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Exploring Employee Perspectives on CSR in the Video Game Industry

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Abstract

Title Exploring Employee Perspectives on CSR in the Video Game Industry

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Background and purpose Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly crucial across industries, including the video game sector, which faces scrutiny for controversial aspects of its products. Despite the industry's growing investment in CSR, few studies have explored these commitments from employees' perspectives. Given that employees significantly shape the values embedded in game products, this study aims to investigate how they perceive and react to CSR within the video game industry.

Methods This study is conducted through an abductive research method and qualitative research of semi-structured interviews. An interpretive tradition, with a particular focus on symbolic interactionism, is used in this research.

Findings

- 1) In the video game industry, regular employees often lack familiarity with the concept of CSR. Furthermore, user-focused initiatives lack attention, particularly in addressing the controversial aspects of video games
- 2) Employees exhibit diverse responses to CSR initiatives, ranging from positive to limited reactions. Regarding organizational identification, employees who perceive CSR as mainly substantive exhibit a deep sense of organizational identification. On the other hand, for employees who perceive CSR as mainly symbolic, the symbolic nature hinders CSR's impact on organizational identification.

Keywords Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Micro-CSR, Symbolic CSR, Substantive CSR, Video Game Industry, Controversial Industries, Organizational Identification

Statement - Generative AI was only used to polish sentences within this study.

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We hope you enjoy reading our thesis!

Thank you!

Xuanran Zheng & Yoonji Cheong

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In modern society, there has been a significant focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which has roots dating back to the 1950s. Initially referred to as “Social responsibility (SR)” (Bowen, 1953), it highlights the obligations of businessmen to pursue social values beyond the economic interest of the firm (Davis, 1960). This emphasis has been further reinforced by the United Nations' agenda (2015), which posits that sustainable development is a multidimensional endeavor aimed at enhancing the quality of life for present and future generations. Historically, corporations have primarily pursued profit motives that prioritize shareholder interests (Friedman, 2007), while contemporary discourse has witnessed an emphasis on values of socio-ecological well-being and environmental justice (Ergene et al. 2021).

Previous studies of CSR have been widely explored at the organizational and institutional level (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Gond et al. 2017), also referred to as macro CSR. On the contrary, there has been a limited amount of research on CSR focused at the individual level, known as micro CSR, compared to macro CSR. Micro CSR encompasses all individuals engaged in CSR activities, including all internal and external stakeholders. According to Aguinis and Glavas (2012), while consumer behavior at the individual level has relatively received more attention, research on employees in the context of micro-CSR is less explored. This paper aims to address this gap by contributing to the domain of micro CSR and providing valuable insights into employees' perspectives.

Existing research on CSR is also centered around the debate between substantive and symbolic CSR. This differentiation between substantive and symbolic CSR revolves around two fundamental differences: genuine change within the organization versus the mere appearance of responsibility. Additionally, the motivation driving a company's CSR initiatives further distinguishes between substantive and symbolic CSR. These approaches offer valuable insights into individual's' perceptions of CSR.

Driven by advancements in electronic technology and further accelerated by the pandemic, the influence of the video game industry continues to expand. However, this growth is accompanied by a set of problematic issues that require closer examination. While previous

research on controversial industries has primarily centered on other sectors such as gambling, tobacco, oil, and alcohol, some researchers argue that the video game industry should also be considered as part of this industry (Yousafzai, et al. 2013). Specifically, controversies regarding the video game industry typically revolve around addiction, violence, and irresponsible commercialism within the games (Jones et al. 2013). Furthermore, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially included gaming disorder (GD) as a legitimate disease in the year of 2019. Gaming disorder (GD) is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “a pattern of gaming behavior (“digital-gaming” or “video-gaming”) characterized by impaired control over gaming and prioritizing gaming over other activities” (2020). These facts highlight the controversial nature of the video game industry and emphasize the necessity of investigating this field.

Game products, an essential aspect of the video game industry, often lack adequate consideration of their embedded social values (Patridge, 2010). According to Patridge (2010), the social meanings in video games extend beyond their explicit content, reflecting and interacting with real-world issues, values, and norms. These meanings encompass representations of gender, race, violence, and power dynamics, which can shape how players perceive and interact with the game. Although some dismiss games as mere entertainment, the ethical, cultural, and social implications of their content underscore the need for a comprehensive examination of the values they embody. Moreover, considering that employees in the video game industry contribute to shaping the values and beliefs embedded in games (Karlsen, 2019; Zagal et al. 2013), exerting a subtle yet significant influence on users, it becomes imperative to explore their perceptions of CSR.

Recognizing the unique dynamics of the video game industry and the importance of CSR, especially at the individual level, we have chosen to investigate this sector to explore how individuals perceive and react to CSR within it.

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

As previously argued, there exists a clear need for further research at the individual level within the video game industry. Building upon a systematic literature review, our study aims to extend the understanding of micro-CSR within this context. Therefore, we seek to explore how employees perceive CSR and their reactions to their company’s CSR initiatives. This results in the following research question:

How do employees in the video game industry perceive and react to CSR?

To address this question, we employ an abductive approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018) and qualitative research methods following interpretive tradition and symbolic interactionism (Prasad, 2018). Semi-structured interviews are selected as our main research method, conducted across four companies in Sweden and two in China. Furthermore, we include perspectives from both general employees and CSR specialists to provide comprehensive insights into the topic. We separately demonstrate the perspectives of general employees and CSR practitioners to highlight distinct contributions from each group.

Our paper aims to explore how employees evaluate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, drawing on the framework established by Gond et al. (2017) to understand how individuals “perceive” their organizations’ CSR efforts. Specifically, our study investigates CSR attributions to discern how employees differentiate between CSR activities perceived as substantive versus symbolic, using definitions from Rodrigue et al. (2013) and Donia and Sirsly (2016).

Additionally, we adopt Aguinis and Glavas's (2012) definition of outcomes, focusing on the results stemming from CSR initiatives. As part of these outcomes, we examine individual “reactions” as suggested by Gond et al. (2017) to investigate how, why, and when employees respond to CSR initiatives. Organizational identification emerges as the most prevalent positive reaction among interviewees, leading us to explore the relationship between CSR and organizational identification. Organizational identification is defined by Mael & Ashforth (1992) as “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member” (p.104). While interpreting the data, we have drawn upon suggested antecedents and outcomes of organizational identification from various scholars to enrich our analysis. We further examine the relationship between CSR attribution and organizational identification to explore how CSR perceptions impact employees’ reaction and their sense of identification with the organization.

Indeed, our research contributes to comprehending the dynamics at the individual level within CSR in the video game industry. Moreover, it enhances the depth of the ongoing discourse about substantive versus symbolic CSR. By exploring employees’ perceptions and outcomes of CSR, we offer valuable insights into both theoretical understanding and practical applications in this field.

1.3 Outline

This section offers an overview of the thesis, providing brief introductions to the content of each chapter. The thesis comprises six main chapters. Chapter 1 elaborates on the background and purpose of our study, focusing on exploring employees' perceptions of CSR within the video game industry and their reactions to CSR initiatives. In Chapter 2, we delve into the main literature surrounding CSR, including discussions on Macro versus Micro CSR, Substantive versus Symbolic CSR, CSR in controversial industries and the video game industry, and individuals' perceptions and outcomes of CSR. Chapter 3 outlines the philosophical grounding and research approach of our study, further detailing our research design, context, and data analysis methods. Chapter 4 progresses to the presentation and analysis of our empirical findings and we summarize the results in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, we engage in a thorough discussion of our findings alongside the literature we have previously introduced. Here, we compare our findings with prior research, potentially challenging existing perspectives and contributing new insights. Finally, we conclude the thesis with Chapter 6, which includes a research summary, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter, we present the theoretical frameworks relevant to our study. Given the extensive literature in the field, we offer a selective review focusing on key theories and concepts essential for understanding our research question. We begin with an overview of CSR, including its concept, evolution, and contemporary CSR. Next, we explore CSR from the perspective of individuals, delving into Macro and Micro CSR discussions and debates surrounding substantive and symbolic CSR. Subsequently, we examine CSR within specific contexts, including controversial industries and the video game industry. Finally, we introduce potential CSR perceptions and outcomes, followed by a discussion of the impact of CSR on organizational identification, the primary outcome identified in our study.

2.1 CSR Overview

The paper's initial focus on CSR prompts us to begin by examining CSR concepts and frameworks presented in previous studies, highlighting the evolution of CSR across various stages. Following this, the sub-chapter ends with an examination of contemporary CSR

practices. This section illustrates the progression of CSR from a niche concept to a globally recognized trend.

2.1.1 CSR Concept

This section traces the origins and evolution of the concept of CSR. The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved significantly over time. In the 1950s, the modern era of CSR began initially with the term "Social Responsibility" (SR), marked by Howard Bowen's landmark book "Social Responsibilities of the Businessman" (1953), arguing the obligations of businessmen to pursue the values of our society (Carroll, 2008). In the 1960s, scholars strived to shape the understanding of social responsibility within business. For example, Davis (1960) defines it as "businessmen's decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm's direct economic or technical interest".

Two dominant perspectives have evolved regarding the debate surrounding the purpose and responsibility of business. In 1970, the Shareholder Theory was proposed by Milton Freeman, suggesting that the primary responsibility of a business is to increase profits for its shareholders. He contends that corporate responsibility is to conduct business in alignment with shareholders' desires, typically focused on maximizing profits while conforming to the basic norms of society (Friedman, 2007). On the other hand, in 1984, Stakeholder theory, introduced by Freeman, reflects a shift away from a narrow focus on shareholder value towards a broader understanding of business responsibilities towards society. He focuses on the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders in business decision-making, including suppliers, customers, employees, stockholders, and the local community (Freeman, 2002).

Carroll (1991) claims that the entire CSR consists of four dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. He illustrates his concept using a pyramid, where economic responsibilities form the foundation, essential for profitability and serving as the basis for the other dimensions. The second layer encompasses legal responsibilities, reflecting society's standards of what is considered right and wrong. Above this lies ethical responsibility, going beyond what is legally required and emphasizing the duty to prevent harm. Finally, at the top layer, philanthropic responsibility is depicted, representing voluntary actions and commitments to act as a good citizen (Carroll, 1991).

2.1.2 CSR Today

In recent years, CSR and its integral component, sustainability, have attracted more attention. This increased focus is partly driven by the UN's Agenda 2030 (2015), which emphasizes sustainable development for people, planet, and prosperity. Based on the Triple Bottom Line concept coined by Elkington (1994), sustainability has also come to be spoken in terms of three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Economic sustainability is defined as the "profit" pillar, enduring the long-term economic performance of the business (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Social sustainability is about "people", ensuring all human beings fulfill their potential in dignity and equality in a healthy environment (United Nations, 2015). Environmental sustainability aims to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources through sustainable production and consumption (United Nations, 2015).

CSR has become a central aspect of business practice today. The twenty-first century has seen a growing recognition of the role of businesses in addressing global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and human rights abuses. This has led to a greater emphasis on sustainability, social justice, and ethical business practices (Carroll, 2008). A growing emphasis on stakeholder engagement in CSR practices led to a greater focus on transparency, accountability, and dialogue in business operations. CSR in many firms is deeply intertwined with strategic decision-making processes and governance structures. The evolution of CSR has seen a shift from a limited focus on local stakeholders to a broader, more global perspective that is now an integral part of many organizations' strategic management practices (Carroll, 2021). Contemporary CSR initiatives are placing greater emphasis on integrating sustainable practices into business functions and strategies.

2.2 CSR from Individual's Perspectives

In this chapter, building upon the CSR knowledge we have previously researched, we delve into two emerging topics within CSR: Macro versus Micro CSR and Substantive versus Symbolic CSR. This exploration aims to provide a foundation for examining individual perspectives within this field and to gain a deeper understanding of their viewpoints.

2.2.1 Discussions over CSR: Macro versus Micro

Exploring Macro and Micro CSR is essential for businesses to effectively navigate the complex landscape of CSR. According to Aguinis and Glavas (2012), macro-CSR refers to CSR at the institutional or organizational level, while micro-CSR pertains to the individual level. Similarly, Rupp and Mallory (2015, p.216) define micro-CSR as "the study of the effects and experiences of CSR (however it is defined) on individuals (in any stakeholder group) as examined at the individual level." This definition encompasses individuals at all levels, including those involved in planning, participating in, and observing CSR initiatives, as well as the intended beneficiaries of CSR (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). In addition, Aguinis and Glavas (2012) note that theories commonly applied in macro-level studies (institutional and organizational) include institutional theory, stakeholder theory, and the resource-based perspective of corporations. In contrast, micro-CSR often emphasizes psychological theories to understand individual reactions to CSR initiatives.

Historically, research on CSR has predominantly focused on the macro level (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Aguinis and Glavas (2012) conducted a comprehensive review of 588 journal articles and 102 books and book chapters, revealing that 90% of the articles centered on the macro level, with 33% focusing on the institutional level and 57% on the organizational level. In contrast, only 4% of articles were conducted on the individual level (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Although this data is a decade old, it underscores the academic imbalance regarding the analysis levels in CSR. While consumer behavior at the individual level has relatively received more attention, research on employees in the context of micro-CSR remains limited. Therefore, our objective is to explore micro-CSR through the lens of employees and understand how they identify with CSR.

2.2.2 Debates over CSR: Substantive versus Symbolic

Existing research has addressed similar concerns surrounding the emerging micro focus in CSR, particularly regarding whether it represents substantive or symbolic elements. The academic community has engaged in an ongoing debate regarding this distinction of substantive and symbolic nature, offering valuable insights into understanding employees' perceptions of CSR.

Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) suggest two general means by which organizations seek legitimacy to attract support from their constituents: substantive management and symbolic

management. Substantive management (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990) involves enacting tangible, material changes in organizational goals, structures, and processes or adopting socially institutionalized practices. This approach entails real transformation within the organization, aligning its actions with societal values and expectations. In contrast, symbolic management (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990) revolves around portraying an image of adherence to social values and expectations without necessarily affecting substantive change within the organization. Rather than altering its fundamental operations, the organization focuses on outward appearances, seeking to project an image of responsibility.

Distinguishing between symbolic and substantive CSR revolves around two fundamental differences. Firstly, as derived from Ashforth and Gibbs's (1990) definition of two approaches to organization legitimacy, Rodrigue et al. (2013) argue that substantive CSR entails genuine change within the organization, while symbolic CSR merely presents the image of responsibility without substantial operational changes. In other words, they suggest that substantive practices would bring tangible transformations within organizations, whereas symbolic practices would portray organizations as responsible without making meaningful changes to their operations. Nejati and Shafaei (2023) also define substantive CSR as involving genuine, material shifts in organizational actions consistent with societal values. Symbolic CSR, on the other hand, entails social practices that give the appearance of conformity to social norms without affecting meaningful changes in organizational activities or policies. Similarly, Wickert et al. (2016) view that the CSR debate centers on two key dimensions of a firm's CSR engagement: 'walk' and 'talk'. 'Walk' involves integrating responsible strategies, structures, and procedures into core business operations across divisions, functions, and value chains, while 'talk' refers to the outward communication of corporate responsibilities. Therefore, symbolic CSR actions ('talk') encompass any actions related to CSR topics that a firm undertakes to show "ceremonial conformity", whereas substantive CSR actions ('walk') involve tangible changes at an operational level, implying measurable activity that requires the allocation of a firm's resources (Schons & Steinmeier, 2015)

Secondly, the differentiation between substantive and symbolic CSR stems from the underlying motivations driving a company's CSR initiatives. According to Donia and Sirsly (2016), substantive CSR is primarily motivated by a genuine desire to benefit its stakeholders. They suggest that this form of CSR benefiting others (other-serving) addresses social needs

and aims to provide real social benefits, as highlighted by Barnett (2007). In contrast, they contend that symbolic CSR is driven by self-serving motivations, seeking to serve the organization's interests by enhancing its image or anticipating advantageous outcomes from its actions. It often focuses on impression management rather than addressing genuine social concerns (Donia & Sirsly, 2016).

2.3 CSR in the Video Game Industry

In this part, we aim to examine CSR in the contexts of the video game industry. Before diving into the video game industry, we find it helpful to investigate CSR in controversial industries first as the video game industry belongs to controversial industries. Therefore, this chapter consists of two main parts including CSR in controversial industries and CSR in the video game industry.

2.3.1 CSR in Controversial Industries

Yousafzai et al. (2013) contend that the video game industry is a part of a controversial industry since video game sectors have started to face criticism around irresponsible game development and gameplay such as addiction, violence, and commercialism (Jones et al. 2013). These negative aspects of the industry justify its classification as controversial.

According to Wilson and West (1981, p.92), controversial industries are those whose "products, services, or concepts may provoke reactions of distaste, disgust, offense, or outrage when mentioned or openly presented, due to considerations of delicacy, decency, morality, or fear". As products or services in controversial industries are often deemed morally questionable or sinful, organizations within these fields face ongoing scrutiny. As a result, some corporations have been struggling to gain societal acceptance (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006). Several researchers have demonstrated that organizations in controversial industries attempt to gain organizational legitimacy (Fatma et al. 2019; Lindgreen et al. 2012; Yani-de-Soriano et al. 2012), reduce firm risk (Jo & Na, 2012), and enhance corporate reputation (Aqueveque et al. 2018) by implementing CSR initiatives and commitments. In addition, Cai et al. (2011) also identify that there are positive relationships between CSR practices and firm values in controversial fields. Along the same lines, Kilian and Hennigs (2014) investigate CSR engagement within controversial industries and identify that controversial companies are more likely to engage in CSR communication than those non-controversial companies. Similarly, Garcia et al. (2017)

also support the legitimacy of research in the environmental dimension, concluding that controversial companies exhibit superior environmental performance than others.

While the video game industry is being classified as a part of controversial industries considering its problematic aspects, it is often overlooked in discussions regarding this sector. The interplay between CSR and the video game industry will be explained in detail in the following part.

2.3.2 CSR in the Video Game Industry

This section will present an investigation into the video game industry and CSR. The video game industry refers to the sum of console games, computer games, and mobile games. After its emergence in the 1970s and 1980s, the industry has been rapidly developing, due to the constant revolution of electronic devices (Goh. et al. 2023). According to the Read from World Economic Forum (2022), lockdowns resulting from the pandemic fostered the video game industry further by bringing millions of new players, highlighting the increasing influence of this industry. We will focus on controversies in further paragraphs, followed by an in-depth exploration of the intersection between CSR and the video game industry.

2.3.2.1 Controversies in the Video Game Industry

As discussed in 2.2, while there is limited research clearly stating that the video game industry falls within the realm of controversial industries, the presence of unethical elements such as violence, gambling and addiction within game products justifies its inclusion in this category.

For example, regarding gambling aspects, loot boxes issues have gained attention in recent years due to their increasing prevalence in game products. Zendle and Cairns (2018) argue that loot boxes share certain formal features with gambling and confirm that there is a causal relationship between buying loot boxes in games and problem gambling. Additionally, Petrovskaya and Zendle (2021) conducted a survey of 1,104 players and identified instances of misleading, aggressive and unfair transactions within the game products. Their findings highlight that some games lack alignment with existing consumer protection regulations in the UK. Furthermore, in May 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) formally recognized gaming disorder (GD) as a legitimate health condition in the eleventh revised edition of the International Classification of Diseases. According to the definition, gaming

disorder (GD) is “a pattern of gaming behavior (“digital-gaming” or “video-gaming”) characterized by impaired control over gaming and prioritizing gaming over other activities” (2020). The fact that gaming disorder (GD) can now be diagnosed and treated as a recognized health issue highlights the problematic nature of video games . These controversial elements of video games underscore the increasing public concerns regarding irresponsible gaming practices.

In fact, game products, as a crucial part of the video game industry, received insufficient attention in terms of social values embedded in the games. According to Patridge (2010), social meanings are not limited to the explicit content of the game but extend to how that content reflects or interacts with real-world social issues, values, and norms. He argues that in the context of video games, social meanings may encompass representations of gender, race, violence, power dynamics, and other social constructs that may influence how players perceive and engage with the game content. However, some people often say that “come on, it’s just a game!”, thereby overlooking the social meanings present in games (Patridge, 2010). The ethical, cultural, social implications of game content and its impacts on players underscore the need for a thorough examination of the values embedded within games.

While studies examining controversial industries have been predominantly revolving around contexts including gambling, tobacco, oil, alcohol, etc. (Aqueveque et al. 2018; Cai et al. 2011; Du & Vieira, 2012; Yani-de-Soriano et al. 2012), this paper argues that the video game industry also needs to be aware of its controversial aspects. Furthermore, given the complexity of the video game industry and the social meanings within the games, practitioners within this sector play a significant role in influencing and shaping game designs, posing the risk of leading to unethical outcomes (Karlsen, 2019; Zagal et al. 2013). Additionally, when investigating employees’ responses to social responsibility, although some acknowledge these obligations, previous research has revealed that certain game practitioners have exhibited negative reactions to such responsibilities. For instance, some developers openly admit to manipulating players through game design to bring more in-game purchases (Karlsen, 2021). This phenomenon highlights the importance of exploring individual's perspectives regarding controversies in video games, as some employees acknowledge these obligations while others do not. This paper highlights the significant role employees play in influencing and shaping values embedded in games. Aside from

considerations regarding profit and art design, it is crucial for game practitioners to consider their social responsibility (Karlsen, 2021).

2.3.2.2 CSR Practices in the Video Game Industry

Academic attention on the interplay between CSR and video game companies focuses on examining the actions and commitments taken by the companies, as well as determining what steps they should take to be socially responsible. For example, Jones et al. (2013) examine the world's top 10 games companies' CSR reports and suggest that a number of the leading game companies are publicly reporting and providing information about the impacts of their business on the marketplace, the workplace, the environment and the communities in which they operate.

Drawing upon the three pillars of CSR suggested by Kuhlman and Farrington (2010), investigations into companies in the video game industry reveal more investments in economic and social aspects, with relatively limited awareness of the environmental aspect. Specifically, regarding the social dimension, companies in video game industries prioritize providing safe and enjoyable gaming experiences, promoting well-being and development of their employees, and actively contributing to the communities in which they operate (Jones et al. 2013). These commitments include ensuring fair remuneration and rewards, providing favorable working conditions, offering opportunities for career progression, promoting employee well-being, fostering diversity in recruitment practices, ensuring equal opportunities for all employees, implementing flexible working arrangements to accommodate individual needs, and investing in comprehensive training and development programs (Jones et al. 2013).

In terms of economic aspects, according to Statista, the revenue generated from the worldwide gaming market reached almost 347 billion U.S. dollars in 2022 (Clement, 2024b). Additionally, the video game industry has significantly contributed to job creation. For example, in 2023, the industry employed approximately 104,080 people across the United States (Clement, 2024a). These figures highlight the substantial economic contributions of the video game industry and the companies within it.

Furthermore, regarding the commitments to the environment, there is a notable trend towards increased energy efficiency in consoles. For instance, both the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X have significantly reduced their carbon footprints per hour. Despite anticipated growth in

console installation, overall power usage is expected to rise slightly for PlayStation and decrease significantly for Xbox (Evans et al. 2020). In addition, a shift towards transportation methods, preferring railway or maritime transport over trucks is emerging, in order to reduce environmental harm caused by exhaust emissions and pollutants (Jones et al. 2013). These commitments emphasize the companies' acknowledgement of their environmental responsibilities.

Similar to the literature presented in section 2.3.1 on CSR in controversial industries, some researchers have suggested that video game companies adopt CSR strategies to counter public criticism and gain legitimacy (Yousafzai et al 2013). Some scholars have advised that the video game industry can look to the gambling industry for examples of embracing social responsibilities and obligations towards their customers to address problematic concerns (Griffiths & Pontes, 2019). Palazzo and Scherer (2006) suggest that CSR can be used as a useful mechanism for controversial companies to deflect stakeholders' negative perceptions, highlighting the strategic nature of CSR implementation in managing public image and reputation. Additionally, as demonstrated by Bae, Park, and Koo (2019), when game users, particularly heavy users, perceive CSR initiatives positively, they tend to have higher purchase intentions. This indicates that CSR can also serve as a method to enhance users' consumption intentions.

However, even though leading gaming companies acknowledge CSR and claim to prioritize responsible gaming practices in their reports, there is scant attention being paid to controversies (Jones et al. 2013). Czarska and Majerska (2023) argue that CSR in the video game industry mainly serves as a tool for cultivating a positive corporate image rather than genuinely addressing social and environmental concerns. It still acts as a means to redirect focus from unethical practices undertaken by the company for its own advantage. Thus, while CSR offers potential benefits, its implementation in the video game industry requires more genuine and comprehensive efforts to address underlying ethical issues.

2.4 CSR Perceptions and Outcomes of Individuals

Most of the literature assumes that organizational engagement in CSR leads to favorable outcomes for employees. It is considered that organizational CSR initiatives would predominantly yield positive relationships with desirable employee attitudes and behaviors (Donia & Sirsly, 2016). However, with a growing skepticism about organizational motives, highlighted by the concept of “greenwashing”, research suggests that corporate misconduct or

negligence can lead to neutral or negative consequences at the individual level (Rupp et al. 2013). To gain a deeper understanding of an individual's reactions to CSR, this section outlines potential evaluations and outcomes that employees may experience.

Our paper adopts Gond et al. (2017)'s definition of CSR evaluation, which encompasses cognitive and affective processes underlying people's assessments of CSR initiatives. In this context, CSR evaluation serves as a framework for understanding how individuals perceive and respond to their organizations' CSR efforts. Specifically, our study focuses on CSR attributions to explore how employees distinguish between CSR activities perceived as substantive versus symbolic (Donia et al. 2019). Moreover, we adopt Aguinis and Glavas (2012)'s definition of outcomes as the results stemming from CSR initiatives. Within this framework, we delve into individual's reactions (Gond et al. 2017) to CSR, investigating how, why, and when employees respond to CSR initiatives.

2.4.1 Individual's Evaluations of CSR

As outlined by Gond et al. (2017) perceptions of CSR are integral to an individual's evaluation of CSR. Similarly, Farooq et al. (2017) argue that CSR perceptions play a significant role in influencing employee's evaluation of their organization. Gond et al. (2017) define individual's evaluations of CSR as "the cognitive and affective processes by which people gather and organize information related to organizations' CSR initiatives to form judgments about the initiatives, experience emotions about their perceptions, and also attribute reasons to their origin." (p.13) Cognitive processes include the framing of CSR perceptions, CSR causal attributions, and CSR sensemaking, while affective processes revolve around how emotions impact CSR evaluations.

While the majority of previous research on CSR outcomes has emphasized to what extent CSR activities are implemented, recent studies have highlighted the impact of employees' perceptions of the underlying motives behind CSR engagement on CSR outcomes. This emerging trend in micro-CSR research examines the attributions individuals make regarding organizational motivations for CSR initiatives (Donia & Sirsly, 2016). In contrast to the extent of CSR which examines the scope and scale of CSR activities by a company, attributions of CSR explore individuals' interpretations and judgments about the company's motivations behind those CSR actions. Two-dimensional organizational motivations underlying CSR initiatives such as substantive versus symbolic are crucial in understanding

how employees perceive and evaluate CSR efforts (Donia & Sirsly, 2016). Substantive CSR involves addressing societal needs and providing true social benefits while symbolic CSR is more about impression management and strategic presentation.

