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SERIOUS GAMES AND BRANDING

How Organizations brand themselves through their causes

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Abstract

The gaming market is expanding to include not only traditional nonprofit firms but also for-profit and hybrid entities that have strong social values and missions. Specifically, due to high pressures from the part of social activists, companies are trying to respond through developing CSR strategies in order to appear more legitimate to their publics (Van Cranenburgh, Liket, & Roome, 2013). While previous papers have documented the trend of INGOs using serious games (SGs) for education-entertainment (Arora & Itu, 2010) the phenomenon of companies branding themselves and their causes through SGs have not been adequately addressed to this day. This thesis examines a wide array of SGs, developed from various types of organizations, aiming at raising awareness and stimulating activism. This taxonomy aims to shed more light on the ways branding differs not only among the non-profit and commercial sector but also among larger and smaller companies, generating patterns that will not only contribute to the existing SGs' research but bring a real life perspective of how the CSR sector and the SG entwine. In addition, as social issues require far more resources than any single organization is capable of mobilizing independently, my main focus will be to investigate potential emerging partnerships and social alliances that span the non-profit and for-profit boundary and create hybrid entities of professional and educational pillars working in tandem. Therefore, through analyzing with a content and comparative analysis the ways in which each organization promotes their SGs and through exploring their design and narratives through auto-ethnography, this paper highlights the various schemes leading to activism, portraying different and novel branding patterns.

Keywords: Serious games taxonomy, branding, activism, CSR, hybrid organizations

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To my family who supported me by all means throughout this amazing journey

1. Introduction

The idea of playing games dates to the ancient past and is considered an integral part of all societies (Laamarti, Eid & El Saddik, 2014). Over the last 40 years computer games have been increasingly replacing more traditional games as leisure activities, transforming the way people spend their leisure time, while at the same time, the availability of new consoles, platforms and technologies delivering games contributed to this continued growth (Connolly, Boyle, MacArthur, Hainey & Boyle, 2012). Indeed, console manufacturers have traditionally provided the platforms for computer games (Soh & Tan, 2008). However, portable video gaming on tiny screens became more popular as Sony introduced PlayStation Portable (Celestec, 2012). These transformations, based on people's needs, finally introduced mobile gaming, which is seen as a delayed or modest extension of console or PC games and seems to increasingly form a distinct user experience itself (Feijoo, Gómez-Barroso, Aguado & Ramos, 2012). Specifically, not only Android and iOS games now generate more revenue than all of Nintendo and Sony's portable games combined, but also games was the most popular mobile app category in the U.S in 2012 (Celestec, 2012). Eventually, such inventions resulted in a greater level of interaction and engagement with the gaming industry.

Nevertheless, while the majority of games are not created to fulfill a purpose beyond the self-contained aim to engage, entertain or satisfy the players, there are games that intend to influence the players' thoughts and actions in real life exceeding the self contained scope of the game itself (Mitgutsch & Alvarado, 2012). Such games are known as 'serious games' (SGs), primarily designed and used for learning and/or behavior change purposes (Connolly et al., 2012). The power of these games, according to Jenkins (2011, May 13), rests on the premise that they provide clarity in defining the roles and goals and motivate deeper forms of learning by triggering desired behaviors through attaching fun points to otherwise mundane and uninteresting activities. According to Breuer and Bente (2010) SGs are used or can be used in various settings like school education, professional training or political campaigns. Moreover, such games have also been created to address social issues such as bullying, political lobbying, and personal health care (Antle, Tanenbaum, Macaranas & Robinson, 2014). This is also illustrated in the work of Ratan and Ritterferd (2009) who created a SGs' classification system through sampling 612 games, shedding light to possible distinctions among their purposes, their target group and their platforms as to better understand and interpret SGs as a medium for various contexts.

Regarding the social context, as demonstrated in the work of Gundry, Kickul, Griffiths and Bacq (2011) the efforts towards social good are expanding to include not only the outcomes

of traditional nonprofit firms but also of for-profit and hybrid entities with strong social values and missions. Indeed, in this digitalized era, various actors contribute to such message(s)' creation and dissemination, either within a 'virtue' driven or a 'return on investment' driven concept (Sullivan Mort, Weerawardena & Carnegie, 2003). Specifically, changes brought by globalization, the increasing needs of targeted audiences and a generally tighter and competitive funding environment have created an enormous societal demand for social value (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006). On the one hand, NGOs/INGOs have become more professional, organized and high skilled in mobilizing their constituencies and, thanks to the internet, email and Skype, they can communicate and organize campaigns quickly and with low costs (Pohl & Tolhurst, 2010). Specifically, the paper of Arora and Itu (2010) portrays the trend of INGOs using SGs for education-entertainment. On the other hand, the wave of social entrepreneurs have also flourished within the non-profit and for-profit sectors (Austin et al., 2006), consisting of motivated people who identify innovative approaches and methods to solve some of the most pressing and persisting problems faced by communities (Gundry et al., 2011).

In this sense, developing SGs which serve basic and long standing needs can be considered as a valuable and innovative vehicle in order to achieve their goals. In addition, due to high pressures from the part of social activists, more and more companies are trying to respond through developing corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies in order to appear more legitimate to their publics (Van Cranenburgh, Liket & Roome, 2013). Consequently, there is an increasing interest around how social change is realized within the not-for-profit and commercial world. However, little has been researched about how especially companies use SGs in this wide context of CSR.

To be more precise, such unprecedented CSR efforts are driven not just by ideological thinking that corporations can be a powerful and positive force for social change, but more by the multi-faceted business returns that corporations can potentially reap from their CSR endeavors (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). In general, since everything a company does send "a message", nowadays, the companies treat the point of branding as an intangible asset, described as goodwill, reputation or preference which may lead to long term profit (Mark-Herbert & Von Schantz, 2007). They hope to minimize the risks to their reputation by learning about controversial issues through stakeholder dialogues and, specifically, through contacting with their external environment and respond to the needs of consumers and society (Pohl & Tolhurst, 2010). In this sense, business-NGO partnerships are build under the umbrella of CSR partnerships, which are

best defined as a strategic collaboration among businesses and not-for-profit organizations in which risks, resources and skills are shared in projects that benefit each partner, as well as, the community (Labib Eid & Robert Sabella, 2014). Moreover, since almost all organizations act within a global context, such strategic alliances require communicating effectively across cultural, social and geographic boundaries (Pohl & Tolhurst, 2010). After all, according to Austin et al. (2006), although such collaboration across organization boundaries may include addressing serious obstacles (i.e. conflicting self interests) social issues require far more resources than any single organization is capable of mobilizing independently to solve. Yet, despite this much literature on the subject still seems to be aimed at academics, concentrating on theories rather than on practical ideas and real life perspectives of what being in the CSR sector entails (Pohl & Tolhurst, 2010).

Overall, gaming practitioners advocate the role of SGs as a potential tool in order to communicate social discourses. Specifically, McGonigal (2010) envisioned in her research that 3 billion hours of combined weekly gaming (at that time) if multiplied by 7 are almost enough to solve big problems like hunger, poverty, climate change, global conflict, and obesity, acknowledging the power that gaming can exercise on social change. In this sense, especially the aforementioned social agents can leverage SGs in order to communicate a shared understanding of a problem, allowing users to experiment with potential solutions in a safe setting and generate their own mental frames for how it works (Swain, 2007). By simulating real life conditions, games are seen to impact on real life knowledge and problem solving, recontextualizing effective playful experiences in their own lives (Mitgutsch & Alvarado, 2012) and effectively communicating a message and instilling motivation to change (Work, 2009).

Consequently, this thesis will focus on the social context, which includes games which have been developed for broader purposes of training and behavior change by business, industry, marketing, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Connolly, Boyle & Hainey, 2011), typically aiming at raising awareness of their cause and stimulating interest and activism (Swain, 2007) or at helping business branding themselves in the context of CSR (Pohl & Tolhurst, 2010). Moreover, since a social system, according to Edwards and Sen (2000), is important to be conceptualized from a macro to a micro level, this thesis will examine *how different organizations brand themselves and their causes through SGs*.

For this purpose, my main focus will be to create a typology of SGs, used by different social agents, and look at and report the diversity of the sample. Moreover, through studying my

sample, another interesting aspect will be to look at the different branding patterns and understand the plurality and scope of the various mechanics which link the SG with the cause. At that point, since the size and reputation of each organization, and, consequently, the available resources play an important role in branding, it will be interesting to elaborate on whether different partnerships emerged among the non-profit, the business or the governmental sector, in a process of exchanging value (Labib Eid & Robert Sabella, 2014), aiming at creating distinct patterns. Nevertheless, undoubtedly the effectiveness of such partnerships depends on several factors, and, especially on the fit, by all means, between the two partners. Thus, besides investigating the existence of partnerships I aim to also critically look at them, identifying those factors that establish the partnership, strengthen the message and make the organization appear more legitimate to their publics, as well as those that can render it at risk of being accused of non authenticity.

Overall, the following sub-questions intend to help better understanding the scope of this research:

- (1) What are the different design strategies of SGs for promoting social awareness and activism?*
- (2) How do SGs implemented by non-profits differ from those implemented by for profit organizations?*
- (3) How does branding via SGs vary between large and small organizations?*

Generally speaking, nobody can deny that SGs, particularly those associated with cognitively complex living worlds, offer a promising area of research and create new thresholds for visual, auditory, behavioral, and emotional representations (Zielke et al., 2009). According to literature, several attempts have been made, trying to categorize SGs and their impacts (Connolly et al., 2012) such as that of Ratan and Ritterferd (2009) which was explained previously. This thesis will acknowledge such distinctions but also narrow them down to the context of stimulating social awareness and activism. Moreover, as mentioned before, while previous papers have focused on researching the nature and design of SGs implemented by INGOs which leads to activism (Arora & Itu, 2012), this thesis will try to explore a wider sample of different organizations and agents of social change which use SGs for branding themselves and their causes, creating a larger body of knowledge. In addition, to this day, research on hybrid organizations or clusters that are generated through the lens of social change is notably lacking (Hoffman, Badiane & Haigh, 2012) and, thus, another contribution of this thesis will be to also

examine this aspect. In a nutshell, this wider approach will shed light on the complicated nature of branding, adding new possibilities, challenges and limitations to the current research of SGs in the context of social change.

The following *Theoretical Framework* will include the two main large concepts surrounding the research question, *social change transformations* and *branding through serious games*, providing some theoretical and empirical findings. Next, after establishing the framing of the research, the focus of thesis will shift to the *Research Methodology*, where I will explain step by step the procedure of my analysis, linking it back to my research question and sub-questions and setting the grounds for the following analysis chapter. Specifically, the *Results* section will contain an extended presentation of the emerged findings. Lastly, in the *Discussion* section I will outline the progress of my research process, shedding light to these elements which helped me both extend the existent literature on SGs and suggest future guidelines for research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Transformations of branding for a social cause

2.1.1 Why social cause?

Businesses, nowadays, are operating in an increasingly skeptical world, where their actions are under constant scrutiny by the media and by NGOs (Frankental, 2001). In this sense, emphasis is being placed on creating social value and lasting social impact while ensuring financial sustainability of programs and organizations that promote social good (Nandan, London & Bent-Goodley , 2014). Indeed, contemporary authors refute Friedman's (1970) position, that "*there is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources to engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud*", suggesting a triple bottom line approach wherein economic, social, and environmental considerations are simultaneously addressed (Prasad & Holzinger, 2013).

