatio mennä katsomaan niitä, mutta ne on kyllä myöskin aika koukuttavia, että yhtäkkiä huomaakin että on katsonut niitä aika pitkäänkin." - Tuomas, 31*

***"If we me and my girlfriend have played a game, I mention that. And say very good co-operative game thing. Or this game might not be very good in that sense. I do tip my friends. And other games as well. Every time I talk to them usually." – Ben, 30***

***"I played those Batman games. Those games are quite well done. Good games, even though the topic is Batman. So my friend... my colleague said that a similar game is MadMax. And it was on sale that time. What would I have paid for it... 15 EUR maximum. " – Jukka, 34***

*Author's translation from: "Pelasin joskus niitä Batman pelejä. Nehän on ihan hyvin tehtyjä. Tosi hyviä pelejä, vaikka aihe on Batman, niin ne on tehty hyvin. Niin kaveri vaan.. duunikaveri sanoi, että samantapainen peli on toi MadMax. Ja se oli ihan hyvässäkin tarjouksessa silloin. Mitähän olisin maksanut siitä...15 EUR maksimissaan." – Jukka, 34*

***"That's how you might find new games, when somebody praises something a lot. So, of course, that's how it starts to interest you. Or if somebody is playing some new game, that you've been considering and badmouths it. If someone trustworthy, TRUSTWORTHY friend says it's shitty, so it certainly affects and the game might not be worth buying."- Juha, 38***

*Author's translation from: "Sitä kautta ehkä löytää uusia pelejä, että joku kehuu jotain ihan älyttömästi. Niin totta kai se sitä kautta alkaa kiinnostamaan. Tai sitten jos joku teillaa jonkun uutuspelin, mitä on itse ehkä miettinyt että pitäiskö ostaa. Jos jokin luotettava, LUOTETTAVA, kaveri sanoo, että se on ihan paska, niin totta kai se vaikuttaa siihen, että ehkä se ei sitten ole ostamisen arvoinen. –Juha, 38*

***"Quite often we have talked about games with the co-workers and they have recommended something, like hey, buy the game or all of us could buy the game, and we can all play together. " – Tuomas, 31***

*Author's translation from: "Aika monesti on myös ollut että työkavereiden kanssa puhutaan jostain ja ne suosittelee jotain, että hei, osta se peli tai ostakaa kaikki se peli, niin voidaan pelata yhdessä." - Tuomas, 31*

***“[How do you review games?] I would say face to face, like in a conversation. In a conversation with friends. I’m not so interested in letting other people know about what my particular feelings were about the game are. Unless I think they are somehow interested in it. Unless we share some sort of interest. “ – Alex, 28***

***”I would say ... especially the social aspect is important, the game doesn’t matter so much. If some friend suggests that we should play this and even if I wouldn’t have been that into the game earlier, but I might still buy it, just to try it out as a group.” – Juha, 38***

*Author’s translation from: ”Pitäisin sitä.. erityisesti sitä sosiaalista puolta siinä tärkeänä että ei sillä pelillä niin väliä. Jos vaikka joku kaveri ehdottaa että aletaan pelaamaan tätä, niin mistä ei välttämättä edes olisi itse hirveästi kiinnostunut siitä muuten, mutta saattaa silti ostaa sen, että kokeillaan sitten porukalla.” – Juha, 38*

***“... I think I contacted them once or twice times long time ago. It was mostly because they had some information about a game that was completely wrong. So I contacted them. “ – Peter, 25***

***“Well, it’s more like while you are cooking, so you watch the game at the same time. Well, I don’t know. He played Alien games and other horror games. When you can hear all the gameplay sounds on your own headphones and he was playing Resident Evil and suddenly it (the ghost) just came from nowhere... oh boy, even here, home I flinched, when I was watching the boys playing... oh boy...” -Pekka, 34***

*Author’s translation from: “No siinä kokkailun lomassa, siinä samalla. Se pelasi Alien peliä ja sellasia pelottavia pelejä. Sitten kun itselläkin tulee kaikki peliänet samallailla kuulokkeisiin ja se pelasi jotain Resident Eviliä ja se yhtäkkiä tuli jostain ... ei jumaliste täällä kotonakin kattelin kun pojat pelas kahdestaan sitä... ei jumalauta.” –Pekka, 34*

***“There is an old saying that you should hear all and trust nothing” – Anton, 28***