Moreover, according to Donia and Sirsly (2016), organizations may engage in CSR with both substantive and symbolic motives, striving to do good while also benefiting from enhanced public perception at the same time. Meanwhile, they argue that employees tend to simplify their evaluations, categorizing CSR initiatives as mainly substantive or symbolic. This suggests that individual perceptions often exhibit a prevalence of dominant attributions concerning CSR, which can be categorized as either substantive or symbolic. Furthermore, individuals' perceptions of CSR initiatives as substantive or symbolic may not align with the organization's underlying motives (Donia & Sirsly, 2016). For example, CSR initiatives aimed at benefiting the community may be perceived as symbolic by employees, as they do not directly address the interests of the employees themselves.

2.4.2 Individual's Outcomes of CSR

Numerous studies have identified a variety of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes among employees influenced by CSR. For instance, Gond et al. (2017) suggest individual reactions to CSR primarily in the workplace including: organizational identification (e.g. Carmeli et al. 2007; De Roeck et al. 2016), organizational commitment (e.g. Erdogan, Bauer, & Taylor, 2015; Glavas & Piderit, 2009), job satisfaction (e.g. Dhanesh, 2014), employee engagement (e.g. Glavas & Piderit, 2009), and organizational pride (e.g. De Roeck et al. 2016), and more.

Moreover, CSR initiatives can lead to different outcomes based on employees' attributions, distinguishing between substantive and symbolic CSR. Research distinguishing between CSR attributed as genuine (substantive) versus greenwashing (symbolic) has demonstrated that only the former contributes to valued employee-level outcomes (Donia & Sirsly, 2016). Furthermore, studies have shown that employees' attributions of CSR motives influence their attitudes and behaviors, with selfless attributions leading to positive outcomes and self-serving attributions having null or negative effects (Donia et al. 2019).

Donia et al. (2019) emphasize the importance for organizations to recognize the authenticity of CSR initiatives as crucial factors influencing their employees' attitudes and behaviors. While symbolic CSR might yield immediate reputation and profit enhancements from

external stakeholders, only CSR perceived as substantive provides valuable benefits to employee attitudes and performance within the organization (Donia et al. 2019).

2.4.3 CSR and Organizational Identification

While analyzing the collected data, we discovered that organizational identification emerged as the most prominent outcome among all of the factors we examined. As a result, we revisited the literature in this specific domain and decided to elaborate on it further.

The concept of organizational identification started to attract the academic world's attention in the 1980s and was acknowledged as a unique construct by scholars in organizational behavior, social psychology, and communication (Riketta, 2005). The origin of this concept lies within Social Identity Theory (SIT), proposed by Tajfel (1978), which suggests that individuals tend to classify themselves and others into different social categories, such as organizational membership, gender, age, and more. Ashforth and Mael (1989) propose applying SIT to a particular organization, thus framing organizational identification from a social identity perspective. They define organizational identification as, "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member" (Ashforth & Mael, 1992, p.104).

When examining the antecedents of organizational identification, social exchange antecedents have been gaining more attention in recent years (He & Brown, 2013). This suggests that when employees receive fulfillment of certain socioemotional needs from the organization, they often feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate by forming a socioemotional attachment to the organization (He & Brown, 2013). For example, some scholars have concluded that perceived organizational support can lead to increased organizational identification (Edwards & Peccei, 2010; Gibney et al. 2011). Furthermore, Jones (2010) contends that when employees experience a sense of pride of being a member of an organization, it enhances their level of organizational identification. In addition, factors likely associated with organizational identification include the distinctiveness of group values and practices (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and attractiveness (Pratt, 1998). Indeed, favorable values and practices within a group directly shape an individual's self-concept and identification with the organization (Turker, 2008). A number of researchers have suggested that organizational identification typically

entails a degree of alignment between an individual's goals and values and those of the organization (Edwards, 2005).

Outcomes resulting from organizational identification can be divided into two categories: attitudinal outcomes and behavioral outcomes (Lee et al. 2015). It has been proved that job involvement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment, being categorized as attitudinal outcomes, are highly connected with organizational identification (Lee et al. 2015). Moreover, behavioral outcomes include in-role performance and extra-role performance (Lee et al. 2015).

Considering that CSR often encompasses positive values and organizational attractiveness, several studies have illustrated that CSR initiatives can foster employees' organizational identification (De Roeck et al. 2014; Farooq et al. 2017; Kim et al. 2010). Farooq et al. (2017) contend that CSR positively correlates with employees' organizational identification, given that alignment of values with socially responsible organizations influences their workplace behaviors. They suggest that CSR initiatives that prioritize external stakeholders tend to boost the perceived prestige of a company, whereas initiatives centered on employee welfare tend to elevate the perceived respect for the company. Both of them are argued to influence employees' organizational identification, but may have varying effects on different aspects of employee citizenship within the organization (Farooq et al. 2017). Likewise, De Roeck et al. (2014) propose that employees tend to utilize CSR initiatives to evaluate their organization's character and form a sense of identification with it. They argue that CSR fosters employees' organizational identification, as individuals are inclined to feel pride in identifying themselves with organizations renowned for their sustainability endeavors.

2.5 Theoretical framework

Before moving on to the methodology, we would like to reiterate the theoretical framework for our study in addressing our research questions:

How do employees in the video game industry perceive and react to CSR?

When examining an individual's perception of CSR, we follow the three pillars of sustainability suggested by Kuhlman and Farrington (2010): society, community, environment. This enables us to build up a consistent foundational understanding with interviewees when discussing CSR.

Our question concerns employee's perceptions and reactions to CSR within the video game industry. Therefore, our focus lies in the sector of micro CSR, where the individual perspective prevails. To comprehend how individuals perceive CSR, we employ the framework established by Gond et al. (2017) to assess how employees evaluate CSR. Specifically, our study delves into CSR attributions to differentiate between CSR perceived as substantive versus symbolic, drawing on definitions provided by Rodrigue et al. (2013) and Donia and Sirsly (2016). Donia and Sirsly (2016) posit that the distinction between substantive and symbolic nature of CSR initiatives lies in the underlying motives, while Rodrigue et al. (2013) suggest differentiating substantive and symbolic CSR based on whether meaningful changes have been made to operations.

In our exploration of the response to CSR as an outcome, we examine individual reactions as suggested by Gond et al. (2017) to investigate how, why, and when employees respond to CSR initiatives. Our identified reaction, organizational identification, is defined by Mael & Ashforth (1992) as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member" (p.104). In interpreting the data, we have drawn upon suggested antecedents and results of organizational identification from various scholars to enrich our analysis. Furthermore, we refer to Donia et al. (2019)'s findings to explore the interplay between two attributions of CSR and organizational outcomes that substantive CSR tends to yield positive outcomes while symbolic CSR has minimal or null impact on it. Through our analysis, we seek to shed light on the nuanced dynamics between CSR attributions and organizational outcomes, contributing to both theoretical advancement and practical insights within the field.

3. Methodology

The goal of our study is to understand how employees in the video game industry perceive CSR and how they react to it. The methodology section begins by presenting philosophical foundations of the interpretive tradition, which provide the guiding principles for our research. We further outline our research approach of abduction, provide a comprehensive overview of the organizations represented by interviewees, and introduce the background of the video game industry in two countries to understand the research context. Following this, we elaborate on the procedures employed for data collection and analysis. We conclude the

chapter by providing critical reflections on our methods and discussing any limitations present in our study.

3.1 Philosophical Grounding

Our research delves into the subjective world of video game industry employees to explore their perceptions of CSR and reactions to the company initiatives. The interpretive tradition, which focuses on human interpretation as the starting point for understanding the social world, is utilized in our study (Prasad, 2018). We specifically focus on symbolic interactionism (SI) within the interpretive tradition to understand individuals' sense-making around CSR. According to Prasad (2018), symbolic interactionism posits that objects and events hold no intrinsic meaning while individuals assign meaning to them through everyday social interactions. This aligns with our recognition that employee perceptions and reactions towards CSR are subjective and shaped through social situations, influenced by factors like job positions, cultural background and personal beliefs.

Based on Prasad (2018), our research aims to identify subjective reality construction (*verstehen*) through a process of understanding the participants' meanings and intentions behind their perceptions of CSR initiatives. To capture these subjective meanings, we explore the everyday lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of employees – the everyday context where they make sense of CSR. We intend to investigate their "self-identity" by asking subjects to elaborate on their perceptions of self and others in different social contexts, such as their work environment and daily interactions. While acknowledging individual interpretations, we also explore "*intersubjectivity*", the tendency for shared understandings to emerge within a group (Prasad, 2018). By analyzing the collected data, we aim to identify common constructions that might represent shared interpretations and reactions of CSR among the employees.

3.2 Research Approach

As stated above, our research adopts an interpretive approach to explore the perceptions of employees within the video game industry regarding CSR and their corresponding responses to the company's CSR commitments.

The study is conducted using a qualitative approach primarily due to the intricate and subjective nature of the phenomena under investigation. Qualitative methods are utilized to

comprehend social interactions and the meaning of social phenomena in the contexts in which they are created (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). By employing methods like interviews, we delve deeply into the nuanced perspectives and experiences of employees. In-depth interviews facilitate the examination of context-specific factors that may influence how CSR is perceived and interpreted within the unique environment of the video game industry. Furthermore, qualitative research allows for the exploration of individuals' meanings, motivations, and emotions surrounding CSR, offering insights into the complex interplay between organizational practices and employee perceptions.

Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) propose three approaches for conducting business research: induction, deduction, and abduction. The inductive approach begins with analyzing empirical findings to discover theoretical concepts. Conversely, the deductive approach seeks to validate a theory through empirical data (Bryman, 2012). Abduction, while incorporating elements of both deduction and induction, entails a multifaceted process characterized by continuous interaction between theory and empirical facts. It is regarded as a method to add new perspectives to comprehend certain theories and gather data (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

An abductive approach, which involves a cyclical process of empirical observation and theory development, is adopted in our study. Our study is grounded in the literature on CSR concepts, CSR in the video game industry, and micro-CSR to gain a basic understanding of relevant theories prior to data collection. In our literature review on individual's perception of CSR, we have found that existing research has explored a key focus on CSR attribution, specifically distinguishing between symbolic and substantive CSR. To enhance our analysis of empirical data, we have adopted this approach to gain deeper insights into their perceptions. By applying these established theoretical concepts to our specific data, we have employed a deductive method. Furthermore, through a comprehensive review of the literature on potential individual's outcomes of CSR, we have gathered existing knowledge across this field. Upon analyzing our findings, we have identified organizational identification as a significant outcome associated with reactions to CSR. This discovery has been made without any preconceived assumptions, as we have conducted our analysis of empirical data free from the constraints of limited theories. This aspect of our approach reflects the inductive nature of abduction, allowing us to draw outcomes directly from data. Subsequently, we revisited the literature on organizational identification to interpret our data by applying theoretical

frameworks. This stage demonstrates the deductive aspect of our abduction approach, wherein we utilize existing theories to analyze and interpret our empirical findings. Throughout this process, we continuously compare our empirical findings with established theories, engaging in a back-and-forth evaluation to ensure comprehensive analysis. While our aim was to mitigate the potential bias from a particular theory, we recognize that our previous exposure to theories during our master's program may still have influenced our research.

3.3 Research Design and Context

To ensure confidentiality throughout our paper, we have decided to anonymize the case organizations by using generic labels such as “Organization A”, “Organization B”, and so forth (Appendix 9.2). Similarly, participants are labeled as “Interviewee” followed by a designated number, rather than by their names (Appendix 9.1).

Our interviewees are from six video game companies, with four based in Sweden and two based in China. The process of how we identified these employees will be further elaborated on in section 3.4.1 on sampling section. Given the individual-centric focus of our study, we offer a concise overview of the employing companies of our interviewees. This overview serves as supplementary background information to facilitate a better understanding of their perceptions and reactions. In terms of business focus, Organizations A and B have diversified portfolios, producing console games, computer games, and mobile games. Conversely, Organizations C, D, and E concentrate on the innovation and development of computer games and mobile games. Furthermore, only Organizations A, C, and F have specific departments or dedicated positions concerning CSR.

Furthermore, as our identified interviewees are based in either Sweden or China, obtaining a brief understanding of the video game industry in these two countries will also contribute to contextualizing this study. In the video game industry, China ranks as the second-largest market, following the United States in terms of revenues (Wijman, 2023). Moreover, according to Statista (2021) and Yiguan Analysys (2021), in terms of the amount of users and people employed by the video game industry, China has been the biggest player all over the world. Furthermore, according to Dataspelesbranschen, a Swedish trade association for video game companies, Sweden also holds significant importance in the European video game industry, with approximately every fourth person in the world having played a game created in Sweden. This statistic highlights the growing influence of the Swedish games industry.

They also reported that in comparison to the previous year (2021), the game industry in Sweden showed an increase of 40% in terms of revenue generated, up to EUR 8.1 billion, contributing several billions to the Swedish public treasury (Dataspelsbranschen, 2023). This also results in a bigger talent pool of gaming practitioners, attracting an increasing number of well-known gaming companies to establish offices in Sweden.

3.4 Data Collection

In this section, we present the process of collecting data. In line with the symbolic interactionism tradition, the semi-structured interview is the core method used to study employee's perceptions. Since the interviews are highly subjective, it is crucial to clearly explain how the samples were chosen and how the semi-structured interviews were conducted, to better capture the overview of data.