Especially in the current century, the economic, social, and political climate, both nationally and globally, calls for social workers to lead and facilitate social change (Nandan et al., 2014), which is described as those *alterations of behavior patterns, social relationships, institutions, and social structure over time* (Farley, 1990, as cited in Hoff and Hickling-Hudson, 2011). According to Kotler (2011) globalization, cultural differences, the Internet, social media, brand proliferation, retail concentration, recession and environmental issues are forcing

organizations to address the issue of sustainability, which raises the question whether this generation, can leave future generations with the same basket of resources. Moreover, global challenges of poverty and social inequality form only part of an array of border-transcending social, political, and environmental problems such as displacement and migration, terrorism, famine, ill health, climate change, and unsustainable development, with more than 40% of the world's population living at or below the poverty line, especially in the Global South (Hoff & Hickling-Hudson, 2011). As a result, this emerged global inequality of power and wealth institutionalized discrimination and racism, neocolonialism and internal colonialism, unethical interactional business practices, authoritarian governments, lack of democracy and corrupt local elites, creates the bases of global environmental injustice and human rights transgression (Adeola, 2010). Specifically, of the 4.4 billion people in the developing world, almost 60% lack access to safe sewers, 33% do not have access to clean water, 25% lack adequate housing and 30% have no modern health service (Hoffman et al., 2012).

Indeed, environmental injustice and human rights violations are inextricably interwoven and the former should be recognized as a major component of the latter (Adeola, 2010). While, increasingly, the right to a safer environment has gained currency in the United States and the other advanced industrial states, due to the proliferation of grassroots activism, paradoxically, the same forces which normalized the conditions in these nations are the same contributing to the violations in non-core nations. To be more precise, according to the aforementioned author, commercial companies, in order to avoid visibility, regulations, liability and environment pollution accountability, transfer their manufacturing components to the interior of third world countries, deteriorating their human rights and ecological background.

Thus, nobody can deny that the nature and complexity of clients' problems and challenges experienced by communities incessantly evolves and grows each year (Nandan et al., 2014), calling social workers to lead and facilitate social change which can have a lasting impact on communities and in people's lives. For example, an innovative approach in creating social change may include the development of products and services targeted to unserved or underserved markets, generally with the goal of the reduction and resolution of social problems and challenges (Gundry et al., 2011). However, whether the purpose is just to raise awareness or to persuade the audience to take action over a serious issue, every organization needs to deal with environmental and social concerns in their agenda, since such a demand is escalating (Austin et al., 2006)

According to Edwards and Sen (2000) there are three bases of change, and their interaction determines how different forms of power are exercised in society. Specifically, economic power includes the distribution of productive assets and the workings of markets and firms, social power is expressed in the status and position accredited to different social groups and political power defines each person's voice in decision making in both the private sphere and public affairs. In this sense, companies, regardless of their size (SMEs vs. large firms) and of the amount of financial, managerial and decision making constraints (Williams & Schaefer, 2013) cannot afford to disregard their stakeholders for all kinds of economic, legal and ethical reasons (Pohl & Tolhurst, 2010) and jeopardize their "reputational assurance" (Frankental, 2001). Nevertheless, since local solutions to global problems are hardly effective without the involvement of all different actors (Hoff & Hickling-Hudson, 2011) not only companies, but also not-for-profit organizations, such as NGOs and INGOs, are required to balance their strengths and weaknesses in order to fulfill their social mission. Last but not least, in their personal sphere, individuals are also invited, regardless of their economic and/or social status, to help social change to prosper.

In the following sub-sections, the practitioners and agents of social change will be introduced in details. Nevertheless, since there are times where such efforts for social change are driven not just by ideological thinking but more by the multi-faceted business returns that corporations, organizations or individuals can potentially reap (Du et al., 2010), this section will also contain an overview of what CSR entails. Specifically, since consumers are the ultimate power brokers and nowadays they choose their products adding a third dimension (besides the price and quality of the product), that of how an organization meets its social responsibilities (Kotler, 2011), companies are required to respond to activists' pressures in order to establish a competitive advantage. Indeed, according to Du et al. (2010) 85% will consider switching to another company's products or services because of a company's negative corporate responsibility practices, and 66% will boycott such a company's products or services. Consequently, regardless of the motivation behind, social change is considered a rather popular and demanding theme among contemporary organizations, calling for further investigation.

In this sense, the research on societal marketing programs has examined a range of initiatives, including cause-related marketing (in which every unit sold of a brand triggers a donation to a cause), green marketing (in which the environmental friendliness of a company or brand is stressed as a differentiating attribute), cause sponsorship (in which a brand is clearly identified as a cause supporter) and social advertising (in which a cause is promoted in a brand's

ads) (Bloom, Hoeffler, Keller & Meza, 2012). Thus, in the following sections, these terms will be used as a framework in order to explain the various ways organizations can leverage a social cause in order to accomplish their goals.

In this line of reasoning, regarding the available tools that facilitate these initiatives, Van Zoonen (2007), as cited in Neys and Jansz (2010), portrays the capacity of media, such as movies and television to awaken the “political self”, which leads to social change through description, reflection, judgment and fantasy. Specifically, Van Zoonen states that people can use media to describe a political situation, to think about political dilemmas, praise or criticize politicians and maintain and express their hopes and ideals. Moreover, the rise of the term of “disaster porn”, resulting from the proliferation of modern mass media and globalization is based on a sociological background, aiming at helping members imagine themselves as part of the larger group (Recuber, 2013). This, so called indispensable component of the quest for social understanding, in combination with the growth of social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter, which are now seen as integral to the way information about disastrous events to break, circulate, and provoke reaction and action in relation to these events (McCosker, 2013), emerge as a new communication strategy towards social change.

As a result, while various scholars highlight the capacity of media in general as disruptive tools that create powerful intimacies and constitute global communities of empathy and reaction (Recuber, 2013; McCosker, 2013), Van Zoonen (2007) most of all emphasizes the unique property of SGs, namely their expressive power, which refers to their ability to visually represent how real and imagined systems work, simultaneously inviting the players to interact with those systems. Thus, their capacity to reveal complex situations in a rather simple way is what distinguishes this medium from other traditional media forms and what makes them so interesting to worth research their branding effectiveness in the context of social change.

2.1.2 Traditional and emerging agents of social cause

Embedded in a term well known from the 1970s as social marketing, organizations, individuals or public institutions are deemed potential practitioners when intending to contribute to social change. Specifically, social marketing is defined as (a) influencing behaviors, (b) utilizing a systematic planning process that applies marketing principles and techniques, (c) focusing on priority target audience segments, and (d) delivering a positive benefit for society (Smith, 2011). In this sense, according to Kotler & Zaltman (1971) who first introduced the term, social marketing is the explicit use of marketing skills to help translate present social action

efforts into more effectively designed and communicated programs that elicit desired audience response. Thus, practitioners of social marketing can be regarded as agents of social change. Nevertheless, issues of size, power and network connections are critical attributes for allowing organizations to exercise control over their environments (Hoffman et al., 2012) and achieve the intended outcomes.

To begin with, scholars have been exploring the role of civil society, including the activities of NGOs/INGOs, as agents of social change both nationally and internationally (Hoffman et al. 2012; Hoff & Hickling-Hudson, 2011). Indeed, NGOS/INGOS are vehicles for the direct transformation of the individual, through their program activities, they fund-raising and constituency-building work and in their own organizational praxis (Edwards & Sen, 2000). However, according to McClosley (2011), contemporary NGOS/INGOS need to adopt a more political role in society and align themselves more strategically with civil society groups that share their vision for a more egalitarian society by being open minded but also critical to social movements at the same time. Hoffman et al. (2012) discuss a schism within the environmental NGO world sees two positions on the role of the market in solving environmental and social problems; those of the dark green NGOs, such as *Greenpeace*, which see the market as the problem and seek radical social change to solve environmental problems, often by confronting corporations and the market and the bright green NGOs, such as *Conservation International*, which see the market as the solution and work within the system, often in close alliance with corporations, to solve environmental problems. Nevertheless, despite their widespread action, philanthropic donations and charities have experienced a more than 10% decline in the past 10 years, though financial needs of nonprofits continue rising, driving organizations to think “outside the box” to continue effectively addressing endemic social issues (Nandan et al., 2014). Hence, as Hemat and Yuksel (2014) explain, nowadays, non profits face pressures to find alternative ways of funding as also government support generally declines.

Next, social entrepreneurs are also acknowledged as catalysts for increasing public awareness and fostering societal change (Waddock & Post, 1991). Those social and environmental entrepreneurs share the same characteristics as all entrepreneurs, such as being innovative, resourceful, practical and opportunistic, aiming at achieving the “ideal” (Elkington & Hartigan, 2013). They use innovation to create social value and social change through a new venture (any organizational forms) in the public, private, citizen or nonprofit sector (Nandan et al., 2014). The main reason accounting for their growth is because they appeal to a group of socially aware people who have become more skeptical about the ability of governments and

businesses to meaningfully address pressing social problems (Dacin, Dacin & Tracey, 2011). Hence, their passion for social intervention entails them capable of bringing social change, especially to a more skeptical and “21 century” (Romero et.al, 2012) audience.

Furthermore, as previously described commercial firms can be also viewed as practitioners of social change. Specifically, firms tend to increasingly face saturated markets and a difficult task of differentiating their offerings, a fact which is intensified by strong local and international competition and thus, they tend to use new strategies to develop a sustainable competitive advantage, while being more accountable for expenses (Hemat & Yuksel, 2014). The case histories suggest that these companies have been able to use societal marketing to help differentiate their brands from competitors in consumers’ minds, in turn leading to a range of desirable effects, including greater efficiency for other marketing efforts, an ability to charge higher prices, increased market share, greater brand loyalty and more favorable treatment from stakeholders such as regulators and investors (Bloom et al., 2012). At the same time, such attempts have helped many of these companies achieve better scores on ratings of the most admired and socially responsible companies. Since there is a long debate on the socially responsible side of businesses, I decided to incorporate it in an individual section, and, thus, more about their practices are discussed below.

Lastly, since the demand for social services is growing, government, businesses and nonprofits are required to work in tandem to find creative solutions to effectively leverage what each sector does (Nandan et al., 2014). Moreover, addressing sustainability issues in a globalized world requires the emergence and diffusion of new organizational forms and new forms of governance (Hoffman et al., 2010). Therefore, partnerships between businesses and NGOs in the context of social good have been designated in different ways, namely social alliances, referring to specific types of partnerships that span the for-profit/non-profit boundary and include non-economic objectives (i.e. social welfare objectives) (Jamali, Yianni & Abdallah, 2011). Moreover, “brand aid”, the combination of causes, branded products and celebrity, is one of the newest alliances in international development, shifting relationships between public and private aid (Ponte & Richey, 2014). Indeed, celebrities are often found speaking on behalf of the products, representing the benefits of the cause while co-branding helping as cool, and are important for the ‘fit’ between a cause and a company. In a nutshell, the problems themselves, be they low educational achievement, famine or aids, and the people who endure them, are branded and marketed to Western consumers through celebritised multimedia story-telling just as

effectively as the products that will 'save' them. Moreover, corporate philanthropy is no longer anonymous but instead becomes shared with the consumer, publicised and celebritised.

Specifically, on one hand, such partnerships are seen as a way for agents to overcome financial constraints, gain access to commercial capital markets and attract talent (Austin et al., 2006). Indeed, large, media-savvy development organizations, such as INGOs/NGOs 'partner' by constructing these regimes of value for development, which resonate with years of promotion of public-private partnerships (Ponte & Richey, 2014). Moreover, in this sense, non profits are no longer viewed as "beggars" asking for corporate donations but instead, acquire more legitimacy by being feasible partners for companies (Hemat & Yuksel, 2014). Lastly, besides the financial benefits, non profits are able to acquire volunteers or senior executive staff to provide managerial assistance in order to better support their causes, groups, individuals and the environment that they rely on.