3.4.1 Sampling

As stated by Bell et al. (2019), to conduct purposive sampling, interviewees who are able to contribute insightful opinions on answers to research questions should be selected. Therefore, we started our sampling process by identifying organizations within the video game industry. Being based in Sweden, with the help of Google, we identified a list of video game companies in Sweden. We searched people on LinkedIn who are working or used to work in target companies and sent out over 100 connection requests in total. In addition, we reached out to other platforms like Game Habitat, a community dedicated to the game industry in Malmö, Sweden. After one month, we successfully received 5 responses. In addition, having personal connections with video game practitioners in China, we also took the opportunity to expand our sampling to include interviews with employees in China, adding 5 more interviews to our total number. This also contributes to the diversity of our sample interviewees. In summary, we have conducted 10 interviews, including 2 CSR specialists. We have incorporated perspectives from both general employees and CSR specialists to provide comprehensive insights into the topic. In terms of the variety of interview samples, we aim to include people of various genders, ages, positions, and duration of working for their employer. The list of interviewees (Appendix 9.1) shows the general information in an anonymous way. The specific position title will not be revealed to ensure anonymity.

3.4.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are regarded as the best way to collect detailed data and hidden information (Bell et al. 2019). Within symbolic interactionism, such interviews delve into the depth and meaning of experiences of the interviewees. They prioritize understanding “how” individuals interpret specific situations, often allowing for open-ended discussions where respondents have substantial control over the direction of the interview (Prasad, 2018). Thus, we decided to adopt semi-structured interviews for our investigation.

Using an interview guideline helped us cover our research interests while enabling respondents to share their perspectives and offer additional insights (Bryman, 2012). According to Kvale (1996), the interview guide encompasses introducing, probing questions, and follow-up. The interview questions were formulated from the insights obtained during the literature review. Our interview guide will be presented in Appendix 9.3 For the introduction, we began our interviews with greetings, self-introductions, the background of the research project, and welcomes. In this way, we intended to create a comfortable conversation atmosphere for interviewees. Regarding probing questions and follow-up, we designed the interview questions for four categories: personal information of the interviewee, understanding of CSR, their view towards the organization, and their reactions to CSR or relevant initiatives. At the same time, certain extents of flexibility and freedom were allowed as follow-up questions for both interviewers and interviewees. Finally, we ended the interviews by expressing our appreciation and thanks again.

In general, all the interviews lasted with a span from 30 to 60 minutes. Because of the physical distance issue, the interviews had to be conducted online with video and audio, which helped us to observe interviewees’ facial expressions and body language and better understand the context. All the interviews for people based in Sweden were conducted in English, while the interviews for people based in China were conducted in Chinese Mandarin due to the language barriers.

We prepared a consent for interviewees to sign, ensuring they are aware that the interviews will be recorded and used exclusively for the thesis project, with all the information being anonymous. We sent out the consent in advance and requested them to sign it and send it back before the interview, also as a reminder for our interview appointment. In Appendix 9.2, interview consent can be found.

3.5 Data Analysis

By conducting interviews, we gain insight into the interviewees' "*Lebenswelt*" (Prasad, 2018), providing us with a closer understanding of their daily lives and how they perceive and react to CSR. This chapter outlines the transcription, "*sorting, coding, and reducing*" processes (Rennstam & Wasterfors, 2018) used to analyze the data obtained from the conducted interviews.

After each interview was finished, we initiated the transcription process. We recorded the interviews to capture all insights, ensuring a thorough and comprehensive presentation of the data. One of our researchers converted the audio recordings into text using a video editing application. To ensure clarity, one researcher meticulously refined the transcripts and highlighted statements that were particularly interesting or insightful. Subsequently, another researcher reviewed the same transcripts and marked intriguing passages. After this initial review, both of us discussed the sentences we found noteworthy. Sorting process (Rennstam & Wasterfors, 2018) was utilized alongside our transcription process, wherein we deliberated on the emerging patterns and themes. While we observed similar themes and patterns, our interpretations and perspectives differed in several aspects. Hence, through this collaborative discussion process, we ensured that diverse perspectives were considered, allowing us to emphasize the most significant material. This systematic approach formed the foundation for our analysis.

For interviews conducted in Chinese, one of us, a native Chinese speaker, handled the translation after initial modifications. To ensure a thorough understanding of the interviewees' responses, the native speaker researcher initially used Google Translator for automatic translation, followed by a thorough review and revision of each sentence. Then, another researcher, who does not speak Chinese, carefully reviewed the English translation and provided comments on any ambiguous sentences. Together, we discussed and revised specific words or sentences to ensure both researchers consistently understood the transcriptions and minimize misunderstandings resulting from translations. This collaborative approach helped maintain the integrity and accuracy of the translated data for our analysis. Similarly to interviews conducted in English, the transcription process occurred simultaneously with the sorting process as stated above.

To effectively engage in the coding process (Rennstam & Wasterfors, 2018), we collaborated to create a spreadsheet listing all conducted interviews. We listed the information to include

in our overview spreadsheet and designed labels that we perceived valuable to our study. These labels encompassed background information about the interviewees, including their tenure, age, position, and main discussion themes such as CSR dimensions, terms used to describe CSR, and most impressive CSR initiatives, CSR attributions, reactions to CSR, and so on. Each time we introduced a new label, we defined in our words it to ensure a shared understanding of its significance. We then revisited the original statements, incorporating keywords from them. This process illustrates that the initial coding is typically close to the empirical data while still being influenced by our knowledge as the researchers (Rennstam & Wasterfors, 2018). Throughout the interview process, we continually refined our ideas and adjusted our labels. Initially starting with 9 different labels, the number expanded to 13 after completing all interviews. We added labels such as CSR target groups and organizational identification after noticing that these themes were also recurring topics in our interviews.

Following the sorting stages, we conducted a categorical reduction process, intentionally emphasizing certain categories over others that held less theoretical significance (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). This pragmatic approach enabled us to selectively narrow down themes and categories that fell outside the scope of our research. From the 13 labels, we selected 8 most relevant ones to examine in detail in our analysis. Subsequently, 8 labels are categorized into 3 overarching coded themes that best address our research question regarding employees' perceptions and reactions to CSR within the video game industry. In addition, we broke them down into several sub-themes under each category to reinforce the overarching theme and clearly highlight important aspects regarding it. This process allowed us to condense the key points from the data into specific themes consistent with our research objectives. When arguing (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) the data, we separately present the perspectives of general employees and CSR practitioners to highlight distinct contributions from each group.

In summary, our thorough transcription, sorting, coding, and reducing (Rennstam & Wasterfors, 2018) processes enabled us to extract valuable insights from interview data regarding individuals' perceptions and reactions to CSR within the video game industry. Through collaborative analysis, we identified overarching and sub-themes that align with our research objectives, ensuring the validity and depth of our findings. This comprehensive methodology enhances our contribution to the understanding of CSR in this specific context.

3.6 Reflexivity and Limitations

To better navigate through the complexity of exploring a widely discussed topic from various perspectives, it is essential to be reflexive and to constantly question ourselves and each other. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) suggested that there are two characteristics of reflexive research: careful interpretation and reflection. Therefore, this chapter will reveal the reflections and limitations identified by reassessing the study.

Being the first time collaborating on a thesis project with another researcher, and considering that neither of us are native English speakers, we have actively exchanged our thoughts. Our aim has been to achieve a convergence while still allowing space to challenge each other. We have continuously questioned, reassessed, and adjusted our understanding of our work. For example, following our first interview, which took around 60 minutes, we discovered that certain questions were repetitive, prompting us to engage in reflexive discussions to enhance the efficiency of our interviewing process. Before the first interview, we believed it was necessary to ask every question we had prepared for the interviews. However, we noticed that some questions were redundant, as they had already been answered. For instance, during the first interview, we asked both "How would you describe the company as socially responsible in terms of economic, social, and environmental aspects?" and "How are you contributing to any actions in your position?" even though Interviewee 1 had already addressed the answer of the latter question in the former question. Upon reflecting on this redundancy, we agreed to adopt a more flexible approach to questioning rather than rigidly following the pre-designed interview structure. This reflexive practice allows for a more natural conversation flow and avoids repetitive inquiries, ensuring a more efficient and effective interview process. This reflexive practice has become a standard routine after each interview.

Another example we would like to highlight is from the reflection session after the second interview. We realized that some of our questions were framed to elicit yes or no answers, which limited the depth of the responses and did not contribute to our investigation of individual perceptions. Therefore, we decided to rephrase these questions to be more open-ended. For instance, we modified the question "Do you think the CSR initiatives affect your view towards your employer?" to "How do the CSR initiatives affect your view towards your employer?". This adjustment has allowed us to conduct interviews more efficiently while maintaining focus on gathering comprehensive and insightful data.

We acknowledge several limitations in our study. We selected qualitative research and the semi-structured interview method as the most suitable approaches to address our research question and understand individuals' sense-making around CSR. However, we recognize that qualitative research lacks formal generalizability due to its unique and context-specific nature (Prasad, 2018). Additionally, our study specifically focused on the video game industry, with participants located in Sweden and China, which may further limit the generalizability of our findings. Moreover, due to time and resource constraints, our study's scope was limited. A larger sample size could have provided a more comprehensive understanding and potentially more extensive insights. Future research could benefit from expanding the sample size and including participants from a broader range of locations and industries to enhance the generalizability of the findings. In addition, due to geographical distances and scheduling conflicts, we encountered challenges in conducting in-person interviews and chose online interviews as an alternative method. Online interviews had some limitations such as technical issues and reduced non-verbal communication cues. Lastly, language barriers posed an additional challenge, particularly with Chinese-speaking participants. As not all interviews could be conducted in English, we translated the scripts from Chinese to English, potentially impacting the accuracy and interpretation of interview responses.

4. Findings

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of how CSR practices shape perception and identification of individuals within the company, the findings are divided into two distinct sections: one focusing on employees and the other on CSR specialists within the video game industry. To gain insights into how CSR permeates throughout the organization and impacts individuals, we examine the perspectives of general employees across various departments and levels. Meanwhile, considering that CSR specialists possess a professional understanding of CSR due to their dedicated role and responsibilities, we have dedicated a separate section to their insights. Their expertise and direct involvement in CSR initiatives undoubtedly influence their perceptions and identification with the company, as they are deeply involved in implementing and advocating for CSR practices. Therefore, separating these sections enables a nuanced exploration of CSR perceptions and identification within the video game industry, accounting for both specialized knowledge and broader organizational dynamics.

To delve into how employees perceive and react to CSR initiatives, we have identified three overarching themes: understanding of CSR, CSR attribution, and reactions to CSR. Each of

these themes encompasses several sub-themes, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of employees' perspectives and experiences.

4.1 Findings from Interviews with Employees

This section aims to present empirical findings and analysis of interviews with those participants who do not take CSR as their main job responsibilities.

4.1.1 Understanding of CSR

In this overarching theme, we analyze individuals' perceptions through 3 sub-themes, including: own awareness and description of CSR, perspectives on the scopes of CSR initiatives, and views on the target group for CSR initiatives.

4.1.1.1 Own Awareness and Description of CSR

To establish a solid foundation for conversation, we initially explored interviewees' personal awareness regarding CSR without explicitly mentioning the term. We asked them to describe their understanding of business considering the broader impact of their actions on society, the environment, and the economy. Overall, interviewees demonstrated diverse levels of awareness and provided nuanced descriptions of the concept.

Although interviewee 1 is not dedicated in CSR specialization, they exhibited familiarity with the concept, demonstrating a strong personal belief in CSR by repeating the word "strong conviction":

"I have a very strong conviction that society is a combination of efforts. [...] I also have a very strong conviction that corporations also have a responsibility to contribute to society. So for me, CSR is kind of a collective word that describes any effort we make as a corporation to take responsibility for the fact that we have an impact on society beyond our business." - Interviewee 1

This quote illustrates that interviewee 1 perceived CSR as a comprehensive term encompassing all endeavors related to corporate responsibility towards society. Their perspective reflects a strong conviction regarding the significance of CSR.

In contrast, some interviewees expressed unfamiliarity with CSR, with some even indicating they had not heard the term before:

“I do not really know (which concept can be used to describe these initiatives or commitments). [...] I only know that some companies may be responsible for some aspects of social welfare [...].” - Interviewee 6

Interviewee 6 demonstrated a general idea that companies have a responsibility towards society, yet encountered difficulty in pinpointing a specific term or concept to articulate it.

As for interviewee 7, despite our repeated attempts to clarify the question, they did not understand the question about the corporate’s socially responsible actions saying, *“I still do not quite understand, so I do not think I can answer this question.”* This highlights that they lacked both familiarity with the concept and understanding of the discourse surrounding CSR.

To sum up, individuals in the video game industry hold varying levels of perceptions regarding the concept of CSR or relevant discourses. Some have a well-structured and comprehensive understanding of CSR, while others are entirely unaware of the concept before we introduced it to them.

Based on the observations identified above, we delve deeper into how each interviewee connects the company’s socially responsible actions with specific terms. Both interviewees 3 and 4 associated the company’s social commitments with the concept of “diversity and inclusion”:

“I don't think we use a specific word, but what comes to mind is for sure inclusivity. Diversity and inclusion is something that comes up a lot.” - Interviewee 3

“When it comes to what you are asking about I think that the closest thing would be the DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion).” - Interviewee 4

This illustrates that the term "diversity and inclusion" is closely intertwined with CSR, emphasizing the significant role that initiatives related to "diversity and inclusion" plays in shaping their perception of CSR.