On the other hand, since nowadays social marketing, which was traditionally mostly sponsored by non-profit or public sector agencies (Smith, 2011), is also practiced by businesses, according to Austin and Seitanidi (2012), cross-sector partnering, and in particular collaborations between non-profits and businesses, is viewed by academics and practitioners as an inescapable and powerful vehicle for implementing CSR and for achieving social and economic missions. In this sense, commercial firms may reap several benefits from a cross sectoring campaign, such as increased sales revenue, product differentiation and competitive advantage, increased publicity, converted non-profit's supporters to new buyers and, even internal benefits, such as increased workers' productivity, since they perceive the company they work for as more caring (Hemat & Yuksel, 2014). Thus, a CSR partnership itself is regarded as a political pastime called an 'alliance building game' aiming at generating reciprocal support and social acceptance (Labib Eid & Robert Sabella, 2014). In a nutshell, partnerships create new 'hybrid' organizations under deals which require an exchange of value (Austin et al., 2006) and help to achieve both financial and non financial benefits.

Nevertheless, there are risks and costs associated with CRM strategies, which may prohibit a win-win situation for parties involved in a hybrid (Hemat & Yuksel, 2014). Specifically, some examples may be found in cases where non profits may pursue partnerships with businesses at the expense of pursuing individual donors, where a poor fit between the two partners may endanger and damage their reputations or where consumers perceive businesses as

exploiting a not for profit cause. In this sense, partnerships must be selected with caution as they include many costs which cannot be outweighed by a poorly transmitted cause-related message.

2.1.3 Digital activism and its consequences for businesses

Focusing on its technological transformation, digital activism is nowadays introduced as the enabled by the speed, reliability, scale, and low cost of the Internet act of strengthening social movements (Sivitanides & Shah, 2011). Specifically, this trending concept has many pathways of existence that provide individuals a way to send and express their messages about social change to the masses of the population (Hughes et al., 2014), leveraging the power of modern technologies. Activists are making full use of blogs, social media sites, mobile apps, and other tools to promote their message and gain support (McCafferty, 2011). Nevertheless, such an act has arisen much controversy, accused of not being translated to an offline, real world impact. As a result, many new terms have arisen such as ‘slacktivism’, defined as the *‘actions performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement’*, and debates as that raised by Morozov (2009), who supports that *‘feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact’* (Jones, 2015).

In this sense, Kristofferson, et al. (2014), as cited in Jones’s (2015) research regarding cause-related videos, define these actions that allow people to show their support for causes with little associated cost (e.g., liking a Facebook page) as ‘token support’, and contributions requiring significant cost, effort or behavior change with tangible positive impacts for the cause (e.g., donating money) as ‘meaningful support’. Moreover, such light-touch activities are likely to result in organizational losses to traditional activists, as people use ‘slacktivist’ activities to replace ‘conventional (and proven) forms of activism’ (demonstrations, volunteering litigation, etc.), further diminishing the role of the Internet in promoting activism (Lee & Hsieh, 2013). Nevertheless, Jones’s research ends up partially refuting Morozov’s argument, and suggests that sharing social videos to help a cause is not a slacktivist act; indeed, the stronger a viewer’s motivation to share a video to help a cause, the stronger their motivation to find out more afterwards. Hence, Jones’s research provides an early insight of how media tools can function as generators of interests in the context of social change.

Furthermore, similar studies on this topic confirmed that not only slacktivism do not harm offline activism but also tend to increase the likelihood of participation in a subsequent collective action (Lee & Hsieh, 2013). Besides, technology and activism are a perfect match, as the founding principle of Web 2.0 itself is based upon the same ideas and principles, such as

interacting, sharing and pursuing goals, that fuel efforts toward change (McCafferty, 2011). Thus, besides its prevalent terminology of “easy activism”, “slacktivism” or “clicktivism”, which implies easily exercising a sense of moral justification without the need to actually engage (Halupka, 2014), and, all the criticism around it, this modern practice that cannot be overlooked, especially by for-profit organizations, creating new opportunities for the rejuvenation of their value proposition through CSR branding communications. Especially nowadays, where in anti brand communities, consumers are viewed to take on social activists roles by voicing their opposition towards corporations (Sivitanides & Shah, 2011), commercial firms are forced to respond in order to secure their welfare. Thus, beyond raising awareness, the next key challenge of CSR communication is how to minimize stakeholder skepticism (Du et al., 2010) by creating a long lasting impact.

2.1.4 CSR approach

In alliance with the previous section, while cause specificity or CRM often seems to be a more favorable tool for communicating with customers than simply abiding by the principles of CSR (Sheikh & Beise-Zee, 2011), the fear of being targeted by activists appears to be a direct cause of the adoption of CSR (King, & McDonnell, 2012). Specifically, while fearing the reputational threat represented by the boycott, companies become more committed to impression management tactics and engage in consistent CSR activities, hoping that their audiences will give more weight to these positive actions than they will to the negative claims made by boycotters. Indeed, today’s CSR programs, either pro-active or re-active, increasingly rely upon a broader stakeholder concept (Genasci & Pray, 2008) aiming at promoting a firm’s commitment to improve the social well being and, over the long run, at building corporate/brand image, strengthening stakeholder–company relationships, and enhance stakeholders' advocacy behaviors for the company (Du, et al., 2010). In a nutshell, such practices aim at emphasizing that a company is not a lonely actor, rather a part of a system of exchange and interaction (Mark-Herbert & Von Schantz, 2007).

Nowadays, more than ever, companies are devoting significant resources to various social initiatives, from community outreach and environmental protection, to socially responsible business practices (Du et al., 2010). Given that the communication of a firm's commitment to CSR is a vital motivation, CSR is often practiced via the support of causes, which can differentiate and give meaning to the brand (Sheikh & Beise-Zee, 2011). Such causes may range from environmental to social, aiming from raising awareness and preserving the future of the planet to fighting against all kinds of discriminations and injustices. Differences may also be

customer specific or company specific (Sheikh & Beise-Zee, 2011), meaning that either causes are oriented towards the personality traits and cultural characteristics of the audience, or, the choice of cause derives from the specific industry of the company or the company's reputation or the company cause-fit and so on, putting the character of the company as the central node of the decision tree. In this sense, CSR is the first step for the examination of corporate marketing, referring to the integration of corporate-level concepts including corporate identity, corporate image, corporate branding, corporate communication, and corporate reputation (Prasad & Holzinger, 2013). One example is through their mission slogans, which can become part of collective memory of consumers (Verboven, 2011). Nevertheless, until now, mission slogans have been neglected in scholarly research about CSR, a fact that increases the CSR literature gap, given that they represent the core of transmitted corporate identity and offer much potential for further examination.

Undoubtedly, though, there are times when companies embrace a false consciousness in ideology, when they get involved with a cause in order to advertise their philanthropic efforts, and not the philanthropy itself, aiming to promote market capitalization (Prasad & Holzinger, 2013). Moreover, in a different scenario, due to the high sensitivity to activists' demands, companies sometimes pursue projects for public relations purposes with no true intention of addressing real needs (Genasci & Pray, 2008). Indeed, many scholars have claimed that companies may abuse CSR as a sort of marketing or branding tool (Verboven, 2011). This practice, namely "greenwashing", is a socially constructed phenomenon referring to how corporations create green symbolism without taking any radical measures to substantively realize the environmentalist movement's central project (Prasad & Holzinger, 2013). This is mostly portrayed when companies intend to convey a green image, perhaps by undertaking some highly visible campaign, but without applying the lessons of environmentalism to their business processes.

What is more, greenwashing can be detrimental for a firm's reputation when perceived by the different stakeholders (Vries, Terwel, Ellemers & Daamen, 2013). Specifically, especially if implemented by large firms, it creates a vicious cycle since, according to King and McDonnell (2012), activists focus is almost exclusively on the upper tier of reputable firms. Thus, there are cases, where firms that fly under-the-radar because of their weak reputations are able to get away with irresponsible behavior. Consequently, according to scholars, size is not independent of the level of CSR engagement, rendering the investigation of how CSR practices are implemented differently between SMEs versus large firms extremely interesting.

In a nutshell, CSR allows companies, through public relations and minimal adjustments to policy and practice, to project an image of reform while changing little, if anything, in terms of actual corporate behavior, convincing their audiences (Prasad & Holzinger, 2013). Moreover, a social-cause affiliation could also have a “halo effect” on how a brand is seen on other attributes, such as trustworthiness or quality (Bloom et al., 2012). Nevertheless, although CSR is also seen as insurance for the company in the event of product harm crises and consequently, part of their branding and communication strategy (Sheikh & Beise-Zee, 2011), there are cases when stakeholders may also quickly become leery of the CSR motives, especially when companies aggressively promote their CSR efforts (Du et al., 2010). This is also in line with what Frankental’s (2001) observation that CSR is nothing more than a public relations invention with the intention to strategically manipulate consumers. Thus, indisputably, CSR is regarded as a very sensitive and controversial initiative.

In this line of reasoning, companies should not only invest in company-controlled CSR communication channels such as high-profile cause marketing campaigns but instead penetrate communicators of CSR (e.g. media, customers, monitoring groups and consumer’s forums/blogs) and get positive coverage from more independent, unbiased and credible source such as editorial coverage on television or in the press or word-of-mouth (Du et al., 2010). Moreover, consumers are deemed an informal yet highly credible CSR communication channel, especially the ones who, according to Du et al. (2010) act as advocates and activists of companies which try to support and advocate social change, given that the power of consumer word-of-mouth (WOM) has been greatly magnified due to the popularity and vast reach of Internet communication media such as blogs, chat rooms and social media sites (e.g. Facebook).

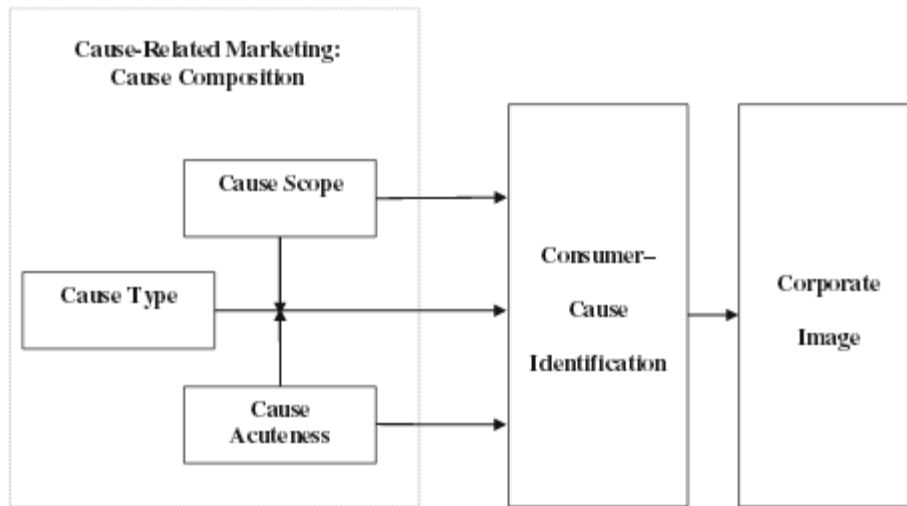
Indeed, today’s Web 2.0 allows for sharing, linking, collaborating, and inclusion of user generated content (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson & McKenzie, 2008). Thus, as the consumer is put on the forefront, this online interface provides them with various effortless incentives to disseminate a message. Specifically, one of the fundamental privileges of Web 2.0 is the possibility of making use of viral or e-world-of-mouth (eWOM) marketing (Thackeray et al., 2008). Moreover, supporters of online activism argue that social media can be used to reach a wider group of people by raising awareness or knowledge, inviting people who may otherwise never take traditional civic actions to partake in a collective action (Lee & Hsieh, 2013). Especially the Millennials, skeptical of traditional advertising, are seeking for an emotional connection to companies and brands and thus, commercial firms supporting for a cause can leverage this target group in order to brand themselves and their causes (Furlow, 2011).

Consequently, this generation of “doers”, which represents a larger percentage of the audience, is most likely to engage with a cause, especially if found online, since this is the generation which is the most active online, especially on SNSs, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Nevertheless, besides the each time targeted audience, Dawkins (2004), as cited in Du et al. (2010), discuss two types who can transmit a CSR message. First of all, the opinion-leader audiences such as business press, investors (both mainstream institutional investors and the socially responsible investment (SRI) community) and NGOs are keen on seeking and disseminate information regarding a company’s CSR deeds. This also explains why various observers have noted that the discourse on CSR and other voluntary ethical actions is counteracted by an ever increasing penetration of corporations into the public policy process through lobbying, funding and sponsorship, partnerships, consultation and dialog with governments, and civil organizations (Prasad & Holzinger, 2013). Nevertheless, since the marketing of CSR often gives the impression that the corporate sector is, in general, seriously engaged with CSR when the reality looks very different, and the nowadays audience is extremely skeptical, especially if a cause involves money donations, CSR alliances must be treated with transparency and all the reports need to be visible and able to be verified.

Secondly, the general public, such as consumers and local communities, while they, themselves, will not seek proactively for information regarding the company’s practice, they are the receivers of those independent and unbiased messages of the press, and thus, they are more likely to accept and share them (Dawkins, 2004, as cited in Du et al., 2010) . According to Prasad and Holzinger (2013), as such audience is deemed a crucial stakeholder and performance indicator of the CSR attempt, inclusive and open dialog is an important first step to empower them and overcome cynicism. Experimental results show that consumers will respond with more favorable ratings and a higher likelihood of choice to brands that have certain social-cause affiliations (Bloom et al., 2012). After all, many consumption actions, such as buying products associated with a cause-related marketing campaign, serve goals that support self-identification processes (Vanhamme, Lindgreen, Reast & van Popering, 2012) and thus explain why a consumer may be eager to succumb to supporting a cause.

Figure 2.1.4.1 The process of self identification.



Retrieved from Vanhamme, Lindgreen, Reast & van Popering, 2012.

Nevertheless, one element that delineates the success of the message dissemination, in the eyes of the audience, is the degree of fit between the cause and the brand, namely messages in which the logic behind the brand's affiliation can be easily recognized by most consumers. Specifically, on the one hand, studies indicate that the impact of CRM or CSR primarily occurs on consumers' attitudes towards the company, rather than towards the ad or the brand, regardless of the level of brand/cause fit (Nan & Heo, 2007). These authors rest on the premise that solely the addition of a CRM or CSR component is beneficial and enhances the sponsoring company's overall image, either it has a high fit or not. However, on the other hand, recent studies refute this argument, suggesting a double faceted impact of the fit on the company branding. Specifically Bloom et al. (2012) distinct between having a fit and between promoting it. In this sense, while cause related programs with a high degree of fit with the brand are more likely to produce more positive brand judgments and feelings than initiatives with weaker fit, when a brand promotes a high-fit social cause, it may be more likely to be viewed by some consumers as opportunistic and seeking commercial gain. Therefore, there are cases where the lack of surprise and uniqueness may dampen the effectiveness of the message, while a low-fit social cause might actually help to differentiate a brand, leading the consumers to react more positively to the promotional initiative.

Last but not least, as discussed in the work of Neys and Jansz, (2010), unlike literature and movies, games encourage risk-taking and learning the results of the player's actions, forcing them to view the world from a different angle, and always be ready to learn something new. Undoubtedly, these are the skills required to facilitate social change. Thus, in the following

section a SGs' overview will be extensively presented, logically putting the reader to a position of accepting SGs as effective cause-related branding mediums for the various organizations. In this sense, the two major components of my research would have been adequately explained and thus, we will be able to proceed to the research phase.

2.2 Branding through Serious Games

2.2.1 Literature review on gaming

As stated in the work of Freudmann and Bakamitsos (2014) while the oldest documented game, Mancala, dates back to Egypt in the fifteenth to eleventh centuries, other references present Herodotus (of Ancient Greece) as the first to report on the cultural significance of game-playing in society and the psychological value inherent in the act of playing. Back to the current age, humans continue to find story elements profoundly meaningful, and, as Gee (2006) explains, they try to interpret everything that happens as if it were part of some story. In general, the idea of using games for purposes other than fun was first formulated by Clark C. Abt (1975), as cited in the work of Breuer and Bente (2010). However, the definition of 'serious game', which dates for almost 40 years now, in itself is somewhat questionable and even, for some, appears to be a contradiction (Breuer & Bente, 2010). Are games not fun by definition and hence not serious? In this line of reasoning, Prensky (2005), in his work, rejects claims of other authors questioning the "fun" element of games, quoting Daniel Carnegie (1964) who stated that people rarely succeed when they do not have fun in what they are doing (Carnegie, 1964, as cited in Prensky, 2005) even if that entails effort and willingness to invest time and resources to something often experienced as unpleasant in other contexts (Breuer & Bente, 2010). However, in games designed to change a player's behavior in the out-of-game world, it is questionable whether the player will revert back to former patterns if they stop playing (Freudmann & Bakamitsos, 2014).

Although irrefutable empirical evidence about the impact of these games is still lacking, the trend to design "serious games", "games for change" or "social impact games" has undergone a rapid upswing in the last decade (Mitgutsch & Alvarado, 2012). Historically, initial interest focused on COTS (commercial-off-the-shelf) games, which are popular games primarily designed for entertainment, advocating that they can be used to get learners engaged and spark interest for specific topics (Breuer & Bente, 2010), but later, interest also grew in games-based learning (GBL) and the designing of games for educational purposes (Connolly, et al., 2012). However, the term 'serious game', as it applies today to digital games where education or persuasion rather than entertainment is the primary focus, was coined in 2003 by Ben Sawyer in his paper

concerning the potential of using digital games for policy making (Breuer & Bente, 2010). According to Marsh (2011),

“Serious games are digital games, simulations, virtual environments and mixed reality/media that provide opportunities to engage in activities through responsive narrative/story, gameplay or encounters to inform, influence, for well-being, and/or experience to convey meaning.” (Marsh 2011, p. 63)

Michael and Chen (2006), in their work, also extend the SGs educational goal in its various forms, picturing their wide range of application. This definition, however, can only be considered valid with a very broad understanding of education. For example, one type of education is *adult education*, which carries the connotation of applying to adults who have missed out on educational opportunities that should be offered by formal schooling, historically, emphasizing on social change and social action, or personal and economic development (Hoff & Hickling-Hudson, 2011). Furthermore, in the context of educating through raising awareness for a social issue, Work (2009) forms three effect categories related to playing SGs, such as (a) exposure and elaboration, (b) comprehension and knowledge acquisition and, (c) persuasion and attitude change. These three layers express how deeply the SG impact on the player’s cognition. In a nutshell, SGs engage with the intention to “convey ideas, values, and sometimes at persuading the players”, aiming at influencing the players’ thoughts and actions in real life contexts, as well as exceeding the self-contained scope of the game itself (Mitgutsch & Alvarado, 2012).

In this line of reasoning, an inviolable rule exists; if a SG has no intended impact on the player in a real life context it misses its pivotal purpose (Mitgutsch & Alvarado, 2012). Specifically, regarding those games’ persuasive dimension, it does not necessarily need to be in the game’s design but can be assigned to the game by the context it is used or embedded in (Breuer & Bente, 2010). For example, a board game originally designed for fun can be used in another concept, to teach strategic thinking. Nevertheless, when defining SGs, it is useful to consider the primary function of the game and that is whether the game was developed initially as a game for entertainment or as a SG (Connolly et al., 2012). Therefore, simply adding educational material to an enjoyable game concept is not sufficient to create an interesting and effective SG for any intended purposes (Breuer & Bente, 2010). Overall, the purpose should be reflected directly in the aim of the game and its topic, but also in the designer’s intentions and their goal to impact the players in a specific way (Mitgutsch & Alvarado, 2012).

In this line of reasoning, it is important to mention that SGs are also criticized in several articles due to the existence of various and confusing definitions resulting in the creation of games, under the umbrella name of SGs, which neither are attached to the wider SGs community nor incorporate any persuasion or behavior change design (Marsh, 2011). Specifically, there are cases where no SGs are created for specific purposes but rather gamification features are attached in a context, especially by commercial organizations, for branding purposes. This modern practice refers to the use of elements of game design in non-game contexts, products, and services to motivate desired behaviors (Deterding, 2012) mostly focusing on the challenge-reward cycle (Freudmann & Bakamitsos, 2014). In this sense, in order to attain meaningful results, developers are called to quantify realistic intended outcomes (i.e. money donated, number of emails, number of new stories written, number of time players, tell a friend, number of meet up events generated and so on) at the beginning of the project (Swain, 2007).

Undoubtedly, gamification has become so widespread in the corporate world and, leveraging the social media environments, that it is estimated that, by 2015, more than 50% of organizations that manage innovation processes will gamify those processes (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). However, while such a SG, *Spent*, when launched, was certainly successful in increasing donations, it is important to consider whether revenue was the only, even the most, desired outcome, since, according to its social mission – “*to explore and utilize the social networking platform to engage, educate and inspire existing and potentially new audiences in entirely new ways*” – apparently fundraising was only one of the dimensions along which the game designers hoped to impact players (Freudmann & Bakamitsos, 2014). Thus, gamification is a process which needs to be examined with caution.

2.2.2 *Persuasion in games*

Persuasion can be pictured as a continuum ranging from information to action where the persuader is attempting to educate the receiver of the persuasive message about an issue, an idea or a product (Lavender, 2007). The effectiveness of these SGs can then be measured and determined by the degree to which the goals are met. Previous researches advocate a positive relation between SGs and persuasion (Van Eck, 2006), others identify and categorize the different educational outcomes of SGs (Connolly et al., 2012) and others highlight it as a still underdeveloped field (Girard, Ecalle & Magnan, 2013). However, Antle, Tanenbaum and Robinson (2013) managed to construct a model presenting the three different perspectives on behavior change through SGs.

Specifically, the aforementioned authors use three different models to better explain how persuasion in games can lead to behavior change. Firstly, they introduce the *Information Deficit model* where games designed under that perspective excel at delivering facts, advocating that providing information changes values, value change drives changes in attitudes and attitude change drives changes in behavior change. Next, the *Procedural Rhetoric model* is based on the notion that the processes and activities that players engage in during a game are more persuasive than the information that is layered on top of those processes, stating that it is the experience of interaction and reflection that motivates any changes in values, attitude and behavior. Lastly, the *Emergent Dialogue* model introduces a more participatory approach and is not focused on individual behavior change but instead on social mobilization in support of collective behavior change (Antle, Tanenbaum & Robinson, 2013).

In an attempt to address effectiveness, it is important to take into account the different games taxonomies, since according to Van Eck (2006) not all games will be equally effective at all levels of learning. For example, card games are going to be best for promoting the ability to match concepts and recognize numbers, arcade-style games are likely to be best at promoting speed, response and visual processing while narrative-driven adventure games can be effective in promoting hypothesis testing and problem solving. Connolly et al. (2012) also include in their work a distinction among skills based learning outcomes (including technical and motor skills), cognitive outcomes (including declarative, procedural and strategic knowledge) and affective outcomes (beliefs or attitudes). Empirical evidence also confirms substantial changes in gamers' knowledge and opinion about issues addressed in mostly political SGs (Neys & Jansz, 2010).