Regarding the corporate’s impacts on the environment, interviewee 3 linked the concept with the term “sustainability” saying, *“sustainability, I think, is also a term that goes around,*

especially when it comes to environmental sustainability.” This statement reveals a clear association between sustainability and CSR, with particular emphasis on perceiving sustainability as closely linked to environmental commitments or impacts.

Meanwhile, interviewee 8 expressed that their organization uses the term “corporate social responsibilities” to describe their commitments, but mainly in external contexts:

“We use corporate social responsibilities. We started to use this term in recent 2 years in our marketing promotion materials when we are conducting campus recruitment.” - Interviewee 8

This suggests that while the organization acknowledges and promotes its CSR efforts externally, the term may not be as commonly used or emphasized within the internal culture or communications of the company.

In summary, these excerpts illustrate how each employee aligned the company’s socially responsible actions with diverse concepts such as diversity, inclusion and sustainability. Such concepts might stem from varying personal values or organizational strategies.

To mitigate the potential limitations in interview effectiveness caused by some interviewees’ lack of awareness or familiarity with the extent of CSR , we briefly mentioned the three main aspects of CSR (economic, social, and environmental) to all interviewees before we move forward to further questions, based on Kuhlman and Farrington's (2010) framework. After that, those interviewees who were not aware of the CSR concept in the beginning of the interview were able to identify CSR initiatives during the interview process. For example, interviewee 6 mentioned the initiative called “girls help girls”, an informal network providing assistance and support for all female employees within the organization. Although they struggled to pinpoint a specific term to describe socially responsible commitments, they referenced certain terms used within specific initiatives within their organizations.

Additionally, Interviewee 8 stated that while the term CSR may be relatively new and unfamiliar to them, the relevant initiatives themselves already existed:

“I think in China, we have never heard about or been exposed to this concept until the past two years or so and some media started to use this concept in recent years. But when it comes to specific actions or initiatives, they have been existing for a long time” - Interviewee 8

As evidenced above, they regarded the initiatives as being implemented over time, with CSR seen as a subsequent, overarching term encompassing various initiatives. This observation underscores the importance of exploring individuals' perceptions not only of the CSR concept but also of the commitments, initiatives, and actions it embodies. Additionally, in certain contexts, even though CSR initiatives already existed, individuals might not be aware of the concept itself. In this case, CSR has emerged as a conceptual framework after initiatives have already been practiced for a period of time.

Overall, in this sub-theme, individuals within the video game industry exhibited varying levels of awareness about CSR concepts, and they adopted different terms to associate with the CSR practices of their employing company. Furthermore, for those who remained unfamiliar with CSR concepts, they became able to identify CSR initiatives once the concept was introduced.

4.1.1.2 Perspectives on the Scope of CSR Initiatives:

In this sub-theme, building upon a foundational understanding of the CSR concept, we delve deeper into exploring the extent to which individuals in the video game industry perceive CSR.

During the interviews, nearly all participants referenced CSR initiatives focused on social aspects, particularly regarding diversity and inclusion. For example, as mentioned earlier, both interviewees 3 and 4 discussed initiatives associated with diversity and inclusion, with interviewee 4 offering a specific example from their employer:

“I think we have recently hired a DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) lead who has the whole initiative under her, and the company is trying to make the company basically more diverse. I think that we have hired significantly higher percentage of women over the last year since the female CEO joined the company. So there are definitely attempts at trying to make everybody a little bit more equal [...].” – Interviewee 4

By hiring a DEI specialist and appointing a female CEO, the company has been actively investing in diversity and inclusion attempts. This has led to a more diverse and inclusive workplace, as well as creating additional job opportunities for women, thereby contributing to gender equality.

Interviewee 6 added an example of fostering inclusivity and diversity in the workplace by creating opportunities for disabled people, stating, *“The first thing that came to my mind was the positions (only available) for disabled people [...] it is about helping disadvantaged groups.”* This initiative also falls within the realm of social dimension as it addresses societal equality by specifically providing job opportunities for marginalized individuals.

In addition, some interviewees mentioned philanthropic initiatives within their organizations, also resonating with the social aspect of CSR:

“Then we realized that a lot of the people struggling with drug abuse or a criminal lifestyle also had children and of course they had no money to buy a PlayStation or [...] cool games to enjoy. So we took a lot of our machines and we set up a play night for their children. [...] For them it was really like a kaleidoscopic experience.” -

Interview 1

“Like during the pandemic, companies provided masks which were hard to find at that time. And also in Zhengzhou city or elsewhere the flood happened, there were donation events for them.” - Interview 7

These initiatives demonstrate the companies' efforts to assist individuals facing disadvantaged situations in various ways, highlighting their dedication to social responsibility extending beyond their primary business operations

Lastly, a few interviewees discussed the cultural impact of gaming products, emphasizing their soft influence on society.

“Regarding the cultural aspects [...] for example, we actually collaborate with many traditional cultural or top-tier tourism entities. The core of these projects is to promote the spirit of China or Chinese traditional culture, conveying these elements in our gaming products to every player who engages with us. It can serve as a very central channel for cultural promotion.” - Interviewee 8

Interviewee 8 provided a fresh perspective on initiatives tied to social aspects, particularly cultural diffusion. These initiatives have benefited society by promoting specific values and traditions.

When it comes to CSR, the interviewees' initial thoughts revolve around the social dimension of it, showcasing that their perceptions of CSR are particularly influenced by initiatives addressing social issues.

Furthermore, regarding economic dimension, some interviewees merely mentioned this dimension without providing detailed explanation:

“In addition to making profits through this society, it can also [...]” - Interviewee 7

“In terms of the economy, apart from the revenue generated by our own products, which benefits the entire company, there is [...]” - Interviewee 8

This suggests that while the economic dimension of CSR was acknowledged by these interviewees, they may perceive it as something inherent to corporate nature and may not consider it necessary to elaborate further on its significance within the context of CSR.

Moreover, some interviewees discussed job opportunities provided by the companies, which can be considered as a part of both economic and social dimensions.

“Project X was an idea that the biggest impact we have on people's lives is by giving them a proper job and a chance to grow. [...] Project X was to allow companies, not just us, but a lot of companies, to meet people who were outside of the system who did not have a way, not have a good path into work and offer them their first real paid job.” - Interviewee 1

This statement emphasizes that the role of the initiative is not only in fostering economic growth but also in promoting social inclusion and providing pathways to employment for marginalized individuals.

The final dimension concerns the environment. For example, interviewee 2 introduced Project Y by stating, *“In 2023, we (the employer) launched project Y for one of our game products, advocating for the protection of endangered animals in China.”* Additionally, interviewee 3 mentioned the bike race organized by the company, explaining, *“They go on bikes and they take a huge load and go for days and days. [...] They make these initiatives and raise money for environmental causes.”*

However, some individuals did not provide any examples regarding the environmental dimension, indicating a lack of perception of CSR in this area. Interviewee 8's skeptical opinion shed light on this, suggesting that the video game industry may not be involved in environmental responsibility:

“Actually, when it comes to the environment, I think for most companies, unless we are engaged in industrial activities, there is certainly no harm being done, especially for internet companies...I don't think it has much to do with the video game industry. - Interviewee 8

Therefore, individuals within the video game industry appeared to have limited understanding or awareness of specific corporate responsibilities concerning the environmental dimension, as discussed in the literature review, which includes aspects such as electricity consumption, transportation practices, and so forth.

To summarize, in exploring individuals' perceptions regarding CSR initiatives, it becomes evident that a notable emphasis is placed on the social dimension. The diverse range of initiatives categorized under social aspects suggests a significant level of attention and interest from individuals. However, it is noteworthy that some interviewees tend to overlook economic considerations. Moreover, the video game industry's limited awareness of environmental responsibilities highlights a potential gap in CSR understanding. Overall, these insights provide a comprehensive overview of how individuals within this sector perceive CSR through the lens of different perspectives, drawing from widely used theoretical frameworks in the CSR domain (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010).

4.1.1.3 Views on the Target Group for CSR Initiatives:

In this chapter, we shift our focus from examining CSR dimensions to exploring the target groups of CSR initiatives discussed by interviewees, which are divided into three categories: community, employee, and customer/user. We adopt this classification based on an observation identified in our conducted interviews. To clarify, the target group refers to the specific beneficiaries that the CSR initiative aims to benefit.

It is evident that most interviewees primarily discussed employing companies' CSR initiatives in relation to local community and employee work environment. For instance, interviewee 6

introduced employee care initiatives such as providing free child care services, showcasing the company's commitments to the welfare of employees and their families:

“One thing I found really good in my company is the free child care services they provide. I think this is important for the family that both parents are employed.” - Interviewee 6

Furthermore, as evidenced by excerpts from previous sub-themes, initiatives aimed at fostering a diverse and inclusive working environment can be categorized as initiatives targeting employees. Meanwhile, initiatives that focus on philanthropy and equality extend their benefits to the broader community.

On the contrary, initiatives or commitments targeting users are relatively scarce in our conducted interviews.

Interviewee 1 directly addressed unethical practices for game users within certain games:

“There is the extreme cynicism that is actually bordering on manipulation in video games, which is gambling mechanics, the free-to-play, which is a lie because there is nothing that is free to play. So there are mechanisms in free-to-play games that are intended to trigger your shopping behavior and they're designed to find your shopping [...] contradictory that we have benevolence but also craziness when it comes to the ethical compass.” - Interviewee 1

This further reveals the negative outcomes that controversial elements within games can potentially lead to, reinforcing the importance of investigating the questionable nature of games when examining CSR.

Furthermore, interviewees highlighted the importance of closely examining the underlying values present in game products as their values might directly impact game players.

Interviewee 5 emphasized the importance of maintaining positive content throughout different stages of game production, launch, and maintenance.

“First of all, [...] throughout the game’s production, launch and ongoing maintenance, the content of the game must be positive. And it is necessary to try to reduce some values in games that may mislead teenagers.” - Interviewee 5

This underscores the importance of paying closer attention to the values inherent in game products and the potential negative consequences of neglecting this aspect, particularly regarding the risk of teenagers being misled by these values.

Similarly, interviewee 3, who is actively engaged in developing an influential game product, emphasized considering the value of inclusivity in game design:

“I work on game product Z that is played by millions of players around the world, everywhere in the world. It is important that we keep in mind cultural biases, assumptions and habits that I, as a European man, may not understand or even not know about.” - Interviewee 3

By acknowledging the considerable influence their products have on the large number of users, they underscore the importance of being aware of their biases as producers of game products.

As key influencers shaping the values embedded in game products, employees within the video game industry should recognize the importance of being responsible to users. As discussed in the literature review, given the controversial nature of game products arising from questionable elements, it is crucial to investigate their potential impacts on users. These quotes exhibit that some of the individuals within the video game industry recognize the significance of being responsible to users when considering CSR. They also acknowledge unethical content, schemes, and problematic issues that currently exist. However, we observe that only a few interviewees addressed this aspect, indicating a lack of awareness and understanding of this crucial factor among individuals working in the video game industry. In summary, these insights offer a comprehensive overview of how individuals within this sector perceive CSR through the lens of different beneficiary groups, particularly in terms of their consideration of users.

4.1.2 CSR Attributions

Within this overarching theme, we aim to explore the various attributions individuals make regarding CSR within the organizations. This includes examining how individuals perceive CSR efforts, whether they view them as substantive or symbolic.

4.1.2.1 Substantive CSR

In this sub-theme, our focus lies in delving into the perspectives of individuals regarding the substantive nature of CSR. We aim to understand how individuals perceive CSR initiatives as genuine efforts to create responsible impact.

Interviewee 3 attributed CSR as substantive, emphasizing that the initiative is primarily motivated by a genuine desire to benefit others rather than the organization itself (Donia & Sirsly, 2016):

"One initiative I recently signed up for involves volunteering to tutor young students who identify as either women or non-binary people. It aims to provide them with an introduction to the gaming industry, how it operates, and to support their development."

– Interviewee 3

The interviewee perceived the initiative as driven by a sincere intention to benefit its stakeholders, particularly the community. By assisting young women and non-binary people, it seeks to challenge the long-standing male dominance in the gaming industry, taking a significant step towards fostering inclusivity and diversity. This initiative is rooted in addressing social needs and striving to deliver tangible social benefits (Donia & Sirsly, 2016; Barnett, 2007) to marginalized groups within the gaming industry. This indicates that interviewee 3 perceives the initiative as substantive, as it is directed not towards benefiting the organization itself, but rather towards the stakeholders.

Interviewee 1 attributed CSR as substantive, drawing distinction between practices that bring genuine impacts to organizations and those that merely symbolize responsibility without affecting meaningful changes to their operations (Rodrigue et al. 2013). This attribution is evident in the description of how CSR initiatives were integrated into organization's culture and operations:

"It was not the top-down project where people were told to pretend this is important. It was officially part of our brand. It really came from internal initiatives, where if you found it interesting, we are going to give you 20 percent of your time to invest in this project. Then, in the end, they (CSR initiatives) became more integrated into everyday operations and were managed by a dedicated team." – Interviewee 1

Rather than CSR being imposed as a top-down directive, the initiative arises naturally from within the organization. Employees are given autonomy and allocated time to invest in projects they find personally meaningful and socially impactful. This approach suggests that CSR is not merely a superficial branding exercise but is deeply ingrained in the organization's values. The interviewee's emphasis on the project originating from internal initiatives underscores a genuine commitment to social responsibility, aligning with the notion of CSR as substantive rather than symbolic.

Similarly, interviewee 3 emphasized the substantial resource allocation of the company, with a specific team responsible for developing and executing initiatives.