Breuer and Bente (2010) also mention that games can be used not only as learning tools but also as motivators or generators of interest. Specifically, games such as *Age of Mythology*, which features a number of references to ancient mythology, can really make players curious about the sources so that they voluntarily look them up, simultaneously ensuring that they will not reject a game just because it is labeled as an educational or serious game. Breuer and Bente (2010) discuss this notion of 'pull-knowledge' instead of 'push-knowledge' as a tool that can surely help to foster more self-directed and proactive learning. This is also confirmed from the aforementioned study of Neys and Jansz (2010) who demonstrated in their research that game players learn something during play, and this learning activity can in turn stimulate an interest in the subject-matter itself. Thus, serious games can be seen as a source of persuasion, skills learning and generators of curiosity and implicit learning.

Lastly, besides a tendency to obtain more information about the cause portrayed in the game, namely introduced by Neys and Jansz (2010) as individual facilitation, more than a half of the survey participants expressed social facilitation, namely the need to interact with their friends about the game. This indicates a trend; specifically, after they had played, the players intended to share their experiences with friends, either by informing them about or discussing the issues highlighted in the game, or through stimulating them to play themselves, contributing to the development of informal political network. Thus, issues of viral marketing and eWOM are applicable, meaning that SGs can be meaningfully spread among networks enhancing their reach, succeeding in transmitting a cause-related message and stimulating civic engagement.

2.2.3 Design Characteristics

Gee (2007) defines SGs as a cycle, typical of experimental science of reflective practice. Van Eck (2006) recognized that by playing a game what someone must learn is directly related to the environment in which they learn and demonstrate it, applied and practiced within a context. Players inhabit the goals of a virtual character in a virtual world and this virtual world is designed to be attuned to these goals (Gee, 2007). They experience their own actions to be effective in the virtual game world and this sense of control is pleasurable and motivates further interaction (Breuer & Bente, 2010). Within the social context, one challenge that gamified experiences face, especially those seeking to benefit non-profit organizations, is the issue of player attraction and engagement which unlike traditional games, require players to reframe an idea and interact with it in a new way (Freudmann & Bakamitsos, 2014). Moreover, unlike games that are part of marketing campaigns for consumer products, non-profits are often trying to convey a much less tangible message. Nevertheless, although the content in which the game is embedded is indeed very important, there are also some basic characteristics assembled in order to design a SG.

Overall, Aarseth (2003) introduces three dimensions that characterize every game; the gameplay, namely the players' actions, strategies and motives; the game structure, meaning the rules of the game; and the game world, namely the fictional content which includes the topology, the levels, the design and so on. In this sense, one of the main features that are embedded in these dimensions is *interactivity*. Specifically, Breuer and Bente (2010) present three levels of interactivity, the micro-one, consisting of the individual's inputs and outputs, the narrative one, consisted of interacting with game elements in order to unfold a story, and the setting and customization one which includes choosing difficulties or cheating. As Gee (2007) explains, a video game creates a three way interaction and when playing a game, players are both imposed by the character they play (i.e. the player must take on the character's goals) and impose

themselves on that character (making the character take on the player's goals). Game's rules could help develop citizenship, adaptability, and productivity skills while a great degree of flexibility and range of plausible paths to success could help learners develop a flexible knowledge base that can be applied to a variety of real-world situations (Romero et al., 2014).

Concerning the integration of *learning and enjoyment* characteristics in a game's design Ritterfeld and Weber (2006) suggested three paradigms; the reinforcement paradigm, which includes the rewards or tokens for successful learning, the motivation paradigm, where entertaining game elements are used to evoke the learner's interest and, the blending paradigm which is referred to the acquisition of knowledge and skill in order to enjoy a mastery in a game. Players need to be encouraged to think about relationships not isolated events (Gee, 2009).

Furthermore, when we play games we voluntary confront ourselves with "unnecessary obstacles" (Mitgutsch & Alvarado, 2012). Yet, another core characteristic of games is that actions have *no real-world consequences*, enabling learners to practice safely without fear of failure (Romero et al., 2014). In this sense, regarding the final goal of the gamer, which is to succeed, although entertaining byproducts may increase pleasure of the senses they cannot replace lacking success (Ritterfeld & Weber, 2006). Apparently, good games are those which both lower the consequences of failure and encourage players to take risks, explore and try new thing. Thus, SGs, apart from being challenging it is also important to be doable (Gee, 2009).

In a nutshell, various frameworks exist in the literature helping in deconstructing a SG and understanding these design features and mechanics that render it a serious one. In the work of Mitgutsch and Alvarado (2012) several frameworks have been discussed, meticulously examining the design of games, in terms of learning, storytelling, game play and user experience. The aforementioned authors, though, have recently developed their own framework which includes six elements: (a) the purpose of the game, which should be clearly reflected, (b) the content, which contains all the data and words provided that are visible and approachable to the players, (c) the mechanics, which entail the establishment of the rules that define the space and limits of operation in the game world, (d) the fiction and narrative, which engage the player into a storyline, (e) the aesthetics and graphics which play a fundamental role in the introduction of the game's purpose and its impact on the player, (f) the framing, meaning the targeted audience which is expected with a certain level of literacy, and (g) the relation between all these elements in order to make a cohesive whole. This framework will be used later for my research, as it will

help deconstruct and better understand the different design strategies of each SG and, consequently of each organization.

2.2.4 SGs and new platforms

Due to the increased need for advanced technological literacy (Romero et.al, 2014) what was introduced in the beginning as SGs “leveraging the power of computers” is not a norm anymore. Nowadays new technologies such as mobile technologies, online games, virtual worlds and ARGs have expanded the ways in which games have traditionally been played, their medium of delivery and the different platforms available (Conolly et.al, 2012). These devices contain enough computational power to perform tasks that formerly required a bulky PC (Hildmann, Branki, Pardavila, & Livingstone, 2008). Specifically, mobile learning, which is the intersection of mobile computing and e-learning, makes resources accessible wherever you are and promotes rich interaction while it is also considered as an effective learning and performance-based assessment tool (Singh & Khanna, 2014).

Indeed, in today’s Smartphone era, in combination with a nomadic “on the go” culture (Goggin, 2013), consuming mobile games through applications has become a habit (Feijoo et.al, 2012). Moreover, the low entry barriers for mobile games (lower costs, compared to developing a game for PC or console) have helped spawn a proliferation of small mobile-game software developers and the possibility to account for the long tail of potentially interested gamers (Feijoo et.al, 2012). Additionally, in Q4 2013, more than 75% of consumer app spending in both the Apple App Store and Google Play was spent on mobile games, a “significant increase” from Q4 2012 according to AppAnnie (Sethuraman, 2014). Mobile SGs (MSGs) combine the possibility for the user to be able to play as he moves throughout different real-world places, taking advantage of the user’s playing style, the speed of his movements, times, changes in the environment, acceleration, and the manipulation of objects, among many other things (Sánchez & Olivares, 2011). In this line of reasoning, these MSGs can be used as tools in behavior change communication, creating awareness and giving information on sensitive issues (Singh & Khanna, 2014).

In general, from the part of the social agents using SGs, Katsaliaki and Mustafee (2014) list several advantages such as (i) their free cost availability and ease of adoption, (ii) their ease of accessibility to a larger audience due to their online nature in combination with the increasing coverage and speed of regular broadband connections, (iii) the fact that they can be played by a sole player, without needing to form teams, and (iv) their consistency with the audience that is

primary targeted, the youngsters. Additionally, youth today communicate, buy and sell, search information and socialize differently, transforming the 21st century into a world that requires a new set of competences beyond the obvious information and communication technology literacy (Romero, Usart, & Ott, 2014). Thus, from a managerial perspective they are considered as a potential branding tool for organizations. However, while non-traditional communication methods have been identified as being particularly valuable to non-profits, there is limited data regarding viable techniques for engaging new players, especially when it comes to effectively engage a broader audience of players right away, or to focus on customizing this experience to the segment of players that are considered the most critical by the non-profit (Freudmann & Bakamitsos, 2014). In this sense, while exploring the sample, interest will be also placed on where the different organizations choose to launch their SG.

3. Research Methodology

Previous empirical studies claim a positive link between games and learning outcomes. Specifically, such outcomes can be categorized, ranging from skills based learning outcomes to affective outcomes, such as beliefs or attitudes (Garris, Ahlers & Driskell, 2002, in Connolly et al., 2012). Moreover, given the fact that the latter category reflects the potential of games to change players' emotions and attitudes, SGs were also researched in combination with their field of application by several scholars. Several classifications and taxonomies have also captured the interest of scholars, who sampled and contrasted SGs in order to understand their diversity, in terms of learning modes and target audience (Michael & Chen, 2006) or primary educational content, learning principle, target age group and platform (Ratan & Ritterfeld, 2008). Sawyer and Smith (2008), as retrieved from Breuer and Bente (2010), identified three exemplars field of application: defense, government and NGOs or marketing & communication. Indeed, various recent studies have discussed the positive correlation between using SGs in order to raise awareness, educate and enhance social activism (Wang and Singhal, 2009, Susi et al., 2007). Nevertheless, while previous studies endorse the potential of SGs applied in the not-for-profit sector by NGOs/INGOs (Arora & Itu, 2010), the for-profit sector tends to be neglected.

Consequently, whilst this novel field of SGs arises many opportunities and creates various paths to explore, I decided to maintain my focus on identifying these patterns that distinguish the non profit from the for profit sector. In addition, given the fact that little research has been made in an effort to connect the CSR sector (Pohl & Tolhurst, 2010) with SGs, I decided to take the initiative and explore this medium as an emerging branding instrument, along with the

possible trade-offs that ensue, especially when they are formulated under the umbrella of a partnership. Thus, in this thesis through creating a SGs' taxonomy, through focusing on both sectors and sampling different types of organizations, from entrepreneurs and SMEs to large commercial firms and non-profits, I endeavor to understand and map the different ways branding is realized and the tensions that surround it. However, I will not only maintain my focus on the three formulated sub-questions but, instead, while addressing the various debates discussed in my theoretical framework I will try to acknowledge any other points of similarity and differentiation between the different SGs that may emerge in a rather critical way. Overall, this thesis attempts to provide a wider understanding of this diverse field of using SGs for organizational branding and propose directions for further discussions.

To begin with, I sampled twenty SGs and created four distinct categories; that of the NGOs/INGOs' SGs, that of the companies' SGs, that of the SMEs' SGs and, lastly, that of the entrepreneurs' SGs. Some of those are well known for their actions in the human rights field and others in the environmental field. Furthermore, their SGs primary discuss two topics, environmental injustices and human rights abuse, which, as previously described, are interwoven and constitute phenomena of social morbidity. In total, nine of them are concerned about the environment and the rest about human rights. In each category and within the different categories, the rationality behind choosing this sample is that these SGs are diverse and yet provide enough commonality to support a comparison.

Overall, my sample can be considered international from both large and small actors. For example, while, on one hand, I include SGs from large well known INGOs, on the other hand, I do not disregard SGs that have been created and even promoted locally, but gained their publicity online. Moreover, while the theme remains framed (environment and human rights) some SGs address more sensitive and heightened issues, such as the Syrian conflict, and are targeted to a wide audience but aim at provoking more local solutions, compared to other games that, for example, simply discuss recycling. In this sense, my initial assumptions will be that those SGs that are more provocative than others would yield more interesting points of discussion. However, since I am not interested in examining solely political games I tried to retrieve those SGs that constitute my research both feasible, in terms of time, and diverse enough in order to provide valuable insights vis-à-vis their creators' strategies.

Moreover, my purposive sampling (Family Health International, n/a) contains games that are either selected by accessing the organization's website or by accessing a serious gaming

database where the game is affiliated, such as *Games for Change* (www.gamesforchange.org). Moreover, they derived either from online research in various online sources, such as blogs or Wikipedia or from online gaming databases, where they are listed and categorized. Lastly, in order to limit the scope of my research I set two criteria when researching the SGs; that of ensuring the purpose they were primarily created for, namely by searching SGs that they were labeled serious by their developers and are primarily designed to raise awareness of an issue and want to stimulate interest and activism (Swain, 2007), and that of ensuring accessibility of both the SGs and their accompanying online communities, in order to enable a neutral set point for comparisons.

In this sense, the majorities of games are either embedded in the organization's website, either under the specific campaign or theme that they feature or as part of the website's multimedia offerings, or, are hosted in their own specific website and can be accessed independently. Only three of them needed to be only accessed through a mobile interface while the rest are accessible from a PC. Two of them are even Facebook games, with the one only accessible via Facebook. Overall, even in this initial stage, such emerging points of distinctions concur with generating codes that will further expose a brighter understanding of the organizations branding patterns.

At this point it is important to state that besides my own set criteria while researching the SGs, I followed the logics of Mason (1996), as described in Silverman (2011), who states that a theoretically defined universe will make some sampling choices more sensible and meaningful than others. In this sense, I decided to include in my sampling and focus on those cases that appeared able to yield the biggest insights, with regard to the theoretical factors accompanying them.

Hence, in the first category, I included the SG of Christian Aid, *Disaster Watch*, which entails understanding the nature of disasters and raising awareness about how to prevent them; the SG of National Geographic, *Plant it Green*, which a sim-game intending to introduce resource management and greener solutions; the SG of Amnesty International, *Amnesty the Game*, which intends to raise international awareness about human rights violations and push for the global ban of the death penalty; the SG of Breakthrough, *Homeland Guantanamo*, which engage the player with real story in order to raise awareness about the harsh conditions of detention centers; and *Toxic Blaster*, the SG of WWF which raises awareness about toxic contamination.

The second category, that of commercial firms, includes the SG of MTVu, *Darfur is Dying*, which serves to increase awareness about the severe human rights abuses happening in Sudan; BBC's *Climate Challenge*, which introduces various issues raised by the climate change phenomenon; the Channel 4's *Sweatshop*, which raises awareness about the harsh and inhuman conditions of sweatshops in an attempt to sensitize people to think about the clothes they buy; *Power Matrix*, the SG of Siemens, which showcases how the company's technical solutions introduce a more greener and sustainable power management; and lastly, the Metro Trains Melbourne SG, *Dumb Ways to Die*, which disseminates a safety message by making a pledge to be safe around trains.

The third category, that of SMEs, contains SGs, such as the *Wildfire*, of an SME named By Implication, which is a game which portrays volunteering among others as solutions to save the world from major hardships; *Peacemaker* of Impact Games, which offers the player an open-eyed understanding of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict; *Citizen Science* of Game Learning Society which entails saving a local lake threatened by eutrophication; AIMS Game Center's mobile SG, *Polar Plunder* which introduces the dangers of the Arctic sea; and, *End Game Syria* of Auroch Digital which is a card-based action game which helps to better understand the real events taking part in Syria.

Last but not least, the category of entrepreneurs consist of *Wasteland Adventure*, a thesis project developed by Grace Ching- Yun Peng, which transmits a message in order foster the awareness of making right and sustainable choices to improve the environment in people's life; of *3rd World Farmer*, from Frederik Hermund, Ole Fabricius Toubro, Jakob Elias Nielsen and Roman Spycher, which visualizes the hardships of farming in a poor country; of *Floodie Hell*, from the Dutch hydrologist Ruben I. Jpelaar, who developed a SG in order to support his campaign water4all and raise awareness about the flooding phenomenon; of *Auti Sim*, developed by Taylan Kadayifcioglu, Matt Marshall, Krista Howarth, in order to raise awareness about the hypersensitivity in autistic children; and of *Riverbed: An Eco Noir Mystery*, developed by Mary Wharmby, in order to illustrate the shortage and necessity of clean water.

Therefore, in order to answer my research question, *how organizations brand themselves and their causes through SGs*, I focused on building up my analysis through addressing the three formulated sub-questions. Specifically, these three sub-questions opted to specifying the directions of my focus and have been explored through using a combination of various methods. In this sense, for the purpose of answering them, I conducted both a multimodal content analysis

on the websites of the various organizations, in order to understand how they position and brand their SGs, and an auto-ethnography, in order to understand the nature of their SGs and identify those design features that lead to activism. Moreover, after obtaining a satisfactory level of understanding by triangulating those two methods, I indicated those illustrative exemplars of SGs which, when compared and contrasted, generated valuable insights. In a nutshell, my primary goal was through combining those two qualitative methods which support comparisons to first obtain a deeper understanding of this diverse field and, secondly, to identify potential emerging and neglected paths that can be further explored in the future.

One of the main reasons of triangulating the different methods rests on the premise that while the first content analysis would expose the ways the organizations treat and brand their games, the auto-ethnography would portray the way their strategies are reflected to me, the gamer, while playing the game. In this line of reasoning, I paid attention not only to the different mechanics and narratives that the organizations incorporate in the SGs and lead to activism but also to how their intended impact. Therefore, this combination of methods would be able to demonstrate the outcome of the company's effort to the gamer. Furthermore, a third content and comparative analysis intends to observe and discuss these weak and strong points found among the different illustrative SGs, which contribute in establishing various branding patterns with many practical implications. Consequently, the latter content analysis entailed conceptualizing and reducing the data, elaborating the different distinct categories in terms of their properties and dimensions and relating them to see what relationships, connections and patterns can be generated (Boeije, 2010).

Hence, this mixture of different qualitative research methodologies aims at establishing an exploratory path which leads to a better and wider understanding of the nature of SGs, utilized by various agents of social change. Specifically, triangulation serves to overcome partial views and presenting the complete picture (Silverman, 2011). In this line of reasoning, throughout answering the three sub-questions, the answer to the main research question will be shaped, sketching the contours of the various branding patterns.

My reasoning concurs with the logics of grounded theory, which entail a systematic yet flexible data collection and analysis, "grounding" the theory to the data (Charmaz, 2011). Specifically, grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods and keeps the researcher

interacting and involved with the data and emerging analysis. Thus, it entails a continuous interaction where data collection and analysis may happen simultaneously.

Hence, undoubtedly, another reason to use triangulation of different methods is due to the demanding nature of qualitative research which insists for ensuring the validity of the process (Silverman, 2011). Furthermore, according to the aforementioned author, in combination with the notion of critical rationalism, the researcher in order to ensure credibility needs to falsify initial branches and assumptions about relations between phenomena. Lastly, in order to consistently test the various assumptions, scholars suggest that a good technique to do so is through constant comparative analysis. Indeed, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967) the constant comparative method entails inspecting and comparing all the data fragments that arise in a single case.

In a nutshell, my research follows the principles as described in the work of Gorbin and Straus (1990), which entail, among others, the following steps: (a) data collection and analysis as interrelated processes, (b) conceptualizing data, (c) developing and relating categories, (d) sampling in grounded theory concepts, and, (e) making use of constant comparisons in order to observe and examine relationships. In the following sub-sections I will explain what each method entails followed by their research design and a presentation of the categorization and coding of the different data units that emerged.

3.1 Multimodal Content Analysis

To begin with, due to the multimodal nature of games, which consist of non-ephemeral, artistic content, such as stored words, sounds and images (Aarseth, 2003) I decided to use a multimodal content analysis, defined as the method which explores the design of discourse by investigating the contributions of different semiotic resources (for example, language, gesture, images) co-deployed across various modalities (for example, visual, aural, somatic) as well as their interaction and integration in constructing a coherent text (Lim, 2011). Indeed, a multimodal text entails focusing not only on the text, but rather on the ensemble of text, image and sound. Thus, my primary goal was to report the different SGs, categorize them according to their different attributes and the organizations they belong to, and explore their underlying intentions. By doing that, I opted to partially provide answers to my second and third sub-question, *how do SGs implemented by non-profits differ from those implemented by for profit organizations* and *how does branding via SGs vary between large and small organizations*, respectively.

In this sense, I paid attention to where the game was firstly placed and how it is described and promoted by the organization. The underlying reasoning is to expose the ways each category

of organizations treats the SGs, the ways they promote it within their website and whether they also promote them in external sources, either SNSs or external affiliate websites. Moreover, I also paid attention to whether the games are part of ongoing or past campaigns and whether they are supported by press. However, only few of these have developed the SG as part of a past or even ongoing campaign. In this sense, every little piece of observation sketches the contours of the branding strategy of the organization and enables reflecting back to the theoretical framework.

Moreover, as I was interested in shedding more light to the practices of the corporate sector I have observed whether the firms' websites have a CSR section and whether the SGs or, in general, gamification, is promoted in there as part of their social responsible acts. Yet, except one entrepreneur's case, none organization is precisely indicating the importance of developing SGs. Specifically, only the gaming SMEs, the entrepreneurs and one company clearly state the benefit of playing a game for a cause, already exposing some emerging points of discussion.

Nevertheless, when organizations describe their game, they do use words in their slogans that promote activism, revealing a social interest that the game intends to illustrate. For example, *Darfur is dying* is persuading the gamer to *"Educate yourself, support the darfuri people, advocate for an end to the crisis and inspire others to be active on the issue as well"*. In this sense, given this textual denotation, an initial coding emerges; specifically, it derives from the second chapter, namely the theoretical framework, with regard to the different types of SGs. Thus, after coding the SGs descriptions and linked them to the theory of Work (2008) an initial categorization of the organizations' intended outcomes leading to activism has emerged.

Table 3.1 Coding the games' slogans.

Coded words	Intention	Work 2008
<i>Have fun, inspire, learn, bring attention, , give some idea, introduce, enlighten, provide, bring together, create impact, explore, foster awareness,</i>	Raising awareness	Exposure and elaboration
<i>Engage, understand, think about and realize, educate, entertaining pedagogical context</i>	Provoking deeper understanding, educating	Comprehension and knowledge acquisition
<i>Fight, take action, support, save, advocate, trendsetting solutions,</i>	Provoking action	Persuasion and attitude change

This association between theory and practice intends to provide an initial overview of how organizations use their SGs statements and slogans to defend their social impact and add extra value when promoting corporate identity (Verboven, 2011) through their cause. In this sense, what is important to keep in mind is that, in the above table, each past layer is contained in the following one. For example, the layer persuasion and attitude change is constructed from statements that may also include words from the two previous categories, aiming at raising awareness and/or provoking a deeper understanding as well. Thus, back to my sampling, the game statements have been coded and categorized according to the above table, meaning to reveal the different organizations' purposes and strategies. Further information regarding the organizations and their use of SGs is presented in the Results section.

Moreover, as slogans are not the only branding instrument that organizations use in order to persuade the gamers to play the game, I could not overlook the different community tools that accompanied the SGs. For example, some SGs' slogans, although appear to only intend to immerse the gamer into a better understanding of a cause, they also promote the use of a satisfactory number of community tools, persuading them to take further action or share the world. In this sense, while the previous coding represents an early starting point should not solely serve to explain the intended outcomes of the organizations. On the contrary, a combination of the slogans, the branding and community tools and the organizational website gaming statements should in total contribute in identifying these distinct patterns that enable comparisons among the different organizations and situate those variations to the previously discussed theoretical debates.