“The company I work with has a lot of activity in that sense (CSR). [...] We have people that work full time on this stuff. We have dedicated teams of employees that take care of these initiatives, develop plans and work to make these things work. - Interviewee 3

This recognition of dedicated teams highlighted the organization's focus on integrating CSR into its core operations. Through the allocation of significant resources (Schons & Steinmeier, 2015), such as personnel and funding, towards CSR initiatives, the interviewee believed that the company demonstrates a commitment to making a meaningful impact on CSR issues.

Both interviewees 1 and 3 considered the company's CSR initiatives as substantive, as evidenced by their descriptions of examples involving a sincere intention to benefit stakeholders and tangible changes at an operational level such as resource allocation. Along with the existence of dedicated teams focused on advancing CSR objectives, these statements illustrate the organization's deeply embedded values regarding social responsibility.

4.1.2.2 Symbolic CSR

This sub-theme explores how individuals perceive CSR as symbolic. We seek to understand how CSR initiatives are perceived as mere window dressing or as strategies designed to enhance an employer's reputation. While all interviewees offered examples of diverse CSR commitments implemented by their company, some regarded certain CSR initiatives as symbolic. We recognize that it is challenging to generalize and claim that those interviewees viewed entire commitments of the company as symbolic. Within one company, there may be varying perceptions where some initiatives are seen as substantive while others are viewed as

symbolic. However, interviewees tend to perceive CSR of the company as mainly symbolic or substantive. In this sub-theme, we present the statements perceiving CSR as symbolic.

Some interviewees have characterized CSR as symbolic, indicating that certain practices within the company serve primarily to enhance its image as responsible entities and to anticipate benefits from their actions (Donia & Sirsly, 2016). As interviewee 8 mentioned that the term CSR is utilized for the company's marketing and promotional purposes (4.1.1.1), they implied that CSR is primarily employed to cultivate a positive image and attract potential employees, rather than genuinely addressing social concerns:

“For the Chinese public, the gaming industry has always been considered somewhat inferior. Even in our campus recruitment or employee recruitment efforts, we can feel that parents are hesitant or even opposed to their children working for a gaming company because they perceive it as not a favorable job. However, I did feel that some of our social responsibility initiatives or messages could significantly change a large part of the public's misunderstanding of the industry.” - Interviewee 8

Given the prevailing biases surrounding the gaming industry in China, interviewee 8 proposed that CSR could potentially serve as a valuable tool in enhancing the company's reputation and attractiveness to job seekers.

Furthermore, Interviewee 7 suggested that *“Externally, it (CSR) may be a good opportunity for brand promotion”*, implying that CSR is seen more as a means to create a positive external image rather than to instigate meaningful internal changes.

Interviewees' perceptions of CSR as symbolic are evidenced by these perspectives aligning with the notion of symbolic CSR. They suggested that CSR initiatives are utilized to strategically manage the company's image and appeal to external stakeholders.

Among various CSR practices within the company, Interviewee 4 perceived DEI practices in the company are symbolic and do not make meaningful changes to their operations (Rodrigue et al. 2013). Interviewee 4 shared a nuanced viewpoint, saying, *“I am still not entirely convinced that enforcing DEI is always a socially positive thing that should be done universally.”* This statement suggests a level of skepticism regarding the effectiveness of DEI practices within the company. Instead of merely advocating for DEI through lectures or awareness campaigns, Interviewee 4 proposed a more concrete approach: *“Rather than trying to give lecture to*

employees about this, I think that the company should try to hire people that have DEI in their minds.” This perspective implies a belief that genuine change can only be achieved through substantial actions, specifically through the recruitment and retention of individuals who inherently prioritize DEI.

This statement is echoed by Interviewee 8, who compared CSR initiatives to slogans that boost team morale but may lack substance in terms of real impact.

“Sometimes, when we joke around, we say it (CSR) is just slogans, which actually just serve as a tool to boost team morale” – Interviewee 8

Interviewee 8 suggested that they might ultimately lack meaningful impact and merely function as empty rhetoric despite the promotion of CSR initiatives within the company.

These perspectives from interviewees underscore a skepticism towards the depth of CSR initiatives within the organization, emphasizing their symbolic attributions. Interviewees perceived that while CSR may contribute to an enhanced external and internal image, they may not necessarily reflect genuine commitment to social responsibility or drive significant internal change.

4.1.3 Reactions to CSR

In this overarching theme, we present the empirical findings regarding individuals' reactions to CSR. These responses serve as outcomes of their perceptions of CSR, illustrating the specific impacts of CSR at the individual level.

Some interviewees expressed positive reactions to CSR. Their responses highlight how CSR initiatives can foster organizational identification among employees by aligning with their values, enhancing a sense of pride and belonging in their workplace.

For instance, Interviewee 1 expressed a deep sense of pride and emotional attachment to their company's CSR initiatives, emphasizing how these efforts contribute to a rewarding work environment:

“I love them [...] So it is very easy to be very proud and very happy about these (CSR) initiatives. They are really rewarding. [...] It (CSR) made our employees very proud

also, so they were proud to work for this company and the loyalty increased.” – Interviewee 1

Interviewee 1 added, *“It (CSR) becomes a part of your identity beyond just the work tasks and the hours and the money. There is an identity layer there that is important.”*

This suggests that CSR initiatives go beyond mere tasks and financial rewards, becoming an integral part of the employee’s identity. This aligns with organizational identification, as employees feel a strong sense of oneness to their company based on shared values.

Similarly, interviewee 3 also emphasized happiness and attachment to their current position, stating, *“I am happy with where I am and inclusion is part of why I’m happy.”* This indicates that the company’s commitment to inclusivity has contributed to their sense of belonging and overall job satisfaction.

Meanwhile, although they expressed positive reactions towards the company’s CSR and identification with the company, some of them insisted that these initiatives are not the primary factors influencing their job decisions:

“I would say it would not be top of my list. There are things that I think are more important when you decide if you want to stay in a company and if you want to continue with your job.” - Interviewee 3

Most of the interviewees regarded CSR as a supplementary consideration in their job decisions, indicating that they prioritize other factors over CSR. This suggests that while CSR initiatives may affect organizational identification, their influence on job decision making, particularly in terms of employees’ willingness to stay or leave the company, is less evident.

On the contrary, some interviewees displayed limited reaction to CSR, expressing that CSR has minimal impact on their feelings towards the company. For instance, Interviewee 7 stated, *“But, internally, what matters more to people within the company is not the initiatives themselves but rather how they personally feel about the company.”* This suggests that while CSR efforts may enhance the company’s external image, their influence on internal employees may be limited.

In the meantime, some interviewees demonstrated alignment with organizational values and a strong sense of identification with the company even though they expressed limited reactions

to CSR. Although they mentioned that CSR has no effect on their perceptions of the company, they still displayed identification with it.

“They (the employer) released three new value keywords in 2022: openness, courage, and passion. During my work, I have experienced the practice of these cultural values from different colleagues, which has been quite touching.” - Interviewee 2

Moreover, Interviewee 2 also expressed a willingness to further devote to the company, stating, *“At the current stage, I am still willing (to contribute to the company) and working hard to create my own value, and hoping to provide more support to the team.”*

Interviewee 2’s expression of embracing the company’s newly introduced values along with their willingness to further contribute to the company, demonstrates a strong sense of identification with the organization. This underscores the idea that organizational identification can stem from alignment with organizational values or a sense of belonging with the company culture, which are not necessarily the result of CSR initiatives.

In this theme, the statements revealed that individuals showed different extent of reactions to CSR, ranging from positive to minimal. Furthermore, for interviewees who showed positive reactions to CSR, they exhibited a sense of organizational identification as a specific example of the reactions.

4.2 Findings from Interviews with CSR Specialists

This section aims to present empirical findings and analysis of interviews conducted with participants whose primary job responsibilities focus on CSR.

4.2.1 Understanding of CSR

In parallel with the themes presented for general employees, the first overarching theme delves into specialists' individual perceptions through three sub-themes to understand their perceptions. Therefore, the three sub-themes in this chapter encompass their own description of CSR, perspectives on the scope of CSR initiatives, and views on the target group for CSR initiatives.

4.2.1.1 Own Description of CSR

CSR specialists demonstrated their in-depth understanding of CSR and they both emphasized the importance of CSR. The comprehensive understanding of CSR demonstrated by CSR specialists made it unnecessary for us to provide an introduction to the concept during the interviews.

Interviewee 9 introduced a well-structured theoretical framework utilized by their company, demonstrating a strong integration of CSR concept with their company's strategies. The framework effectively categorized initiatives into social impact, environmental sustainability and inclusivity. This specific framework indicates their thorough grasp of CSR and suggests that their perception of CSR is shaped by both professional expertise and organizational context.

Moreover, both interviewees 9 and 10 highlighted the necessity of CSR initiatives. For instance, Interviewee 9 stated that:

“I think it (CSR) is very important. To be able to represent the industry and to be taken seriously by the society as a whole, including politicians, government organizations, NGOs, and other entities, we need to show that we are a responsible industry and responsible organization. So, it is very important and that is why it is also important to be better at structuring and telling what we do.” – Interviewee 10

Interviewee 9 specifically emphasized the importance of CSR for employees and communities:

“So, commitment is super important. We look at our processes, our practices and our policies and we make sure that they (employees) are equitable, fair and inclusive... Also giving back and supporting people who are less privileged is the one most important thing to me.” - Interviewee 9

These statements reflect their sophisticated grasp of CSR and shared perception of CSR as crucial, acknowledging its significance within both society and the organization.

4.2.1.2 Perspectives on the Scope of CSR Initiatives

In this sub-theme, we aim to further examine specialists' perception of CSR through the lenses of economic, social and environmental aspects.

Both interviewees 9 and 10 elaborated on three dimensions, indicating that their perceptions cover various initiatives to a considerable extent.

Interviewee 9 stated, *“So economically, we now have a position. Socially and environmentally, now we have a position and we are able to demonstrate.”* In addition, as summarized above, the CSR framework provided by interviewee 9 encompasses both social and environmental focuses.

This observation echoes with the findings we presented in the previous chapter, showing the depth of CSR specialists' perceptions of CSR within the video game industry.

Furthermore, Interviewee 10 emphasized the significance of society and the environment for the video game industry, stating: *“The typical is the planet like I used to say that there is no gaming on a dead planet. So I mean to be able to make and sell games in the future, we do need a planet and we need a stable society as well within that.”*

Interviewee 10 further underscored the importance of concerns regarding the planet:

“There has been a lot of work with sustainability when you talk about personnel and like the people within the company, but when it comes to sustainability as a whole and its impact on the planet, there is still a process of refining approaches within the industry.” – Interviewee 10

Interviewee 10 emphasized the importance of considering the broader impact on the planet, noting that most sustainability initiatives tend to focus on employees within the company. Their expressions resonate with the observations made regarding regular employees, indicating that the importance of environmental issues within the video game industry is often undervalued. Furthermore, these statements highlight that their discussion of CSR primarily revolves around a broad array of aspects, rather than focusing on specific dimensions.

4.2.1.3 Views on the Target Group for CSR Initiatives

This sub-theme delves into how CSR specialists perceive CSR initiatives as covering different target groups, categorized into three distinct groups: employees, community, and customers/users.

During the interviews, both Interviewee 9 and Interviewee 10 discussed initiatives targeting various groups.

For example, Interviewee 9 explained the company's implementation of inclusive practices for employees by saying, *"We create inclusive environments and employee networks for our employees. It might be LGBT or it might be women."*

Regarding community targeting, Interviewee 9 argued that the company also contributes to the local community by engaging in charitable actions, stating, *"We have NGO partnerships for offsetting, reducing or removing carbon and for supporting underrepresented groups where we provide mentoring support to young students in need."*

Acknowledging diversity, they further suggested inclusive practices for game users, aiming to create an environment where all players feel represented and valued:

"We want to be able to show cultural appreciation so we are being appropriate and we are appreciating our players' cultural backgrounds. We need to be aware of different steps, choosing our background in games, making sure we're aware of whether they are showing any religion or politics. We have to be very careful and mindful to be sure that we are representing ourselves and our game in an inclusive way." - Interviewee 9

Interviewee 9 highlighted the company's commitment to cultural sensitivity in game development. They believed in the significance of considering players' diverse cultural backgrounds, ensuring that game content respects and reflects this diversity. They perceived it as important to pay careful attention to detail, including the depiction of backgrounds, religions, and political elements within games.

Therefore, through the lenses of different beneficiary groups, CSR specialists demonstrated their extensive understanding of CSR by considering commitments or activities for all audiences. Nevertheless, consistent with the findings from general employees in 4.1, the discussion regarding responsibility towards users predominantly focuses on inclusivity aspects, with little mention of strategies to address controversial elements within video games.

4.2.2 CSR Attributions

The second overarching theme delves into how specialists perceive the motives of CSR initiatives.

In line with section 4.2.1.3, Interviewee 9's perspective highlights that CSR extends beyond internal stakeholders to include external game users and the community. This viewpoint suggests Interviewee 9 perceives CSR as substantive, as she maintains that the initiative's primary motivation stems from a genuine desire to benefit others, rather than solely serving the organization's interests (Donia & Sirsly, 2016).

By emphasizing the organization's "*genuine commitment to do good stuff*", interviewee 10 underscored the sincerity and authenticity of the company's approach to CSR. This implies that CSR initiatives are not merely for window dressing but are rooted in a genuine desire to make a positive impact on society and environment. The interviewee's use of the word "*genuine*" suggests that they perceive the organization's commitment to CSR as sincere and heartfelt, further reinforcing the notion that CSR is seen as substantive rather than superficial.

Their perceptions of CSR are consistent with the concept of substantive CSR, as they indicated that the initiative is driven by a genuine desire to benefit others rather than solely serving the organization's interests (Donia & Sirsly, 2016).

Furthermore, interviewees asserted the substantive nature of their organizations' CSR initiatives, highlighting practices that drive meaningful changes in operations. These include the allocation of significant resources (Schons & Steinmeier, 2015) and the integration of responsible strategies, structures, and procedures into core business operations (Wickert et al. 2016).

Interviewee 9 expressed, "*I feel I have been given enough budget, I am allowed to build my team so they have given me headcounts.*" This implies her acknowledgement of the company's CSR endeavors involving material shifts in organizational actions aligned with socially responsible values (Nejati & Shafaei, 2023).

Interviewee 9 further supported the argument by highlighting budget and resource allocation (Schons & Steinmeier, 2015):

"The company provides a budget for investing in charity partnerships. That is an action in itself, having a good budget. Another action with leaders is that they sign up to be an executive sponsor for a particular charity or a project. We have a sponsorship at the highest level and my team makes it happen." - Interviewee 9

Interviewee 9 believes that the company's actions go beyond superficial gestures, demonstrating a substantive commitment to CSR through tangible budget allocation and leadership involvement in charitable endeavors.

Furthermore, in line with the concept of substantive CSR, which involves the integration of responsible strategies, structures, and procedures into core business operations (Wickert et al. 2016), interviewee 9 contended that *"We create actions that align not only with the impact strategy but also with the business strategy."* This suggests a belief that CSR (impact) initiatives should not be pursued in isolation but rather integrated into the broader objectives and operations of the company. This indicates an attribution of CSR actions as substantive, as they are embedded in the company's operational framework and business practices.

4.2.3 Reactions to CSR

The third overarching theme explores empirical findings regarding specialist's reactions to CSR initiatives. Interviewees demonstrated positive reactions to CSR and further expressed a deep sense of organizational identification. Organizational identification was evident from their close alignment with the company's mission and values regarding CSR. They expressed feelings of pride and belonging, perceived support, and demonstrated personal commitment to organizational values.

Interviewee 9 expressed pride in the company's CSR commitments, attributing it to the substantial support and resources provided by the company.

"I'm really proud of it (CSR commitments). The budget has been amazing so I am grateful for their support and believing in this is the right thing to do. I am feeling really good and proud that Company C has put that level of support behind this." – Interviewee 9

Their pride in the company's CSR commitments and gratitude for the support and resources allocated to these initiatives indicate a deep emotional connection to the company's values and goals, as well as a belief in the company's mission as the *"right thing to do."*

Interviewee 9 further emphasized the positive impact of the company's initiatives on its employees, reflecting a sense of pride and belonging:

“It makes you feel proud to work for a company that offers these initiatives. [...] Without them, I am not convinced that we would be able to be an attractive employer, have people feel that they can find safe spaces in the company, and take part in some of these activities that we do. So yeah, I think we are in a better place because of it.” – Interviewee 9

Interviewee 9 highlighted how these initiatives contribute to creating a supportive and inclusive work environment, making the company an attractive employer and providing employees with "safe spaces" to participate in activities. This reflects a feeling of belonging and loyalty to the company, as well as an acknowledgment of the company's efforts to prioritize employee well-being and satisfaction.

Furthermore, Interviewee 10 emphasized that sustainability is not just a job requirement but a fundamental aspect of their identity and their reason for being passionate about their work, stating, *“It (Sustainability) is what I do, it is what I love. I would not do anything else. [...] I would say sustainability is a prerequisite and it's what makes me like the organization.”*

Interviewee 10 firmly believes in the alignment between her personal values and the organization's CSR commitments, emphasizing the importance of her job reflecting her values in CSR:

“I would not work anywhere with anything else. [...] I would not work for an organization where I could not do this. [...] I would not work there if they would not have this commitment to work with sustainability.” - Interviewee 10

This demonstrates a strong sense of alignment with the organization's values, as interviewee 10 explicitly stated that they would not work for any organization that does not prioritize sustainability. This deep personal connection to the company's mission indicates a high level of organizational identification.

Interviewee 10 further reinforced their identification with the organization by highlighting the impact of CSR initiatives on their own work and well-being.

“They (CSR initiatives) affect me a lot since I am doing them and driving them. I am allowed to do what I think is important and fun.” – Interviewee 10

Interviewee 10 expressed that they are deeply involved in driving these initiatives and feel empowered to focus on what they find important and enjoyable. This demonstrates a sense of ownership and fulfillment in their role, contributing to their overall satisfaction and sense of belonging within the organization. This illustrates how Interviewee 10's strong personal commitment to sustainability and CSR aligns closely with the organization's values, leading to a deep sense of organizational identification. Their passion for their work and the sense of purpose derived from their role as a CSR specialist further strengthen their connection to the organization.

In summary, both CSR specialists showed highly positive reactions to CSR and expressed their strong sense of organizational identification.

5. Result

In this chapter, we will present the results and summarize the empirical findings and analysis regarding how employees perceive CSR and their reactions to CSR initiatives implemented by their company.

5.1 Understanding of CSR

As highlighted in our empirical findings, employees within the video game industry still lack familiarity with the concept of CSR. Reflecting on the research we reviewed regarding the interaction between CSR and the video game industry, while there has been attention to exploring CSR within this sector (Jones et al. 2013), our empirical data demonstrates the lack of individual awareness of CSR. There exists a notable gap between the theoretical discourse surrounding CSR in the video game industry and its practical understanding among industry practitioners.

The literature review has indicated that environmental commitments are less emphasized in the investigation of CSR practices within the video game industry (Jones et al. 2013). This is supported by our findings. As discussed in the previous chapter, we recognized a lack of comprehension regarding environmental CSR initiatives, particularly when compared to social aspects.

Moreover, our findings offered a comprehensive overview of how individuals within this sector perceive CSR through the lens of different beneficiary groups: the community,

employees, and game users. It is evident that most interviewees primarily discussed employing companies' CSR initiatives in relation to the local community and employee work environment, with comparatively less attention directed toward users.

Regarding CSR specialists, they exhibited a profound comprehension of CSR principles, highlighting their significance and elaborating on three key dimensions. Their insights comprehensively covered a wide range of initiatives. When considering diverse beneficiary groups, CSR specialists showcased their comprehensive understanding by addressing commitments or actions aimed at all stakeholders. While they also underscored the importance of users, the discourse on user responsibility primarily emphasized inclusivity, with little discussion on strategies to tackle controversial elements within video games.

5.2 CSR Attributions

Our findings demonstrate diverse perspectives on CSR within the organization, categorizing them as either substantive or symbolic. Interviewees who perceived the company's CSR initiatives as substantive highlighted specific examples demonstrating a genuine intention to benefit stakeholders and tangible operational changes, such as resource allocation. Similarly, all CSR specialists also viewed CSR as substantive. On the other hand, interviewees who perceived CSR initiatives as symbolic suggested that while they might enhance both external and internal perceptions, they may not necessarily indicate a genuine commitment to social responsibility or drive significant internal change.

5.3 Reactions to CSR

The observations uncover varied outcomes among interviewees regarding their reactions to CSR initiatives. While some commonly expressed a positive reaction to CSR and expressed a sense of organizational identification stemming from CSR efforts, others showed limited or minimal reactions to CSR. Even among those who experienced organizational identification due to CSR, it often was not the primary factor guiding their job decisions' instead, it was viewed as an additional benefit. These findings imply that while CSR may have an impact, it is not always the predominant factor shaping attitudes and behaviors towards the company. In addition, all CSR practitioners exhibited highly positive reactions to CSR and a deep sense of organizational identification, with a strong identification with their job responsibilities in CSR and with CSR initiatives.

6. Discussion

In this chapter, we elaborate on the discussion drawing from relevant literature and findings we present above. This chapter consists of three main parts: Individual's understanding of CSR, organizational identification, and the relationship between organizational identification and CSR attributions. We present a discussion focusing on perspectives from both general employees and CSR specialists.

6.1 Individual's Perception of CSR

We begin our discussion with the first theme: individual's perception of CSR in the context of the video game industry. This functions as the fundamental part of our study, reflecting our initial interests in comprehending their perspectives on CSR.

As introduced in previous findings, we employed a classification approach to examine individuals' perceptions of CSR initiatives: the community, employees, and users/customers. This approach allowed us to categorize organizational CSR efforts based on their intended beneficiaries. During our interview analysis, we observed that conversations regarding CSR initiatives consistently centered around these defined categories. Given the problematic and controversial nature of gaming products and their direct influence on users, we found this classification method particularly suitable for emphasizing the importance of users alongside other key stakeholders such as the community and employees.

Building upon the classification of target groups, we now delve into examining individuals' understanding of CSR initiatives aimed at different groups. Regarding game users, our findings suggest that the values embedded in games are influenced by employees and subsequently influence the users. Employees may be able to decide which values to include and which to exclude, encompassing elements such as religion, politics, cultural biases and values that may mislead teenagers. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the role of employees in shaping the values embedded within games (Karlsen, 2019; Zagal et al. 2013). Despite their potentially significant impact on customers, their conversation regarding this group was comparatively lacking in depth compared to other groups. Furthermore, while we have consistently emphasized acknowledging the questionable nature inherent in game products within this industry and their impact on users, both general interviewees and CSR specialists overlooked controversies or unethical aspects when discussing user-focused CSR

initiatives. This neglect of ethical considerations aligns with observations identified by previous researchers, stating that some game practitioners showed limited recognition or adherence to ethical responsibilities (Karlsen, 2021). This paper argues that employees should be mindful of the types of values presented at all stages of game development.

On top of that, when it comes to initiatives undertaken by companies, especially those targeting the community and users, it is challenging to categorize the organization's motives behind them exclusively as purely symbolic or substantive. This complexity arises because while these initiatives do benefit others rather than the organization itself, they could also be driven by a desire to enhance the organization's reputation. This is consistent with previous studies highlighting the multifaceted factors motivating organizations to engage in CSR initiatives (Donia & Sirsly, 2016). As aligned with Donia and Sirsly (2016), organizations may pursue CSR with the intention of both doing good and benefiting from positive publicity, thereby operating under both substantive and symbolic motives. Observed individual's evaluations of their employer's actions were relatively simplistic, often categorizing CSR initiatives as mainly either substantive or symbolic. This aligns with previous research suggesting the prevalence of dominant attributions regarding CSR, either substantive or symbolic, in individual's perceptions (Donia & Sirsly, 2016).

Lastly, we identified a potential misalignment between organizational motives and employee's perceptions. As for employee-targeting CSR initiatives, some employees perceive them as substantive because they bring about meaningful changes within the organization. However, the primary motive behind these initiatives may be to enhance the company's attractiveness and employee's retention. This observation is consistent with previous findings stating that employees' perceptions do not always correspond with the underlying motives of an organization's CSR engagement (Donia & Sirsly, 2016).

6.2 Organizational Identification

In this subchapter, we further discuss our findings regarding individuals' reactions to CSR with a particular focus on organizational identification. This is because organizational identification emerged as the most common among the positive reactions. Furthermore, we examine the relationship between CSR and organizational identification from the perspectives of both regular employees and CSR specialists.

6.2.1 Organizational Identification

In order to address our identified outcome of CSR, which is organizational identification, we introduce a classification based on organizational identification displayed by interviewees and the impact of CSR we identified. This will help to better understand the interaction between CSR and organizational identification. In general, we identified three different groups of interviewees, labeled as Group 1, 2, and 3, as shown in Figure 1. Group 1 consists of interviewees who displayed organizational identification that was influenced by CSR. Group 2 comprises interviewees who exhibited organizational identification independently of CSR. Finally, interviewees who did not exhibit signs of organizational identification are categorized into Group 3.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Organizational Identification	✓	✓	Not sure
Casued by CSR?	✓	X	/

Figure 1

As stated by Ashforth and Mael (1989), organizational identification occurs when employees feel a sense of belonging and collective identity within the organization. Building upon this, the previous chapter suggests that interviewees from both Group 1 and Group 2 displayed organizational identification by exhibiting alignment with their values (Edwards, 2005), a sense of pride (Jones, 2010), and a feeling of belonging in their workplace (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Furthermore, organizational identification of interviewees was demonstrated through outcomes such as job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Lee et al. 2015). Therefore, we argue interviewees from Group 1 and Group 2 are indeed identified with the organization. On the other hand, we were unable to observe organizational identification within Group 3. This could be attributed to the recent resignations of two interviewees, as well as the status of one interviewee as a contractor.

To delve deeper, we analyze whether CSR is contributing to identified organizational identification. Our findings indicate that while some examples demonstrate that CSR plays a role in fostering organizational identification (Group 1), for other participants, their organizational identification was not influenced by CSR initiatives or commitments (Group 2). Other than CSR, some interviewee's organizational identification may result from factors including personal career progress, compensation, job responsibility, and so on. As these factors are not CSR-relevant, we will not elaborate on them further in our discussion.

Interestingly, the findings from Group 1 are consistent with previous research suggesting that CSR can enhance organizational identification (De Roeck et al. 2014; Farooq et al. 2017; Kim et al. 2010), whereas findings from Group 2 do not support this notion. Contrary to previous findings, the result from Group 2 suggests that CSR does not necessarily lead to organizational identification. In the following section (6.3), we will delve into their varied perceptions of CSR by investigating the relationship between CSR attributions and organizational identification.