Nevertheless, the SG itself also functions as a CSR or, in general, branding medium and represents an organizational statement. Specifically, the way the game evolves, along with all the narratives and dilemmas it provides, disseminates the position of the organization regarding the specific cause. Thus, in order to portray the full picture regarding the way the various organizations brand themselves through their causes and, consequently, their SGs, I proceeded to the auto-ethnography part, where I immersed in the gameplay, in order to report both the mechanics and design that lead to activism and my personal reflections on the game.

3.2 Auto-Ethnography

In order to address the first sub-question and, eventually, report *the different design strategies of SGs that are used for promoting social awareness and activism*, I will employ the

method of auto-ethnography. This method according to Anderson (2006), Ellis, Adams and Boncher (2011) is a qualitative approach to research that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. Thus, through playing these games and observing my personal emotional state during the different phases of the game I will, eventually, obtain a sense of how the different mechanics and design elements employed by those SGs introduce social activism.

To be more precise, this method is used in explaining an amount of descriptive details depending on the writer's perspective, perception of audience and familiarities (Boeije, 2010). Moreover, my primary aim will be to identify and report the different dilemmas and narratives which instill a better understanding of a rather complex situation or cause, linking it each time to the developer organization. In a nutshell, the intention of using this type of analysis method is to study the linkages between SGs and their desired outcome and purpose sought by the organizations and understanding their underlying strategies.

Another reason why this method adds to the explorative nature of this thesis is that through playing the SGs and immersing in the storylines the researcher is able to reflect upon and report each emerging sentiment which leads to activism. Therefore, through auto-ethnography the researcher can measure the correlation between the SG's intended and real impact on the player. Nevertheless, in order to maintain the objectivity of the research, it is important to state that different types of gamers exist, with different requirements and expectations from each game. Hence, for the purpose of this research it is important to define the type of gamer I am, and interpret the results accordingly.

In this line of reasoning, for the purpose of this research, I defined myself an explorer (Bartle, 2004, as cited in Gee, 2011), namely the type of gamer driven by the motive of exploration (Tuunanen, 2014) and not by any other motive, such as achievement, sociability, domination or immersion, the result section is representative of the way a story-driven solo gamer (Westwood & Griffiths, 2010) experiences the game play. Indeed, while this topic offers many explorative directions and possibilities to measure the true impact of SGs, due to the limited scope of this thesis I will maintain my focus on exploring the SGs' content and pinpoint the different hooks which constitute the branding efforts of the organization.

Lastly, by exploring each game through playing, instead of only focusing on the information displayed by the organization, the researcher is able to identify whether the organizations described intentions prior the gameplay are eventually reflected after playing the

SG. For example, while an organization may state in the CSR section that it is trying by any mean to spread the cause-related message, the SG, itself, may be lacking of community tools, which, in general, enhance such efforts, and, thus, the researcher can conclude a discourse about this organization's policy. In a nutshell, auto-ethnography, when combined with the previous methodological step can portray a more comprehensive picture of how branding is realized through SGs, following the principles of grounded research, which, as previously described, entails a constant interaction between the two methods.

3.3 Comparative Analysis and Triangulation

The last step of my methodology entails triangulating the two previous steps and immersing in meaningful comparisons. The main desired outcome of this step will be to narrow down my analysis through selecting those illustrative cases that enable comparisons. Specifically, at this stage I am concerned about the level of impact that these SGs appear to have both on their special communities, websites or press and on the gamer as well, and, how *this* varies among the different categories. Specifically, according to Lofland and Lofland (2995), as cited in the work of Boeije (2010) I will manage to answer (a) in which circumstances does phenomenon A emerges, (b) what facilitates the experience of B, (c) what influences phenomenon C and (d) when is event D absent.

At this point, it important to state that the initial planning of my method was slightly dissimilar to what is currently being described. Specifically my initial concept was to identify one SG from each category, based on some arbitrarily, yet logically, defined criteria, which would constitute the representative of the category. Afterwards, the comparisons would have taken part only between those "major players", which will be selected based on their high level of quality and the availability and plurality of online communities, in order to be able to obtain and evaluate a complete picture and assess their branding impact. Nevertheless, since my research is explorative and inductive, after realizing the diversity and richness of my sample, I decided to proceed to various comparisons as long as they were deemed able to yield an interesting point of view.

Therefore, at this stage, SGs and organizations are compared and contrasted from various angles in order to provide a holistic understanding of how branding is realized among the different types of organizations. Indeed, through triangulating the three methods of analysis, namely the two content and comparative analyses of games and the auto-ethnography of games I intend to answer these three sub-questions which shape my main research question *how branding*

through SGs is realized among different organizations. In a nutshell, this comparative content analysis will examine how the obtained data fits together, generating distinct patterns and aiming at providing useful theoretical and practical insights to enrich the existing literature.

4. Results

In this section, after introducing an overview of the reported games' designs and mechanics that lead to activism, I will attempt to compare and contrast some of their in-game features in order to introduce some emerging themes that can help us further understand the nature of serious gaming. Moreover, throughout such comparisons, some distinct points will emerge, shedding more light to the dichotomies between the non-profit and the commercial sector and between large or small organizations. Hence, I will be able to obtain answers to all my research sub-questions. Overall, since this thesis aims to establish a deeper understanding of SGs as a branding medium which can be utilized by various actors, by identifying and further analyzing the most illustrative examples of my sampling, I will manage to identify these patterns that can facilitate my goal to formulate a taxonomy surrounding SGs and better comprehend their variations.

Among the various frameworks which exist in the literature and help in decomposing a SG and understand its design features I will use that developed by Mitgutsch and Alvarado (2012) and includes the six previously explained elements: (a) the purpose of the game, (b) the content, (c) the mechanics (d) the fiction and narrative (e) the aesthetics and graphics (f) the framing, meaning the targeted audience and (g) the relation between all these elements in order to make a cohesive whole. Thus, in the following sub-sections the games will be decomposed yet also examined as a part of a "branding whole", in order to provide useful insights and possible implications.

Lastly, since in the following sub-sections I will often make use of the nebulous term of SG's quality, it is important to define the underlying reasoning behind judging the quality of a game. First of all, it is generally acceptable that games which are not perceived of high quality might affect the gamer's engagement to continue playing them. Therefore, those SGs that are made of poor *design*, namely poor graphics, navigation tools and audio visuals, or are too simplistic, usually fail to reach the quality standards set for the purpose of this thesis, since the gamer is expected to abandon the game before reaching the activism message. Moreover, since the topic of this thesis is to understand the activism initiatives that each SG, and, consequently,

each organization behind it, provides the player and, accordingly, assess the diversity of organizations' branding efforts, the quality of a SG is also judged based on the provided *community tools*, intending to extend the dialogue and generating activism. Lastly, the SG's quality is also being criticized based on the sensitivity and emotions they provoke, namely the *narratives' impact*, since they are important generators of activism. Thus, a good storytelling which balances between realism and sensitivism is deemed appropriate to create an impact.

In this sense, after triangulating the following methods, I concluded to the following table of SGs, which is indicative of their quality and the level of engagement they generate based on a mixture of the previously discussed criteria, and based on my own subjective view. Thus, in the following sub-sections, each time I will refer to the quality of a SG I will take into account those three in-game features that formulate the final observed quality of the game.

Table 3.2 Defining the SG's quality

NGO/INGO's SG	Design	Narratives	Community tools	Quality
Disaster Watch	Simple	Moderate	Available	Poor
Plant it Green	Good	Moderate	Available	Moderate
Amnesty the game	Excellent	Strong	Available	High
Homeland Guantanamo	Excellent	Strong	Available	High
Toxic Blaster	Simple	Moderate	Available	Poor

Company's SG	Design	Narratives	Community tools	Quality
Darfur is Dying	Simple	Strong	Available	Moderate
Climate Challenge	Excellent	Strong	Not Available	High
Sweatshop	Good	Strong	Available	High
Power Matrix	Good	Weak	Available	Moderate
Dump Ways to Die	Good	Weak	Available	Moderate

SME's SG	Design	Narratives	Community tools	Quality
Wildfire	Simple	Moderate	Available	Poor
Peacemaker	Excellent	Strong	Not Available	High
Citizen Science	Good	Strong	Not Available	Moderate
Polar Plunder	Simple	Weak	Not Available	Poor
End Game Syria	Excellent	Strong	Available	High

Entrepreneurs' SG	Design	Narratives	Community tools	Quality
Wasteland Adventure	Simple	Moderate	Not Available	Poor
3rd world farmer	Good	Strong	Available	High
Floodie Hell	Simple	Moderate	Not Available	Moderate
Auti sim	Simple	Strong	Not Available	Moderate
The riverbed	Excellent	Weak	Not Available	Poor

4.1 Games' Overview and Design

In an attempt to start shaping my first sub-question *what are the different design strategies of SGs for promoting social awareness and activism*, a general overview of the findings of the auto-ethnography are presented in this section. To begin with, as a story-driven solo gamer I was motivated by the SGs background story, by how well written the story was and by the good graphics and audio visuals. In this line of reasoning, I felt highly disappointed coming across poorly developed SGs, with of low quality graphics. Moreover, some of the games have bad navigation tools, generating frustration and a likelihood to abandon the game. What is interesting, though, is that while in the case of SMEs or entrepreneurs this may be justified due a potential lack of resources and professionalism, in the case of the larger INGOs/NGOs or companies it is rather perceived as disappointment. However, especially in the case of INGOs/NGOs, a simplistic SG is understood as a supplement of an existing dialogue towards activism. Therefore, the rationale behind developing a SG of simple or even poor quality may rest on the premise that such organizations usually treat their games as supplements, instead of stand-alone branding tools. Nevertheless, given that they view the SG as solely another medium to extend the dialogue than an actual, powerful branding tool, they appear neglecting the impact of quality to the gamer and overlooking the possibility that a poor quality might jeopardize their SG's activism impact.

Furthermore, although functioning as an explorer, while playing those SGs which offered the possibility of further levels or the possibility to play with a harder degree of difficulty I experienced high levels of curiosity and consequently, engagement and motivation to continue playing. In the same line of reasoning, SGs that placed a high score leaderboard appeared to trigger more participation. For example, in *Darfur is Dying*, the final list emphasizes the gap between success and failure in this game. In other words, having just failed, noticing the success of others results in more determination to try again.

Similarly, in *Amnesty the Game*, when the player accomplish saving one of the prisoners, a readymade Facebook post requests for the permission to be published in the player's Facebook profile, highlighting the social dimension of playing SGs. Specifically, the message is constituted by phrases such as "*I feel happy I helped writing history by saving one of the prisoners*", as well as, encouraging the players' friends to also play the game and support the cause. Thus, the organization seduces the player to share the game and spread the word by giving him the chance to demonstrate their success and their socially responsible side among their friends. Nevertheless, in alliance with the previous paragraph, when the gamer fails to save the prisoner another ready-made post asks for permission to be shared, where the likelihood of sharing it and spreading the word about the SG appears low. In this sense, my findings suggest that there should be a necessary balance between demonstrating failure and success in games.

Proceeding in my analysis, one of the examined design characteristics, which appear to create a good first impression in a SG, is when the player is required to inhabit a specific role or select an avatar. In many of the SGs, such as *Peacemaker* or *Climate Challenge*, the gamer is required either to select side, or to choose and name the avatar that represents him or her. This initial selection represents the player's in-game responsibility and immediately puts them in the centre of attention. Moreover, in the latter interactive game, the gamer play as the president of the European United Nations, and represents part of the Intergovernmental panel for climate change. Thus, when the game starts the player not only is required to write his name and sign as the president, but also, while the game unfolds, after a round of actions is completed, they face a report which summarizes and discusses and the actions that the president "Mrs. Karaki" took in the previous round along with their consequences.