6.2.2 Organizational Identification from the Perspectives of CSR Specialists

All specialists belonging to Group 1 demonstrate organizational identification through their alignment with values (Edwards, 2005), a sense of pride (Jones, 2010), and a feeling of workplace belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). They also feel supported (Edwards & Peccei, 2010; Gibney et al. 2011) and find the organization attractive (Pratt, 1998). Moreover, specialists' organizational identification is evident through outcomes like job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Lee et al. 2015). Indeed, specialists derive their organizational identification from their personal passion and alignment with job responsibilities, specifically within CSR, and self-driven CSR initiatives.

6.3 Relationship between CSR Attributions and Organizational Identification

Building upon the discussion presented above, we now further delve into the relationship between CSR attributions and organizational identification. The literature review indicates that CSR perceived as substantive yields positive outcomes in terms of employee attitudes and behaviors while CSR perceived as symbolic has null or even negative effects (Donia et al. 2019). Therefore, our findings initially focused on exploring employee's attributions of the motives behind CSR activities, distinguishing between substantive and symbolic motives. In

this section, this paper aims to investigate how CSR attributions impact employee’s organizational identification.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Organizational Identification	✓	✓	Not sure
Influenced by CSR?	✓	X	/
CSR attributions	Substantive	Symbolic	Symbolic

Figure 2

6.3.1 Substantive CSR and Organizational Identification

Group 1, characterized by a profound sense of organizational identification, perceives CSR as substantive, recognizing that CSR is driven by motivations focused on benefiting others (Donia & Sirsly, 2016). They believe that CSR initiatives bring about meaningful and genuine changes to operations (Nejati & Shafaei, 2023; Rodrigue et al. 2013; Schons & Steinmeier, 2015; Wickert et al. 2016). This aligns with previous research indicating that CSR perceived as substantive provides valuable benefits to employee attitudes and behaviors (Donia et al. 2019). Specifically, these benefits are evident in employees' enhanced sense of organizational identification in our observations. Moreover, CSR specialists in Group 1 perceive CSR initiatives as substantive as indicated in our findings. This perception positively influences their attitude and behaviors as well, which has led to organizational identification. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that their perception of CSR as substantive and their strong sense of identification may be shaped by their pre-existing beliefs in the value of CSR and their dedicated job responsibilities within this field. In summary, we argue that CSR perceived as substantive leads to organizational identification, which is a further discovery building on the research from Donia et al. (2019).

6.3.2 Symbolic CSR and Organizational Identification

Group 2 associates CSR more with symbolic attributions, perceiving it as driven by self-serving motivations (Donia & Sirsly, 2016). They view CSR actions as mere representations of the organization's responsibility, lacking meaningful changes to operations (Nejati & Shafaei, 2023; Rodrigue et al. 2013; Schons & Steinmeier, 2015; Wickert et al. 2016).

Although Group 2 feels identified with the organization, this belief appears to originate from factors other than CSR, as discussed in section 5.2. The findings from Group 2 align with prior research indicating that CSR perceived as symbolic has minimal influence on employee attitudes and behaviors (Donia et al. 2019). Building upon Donia et al. (2019), symbolic CSR has minimal impact on organizational identification. Group 3, individuals who do not identify with the company, also perceives CSR as symbolic, suggesting that symbolic CSR did not lead to organizational identification. To sum up, linking back to our discussion on substantive CSR, we contend that CSR perceived as symbolic undermines its influence on organizational identification.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, we present the conclusions of our study by starting from a research summary. Thereafter, we discuss theoretical and practical implications of this research. By the end, we reflect on our limitations and offer suggestions for future studies.

7.1 Research Summary

Drawing from our interest in the realm of CSR and recognizing the controversial landscape of the video game industry, we embarked on an exploration of CSR within this domain. Given that video game products often embed social values, and that employees play a pivotal role in shaping these values, we decided to delve into the employee perspective of CSR, contributing to the discourse on micro-CSR.

The following research questions guided our investigation:

How do employees in the video game industry perceive and react to CSR?

In addressing the first part of our research question—employee perceptions of CSR—we found that regular employees, who did not specialize in CSR, were not familiar with the concept of CSR. Moreover, while they demonstrated awareness of CSR initiatives directed at

the local community and workplace environment, efforts targeted at users received comparatively less attention. Furthermore, employee perceptions of CSR initiatives were categorized into substantive and symbolic attributions. While some recognized their company's CSR endeavors as substantive, acknowledging their genuine motives to benefit others and tangible organizational changes in operations, others perceived them as symbolic, indicative of a self-serving agenda aimed at projecting an image of responsibility without enacting substantive operational changes.

Regarding the second part of the question—employee reactions to CSR—we discovered different ways of responses ranging from positive to limited. Among the positive reactions, organizational identification emerged as the most common. Therefore, we decided to further explore the relationship between CSR and organizational identification. Certain employees exhibited a sense of organizational identification, feeling an alignment with their company's values and expressing pride in its CSR endeavors. Notably, CSR specialists demonstrated a strong identification with the organization, derived from a personal passion for CSR and an identification with their roles and job responsibilities. In contrast, some employees' identification with the organization was not affected by CSR influences, with some even showing a lack of organizational identification. We further examined the relationship between CSR attribution and organizational identification. We observed that employees who perceived CSR as primarily substantive demonstrated a deeper organizational identification. On the other hand, for those who viewed CSR as predominantly symbolic, the symbolic aspect hindered CSR's influence on organizational identification.

Our findings underscore the multifaceted interplay between CSR perception, CSR attribution, and organizational identification, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of CSR's implications within this dynamic sector.

7.2 Theoretical Implications

Our study substantiates the importance of CSR perception, attributions, and organizational identification, offering significant contributions to the literature on these concepts. The findings provide valuable insights into the realms of micro CSR and the video game industry, areas that have been less explored. By conducting an in-depth empirical investigation into CSR within this industry marked by controversy, our research enriches the understanding of this complex field in several key ways.

Firstly, we employed a classification approach that categorizes perceived CSR initiatives into three groups based on their intended beneficiaries: the community, employees, and customers/users. This method allowed us to highlight the significance of user-centric CSR, particularly given the controversial nature of video games and their impact on users. Our findings align with existing research on the role of employees in shaping the values embedded in games, which influence users (Karlsen, 2019; Zagal et al. 2013). This reinforces the validity of our approach and underscores the importance of considering the user's perspective in CSR initiatives.

Theoretically, our main contribution lies in enhancing the understanding of the interplay between CSR attributions and organizational identification. Building upon previous research indicating that substantive CSR tends to yield positive outcomes on employees' attitudes and behaviors, whereas symbolic CSR has minimal or null impact (Donia et al. 2019), we specifically focused on CSR attributions and their relationship with organizational identification. Although prior studies have shown that CSR initiatives can foster employees' organizational identification (De Roeck et al. 2014; Farooq et al. 2017; Kim et al. 2010), our findings reveal that this relationship is not always consistent. By differentiating between symbolic and substantive CSR, we found that CSR perceived as substantive enhances organizational identification, aligning with earlier findings, whereas symbolic CSR does not contribute to organizational identification.

Overall, our study provides a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at the intersection of micro CSR, organizational identification, and the video game industry, offering valuable insights for future research.

7.3 Practical Implications

In this section, we outline three primary practical implications drawn from our research. By examining CSR from the perspective of employees, we have identified valuable insights that can help organizations more effectively understand and implement CSR. Recommendations for practice are as follows.

Our first practical implication underscores the need for organizations within the video game industry to invest more in raising employee awareness of CSR. This can be achieved by enhancing efforts to promote the concept of CSR and emphasizing its significance to

employees. By doing so, employees can gain a clearer understanding, enabling them to collaborate more effectively with their companies in advancing the CSR agenda.

Secondly, organizations should prioritize substantive CSR efforts, as they are more likely to enhance employees' identification with the organization. As outlined in the research summary, while CSR may not always result in organizational identification, substantive CSR initiatives indeed have a positive impact. By focusing on genuine, impactful CSR efforts, organizations can develop more effective CSR strategies that resonate with their employees.

Last but not least, the video game industry, including both organizations and individuals, must allocate greater attention to user-focused CSR initiatives. The observed lack of depth in discussions about user-focused CSR initiatives, particularly concerning controversial or unethical aspects, indicates a gap between theoretical ideals and practical implementation. This highlights the need for more attention to ensuring that ethical responsibilities are met in practice. The entire industry should be aware of and fulfill its responsibilities towards users at every stage of game development.

7.4 Limitations

In this section, we discuss the key limitations of our study. The methodological reflections have previously been discussed in Chapter 3.6 on reflexivity and limitations. We would like to mention again that our research is not generalizable as already touched upon in 3.6. Our intention was not to construct a universally applicable study, but rather to delve deeply into the intricacies of this particular context. However, we do anticipate that certain findings from our investigation may offer insights that could potentially be applicable to other contexts and situations.

The second reflection involves investigating individual perceptions. In our study, we adopted the framework of CSR dimensions (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010) and CSR attributions (Donia and Sirsly, 2016; Rodrigue et al. 2013) to explore how employees perceive CSR. This approach provided us with valuable insights into the nuanced ways employees perceive the concept of CSR and view their organization's CSR efforts. However, given the broad nature of perception and its potential interpretation through various theoretical lenses, we acknowledge that these are not the only frameworks that can interpret individual perceptions. Incorporating additional frameworks could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how employees perceive CSR.

Furthermore, we would like to clarify that we did not directly ask interviewees whether they viewed CSR as substantive or symbolic. Instead, these attributions were inferred by the researchers, drawing upon various theoretical frameworks presented in our literature review. Therefore, the perception of CSR as substantive or symbolic might be constrained by our own understanding and knowledge within the academic context.

7.5 Future Study

Our empirical study aims to shed light on the interconnectedness of CSR perception, attributions, and individual reactions within the video game industry, contributing to the limited literature in this field. We recognize that this subject remains largely understudied, underscoring the need for further empirical research to expand on our findings regarding the relationship between these concepts. Moreover, the reflections and limitations discussed above highlight numerous opportunities for additional investigation. Throughout our research process, we identified various other potential paths for exploration, which we present in this chapter.

One direction for future research is to conduct a comparative analysis of employees' perceptions and reactions to CSR initiatives across different regions. Our paper indicates that while CSR initiatives have been present in China for some time, the formal concept of CSR is relatively new. This suggests that employees' understanding and expectations of CSR may vary significantly based on their local context. To build on these insights, researchers could compare how employees in different contexts perceive and react to CSR initiatives, such as in developing versus developed countries. Such comparative studies could reveal how socio-economic development, cultural values, and local business practices influence CSR perceptions and responses.

Another fruitful area for future research is the study of organizational identification within controversial industries. Our findings indicate that employees' reactions to CSR initiatives can be tied to their sense of organizational identification. In industries that often face public scrutiny and ethical dilemmas, employees' identification with their company can be particularly complex and multifaceted. Future studies could explore how CSR initiatives influence organizational identification in such contexts. For example, researchers could investigate whether and how CSR efforts help mitigate the negative public perceptions associated with controversial industries and strengthen employees' identification with their organization. Such studies would offer valuable information on the long-term effectiveness of

CSR strategies in building and maintaining a positive organizational identity in industries that are often under the public eye.

By exploring these areas, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how CSR initiatives impact employees in the video game industry and beyond, offering practical insights for both academia and industry practitioners.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Interviewee List

ID	Gender	Position	Organization
1	Male	Management	A
2	Female	Art Project Support	D
3	Male	Designer	C
4	Male	Data Analysis	B
5	Female	Product management	D
6	Female	Artist	E
7	Female	HR	E
8	Female	HR	D
9	Female	CSR Specialist	C
10	Female	CSR Specialist	F

9.2 Organization List

Organization	Based country
A	Sweden
B	Sweden
C	Sweden
D	China
E	China
F	Sweden

9.3 Interview Guide

General information

- May we know your nationality and age?
- What is your position at the company?
- For how long have you been employed here?

Questions about CSR

- How would you describe the concept of business taking into account the impact of their actions on communities, the environment, and society as a whole?
- Which word does your company use when explaining their socially responsible commitments?
- What does the word (e.g. Sustainability/CSR/ESG) mean to you?
- How can you describe the word (e.g. Sustainability/CSR/ESG) in the video game industry?
- How would you describe the company as socially responsible in terms of economic, social and environmental aspects?
- Can you come up with any specific Sustainability/CSR/ESG actions from the company? How do you feel about these actions/commitments?
- What are the actions you are interested in?
- How are you contributing to any actions in your position?

Questions about employee's view towards the company

- What do you think the value or mission of the organization is? What do you think about it?
- How strong do you think is your dedication to the company?
- How long are you willing to stay in this company?

Questions about the relationship between CSR and your perception

- How do the CSR initiatives affect you as an individual or as a part of society?
- How do the CSR initiatives affect your view towards your employer?
- How do the CSR initiatives influence your decision-making to stay or leave the company?
- How do you think the company can further utilize CSR initiatives for employees?
- How do you think the company's CSR efforts impact its reputation both internally among employees and externally within the gaming industry?

9.4 Interview Consent

Declaration of consent for collecting and processing of personal interview data

University: Lund University

Programme: Managing People, Knowledge and Change

Interviewer: Yoon-ji Cheong and Xuanran Zheng

Interview Date:

Name of the Interviewee:

I hereby declare that I am willing to take part in an interview as part of the Master's thesis. I was informed about the direction as well as the relevance of the interview.

I confirm that I agree to the recording of the interview using a recording device. The interview will be transcribed and used exclusively within the context of the Master's thesis. The transcript of the interview will be anonymized, i.e. all information that could lead to an identification of the person will be changed or removed from the text.

My participation in the interview and my consent to the use of the data as described above are voluntary.

Under these conditions I agree to give the interview and accept that it will be recorded, transcribed, anonymized and analyzed.

Place, Date

Signature Interviewee

Signature Interviewer