These actions and consequences are not simplistic at all; specifically, *Climate Challenge* consists of ten turns, with each turn representing a decade. In each turn, the player chooses up to six policies to enact during the decade, which impact the economic standing of the European nations, as well as energy, food, and water factors. Several policies have a positive or negative environmental impact, to reduce or cause more emissions linked to climate change while linked with these policies are popularity meters, based on how the public likes or dislikes the proposed policies. Thus, through acting as the President of the European United Nations, the main task is to establish a strong policy on climate change while keeping the countries happy with these decisions and healthy so that they will continue to elect "Mrs. Karaki" to the intergovernmental panel for climate change. In this line of reasoning, the fact that the message is so personalized and directly approves or disapproves the player's actions appears to trigger additional determination

and engagement. Apparently, enabling the player's input and customization enhances their sense of in-game responsibility which can be translated to a real-world deep understanding of the cause.

Another design characteristic that enhances the gamers' participation and determination is generated by time pressure. This is demonstrated by the fact that the great majority of the games in the sample require immediate reactions in order to highlight the idea of urgency, succeeding in creating a connection with the critical nature of the cause in the real world concept.

However, the element of dealing with time appears to vary according to the type of SGs. In my sampling three popular types of games were introduced: (a) the mini games, referring the creation of simplistic, time-related tasks, (b) the sim-games, aiming at creating simulations adapted to real world phenomena regardless of time, and (c) the strategy games, which involved making decisions whose consequences appear after moving forward the time. In each category, time functions as a double-edged sword; on one hand, in mini games, such as *Disasters Watch*, *Wasteland Adventure*, *Floodie Hell* and others, time pressure generates addiction and determination to try to be on time or achieve a higher score within the given time. Thus, time pressure is deemed appropriate for this type of the game, and in some cases, even compensates the fact that a game may be of poor quality. On the other hand, sim-games such as *Plant it Green* and *Power Matrix*, although they give the player time to "step into the shoes" of a city mayor and meticulously make the right decisions, prioritizing the city's needs, they may misconduct the player's interest. Specifically, the gamer might get distracted from all the different features that the SG provides and lose focus of the cause the game is trying to promote. Moreover, such sim-games may be slow moving, requiring for further devotion, a fact that may result in abandoning the game, especially if their content is not appealing enough to justify repeated game play. In this sense the gamer fails to fully comprehend the problem and experience the possibilities they have to support the cause. Lastly, regarding the strategy games, although forwarding time is a way to successfully illustrate the short term or long term effects of the player' decisions, this gives the possibility to the player, driven by curiosity, to take impulsive decision without really evaluating their consequences. Although this correlates with the general capacity of games to offer the possibility to gamers to practice in a safe environment without the fear of failure (Romero et al., 2014), it misses a real world connection. Specifically, in *Climate Challenge*, the gamer, driven by curiosity, can take rapid decisions and move forward the game, without really realizing the consequences of their action. In other words, impulsive playing without seriously examining the different options may hinder the efforts of the SG to successfully connect the player with the social cause.

Nevertheless, this logic may be refuted by the logic of “pull-knowledge”. According to Breuer and Bente (2010) good games motivate the players to look for references and discover more about the game context on their own. Thus, even impulsive play in strategy games or even repeated failures may motivate the player to self-explore the reasons of no success. In this case the gamer will thoroughly find out more about the cause and may even get the motivation to play again. What’s more, a way to compensate impulsive play is by incorporating an in-game feedback mechanism which offers an understanding of the consequences, as *Climate Challenge*, *Peacemaker* and *End Game Syria* do.

Nevertheless, as the creators of *Climate Challenge* explain “*at times it was necessary to strike a compromise between strict scientific accuracy and playability*” (BBC Website, n/a). Furthermore, as Gee (2009) explains games need to be challenging but also doable. In this sense, all types of games’ content and tasks must be designed with caution. Specifically, in order to avoid getting stuck or frustrated because of complex game hooks, the games should be designed in way that is understandable by the audience they are targeted at. While *Power Matrix* is designed for a large audience the context appears rather specific. Moreover, *Citizen Science* uses a water related vocabulary with words that need to be looked up, if the gamer is not already familiar with water scarcity discourses. As a result both these games may be abandoned before the player familiarizes with the content. Nevertheless, a technique to overcome the possibility of aborting the game is to use a narrator, providing guidance and tips as soon as the player is stuck. In a nutshell, SGs developers should be cautious about the level of complexity they use since sometimes may hinder the players’ efforts to reach the SG’s end goal.

Regarding the interactivity of the games, the auto-ethnography showed that the SGs that incorporated video introductions to the topic were more engaging than wordy and long descriptions. Specifically, *Homeland Guantanamo* integrates real testimonials of immigrants in detention that both contribute to the storytelling and generate more empathy. In this SG, the player is a reporter seeking clues in the death of Mr. Bah, who suffered a skull fracture and brain hemorrhages in the Elizabeth Detention Center in New Jersey. Thus, the main task is to solve a mystery throughout exploring the harsh conditions of immigrants’ detention centers. A cartoon guide leads the way to actual video testimonials of former detainees and information that unlocks the mystery of Mr. Bah’s fate. In particular, the different clues for solving the mystery are revealed after the player observe the video-testimonial of each immigrant and reply to a small and easy question whose answer derives from the immigrant’s speech. The gamer engages with real stories of pregnant women being forced to give birth in shackles, HIV+ people being denied

medication, teenagers being separated from their families, and war veterans being placed in solitary confinement for challenging abuse. In this way, in order to solve the mystery and master the game, the player must carefully listen to what the storyteller has to say and, eventually, find more about the cause.

Nevertheless, compared to the second mystery game of the sample, *The Riverbed: An Eco Noir Mystery*, *Homeland Guantanamo* successfully balances between its fun/interactive and educating side. To be more precise, while *The Riverbed: An Eco Noir Mystery*, although designed by an entrepreneur, not a creative agency, can be comparable in terms of quality with *Homeland Guantanamo*, yet, fails to clearly link the game play with the cause. In contrast, *Homeland Guantanamo*, compromises in a rather smart way its fun and its serious side, as it was previously described. Hence, there is a thin line in SGs that should not be crossed by designers that trivializes the game's educational dimension in the altar of commercialized fun. This is also illustrated, but from the opposite side, from *Auti Sim*, which although succeeds in simulating the experience of being an autistic child, generates confusion regarding whether or not should be considered a game at first place. However, advocates explain that labeling *Auti Sim* a "game" transmits the message that disability should not be understood through the lens of pity, even though the game is more a simulation than a game (Gibbons, 2013), teaching a social lesson.

Summing up, in this games' overview, the diversity of the design mechanics used in the SGs was discussed and evaluated. As a result, among the various schemes, the ones that appeared the most engaging validate the different scholars' theories. Specifically, players inhabit the goals of a virtual character in a virtual world (Gee, 2007) a fact that creates more in-game responsibility and motivation. Moreover, the virtual world is attuned the goals of the player. Customization of the game play in order to fit the personality of each gamer appears to endorse the player's sense of duty to fulfill their assigned task. This also allies with the theory of Breuer and Bente (2010), who identify three levels of interactivity; In this case, the micro-one, concerns the individual's inputs (i.e. customization) and outputs (i.e. scores and leaderboards), the narrative one, regarding the unfolding of a story, is most effectively represented by interactive videos that maintain the player's focus and, lastly, the setting one, which includes setting different levels of difficulties (i.e. different and challenging levels, time pressure). Nevertheless, the boundary between a challenging and doable games appears to be blurred. This is also illustrated by the fact that many games contained the risk of the player getting stuck. Although there are specific ways to prevent this happening (i.e. incorporating a narrator), in general, designers must not forget the purpose for which the games are developed for, along with their targeted audience, and find the balance

between “fun” and “education” to make the game appealing. Lastly, time is a crucial element incorporated in SGs that does not have a single meaning, but instead, vary according to the type of the game. Specifically, while on one hand it may represent the urgency of the phenomenon, creating a strong link with the real world context, on the other hand, it may give the player the opportunity to skip parts of the game that are essential in order for them to obtain a thorough understanding of the problem. As a result, the SG fails to deliver a rich branding experience.

4.2 Persuasion, Narratives and Activism

In the previous section, I discussed those mechanisms that either add or remove value from a SG. This first set of characteristics, which emerged from the auto-ethnography, helps to better understand the practical dimension of creating appealing games that succeed in sustaining the focus and engagement of the player. Nevertheless, a SG has to be a well developed tool not only in order to be considered an attractive pastime from its audiences but also in order to accomplish the main reason of its development, to promote a cause and stimulate interest and activism (Swain, 2007). Therefore, in this section, I will try to identify a second set of characteristics and mechanisms, those that appear related to the cause and aim to lead to activism.

In my sampling different forms of such mechanisms appeared; persuasive descriptions of a specific vocabulary, challenging tasks that illustrate the urgency and difficulty of the real world phenomenon, generated emotions based on a feel good conscious, interactive narratives with a clear link to the real world, and, last but not least, branding tools that establish the link between the SG and organizations. Hence, since I am interested in *how the organizations brand themselves and their causes through SGs*, I am going to examine my sample in categories, aiming at providing a full picture of the first sub-question, *what are the different design strategies of SGs for promoting social awareness and activism* employed by each type of organization, in order to shed light to rising patterns.

Table 4.2.1 Collective chart of the different mechanics leading to activism

	NGOs/INGOs	Companies	SMEs	Entrepreneurs
Descriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Motivating use of language -Provoking the player’s feel good conscious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Moderate use of language -Provoking understanding of somebody’s situation -Inhabiting a role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Attractive descriptions -Real world relevance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Long and attractive descriptions -Slogans -Real world relevance
Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Demonstrate the urgency of the phenomenon -Certify the difficult role of NGOs/INGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Incorporate ethical dilemmas -Balancing conflicting needs -Provoke the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Demand for meaningful dialogue - Provoke the understanding of a phenomenon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Demand for understanding the problem -Stepping into somebody’s shoes

		understanding of a phenomenon		- Provoke the understanding of a phenomenon
Emotions	-Demonstrating failure creates empathy and engagement -Demonstrating real world results creates empathy and determination -Promoting collective transformation	-Making sacrifices and compromising creates understanding -Promoting individual transformation	-Demonstrating and visualizing real world results creates empathy and determination -Promoting individual transformation and deeper understanding	-Engagement vs. confusion -Promoting deeper understanding through stepping in the character's shoes.
Storytelling	-Intros that create empathy -Location based causes -Interactive pull knowledge	-Incorporating real world solutions -Interactive storytelling vs. tutorials	-Incorporating opposing agents and unexpected events that twist the plot -Engaging intros vs. tutorials -Interactive videos -Location based content	-Specific vs. abstract problem solving -Explorative vs. described storytelling
Branding tools	-Logos -In game branding -Community tools -Integrating effectiveness -Take action pop ups	-Out-of-the game branding -Logos of partnerships -Community tools -Low cost and effort take action initiatives	-Descriptions -Credits -Extended information -Demonstrating the sources of the game	-Translating the in game results to real world outcomes -Affiliation with NGOs/INGOs -Demonstrating the sources of the game

To begin with the NGOs/INGOs, one striking example is how they make use of the language in order to describe and promote the SG. For example, Christian Aid invites people to “*fight against poverty and inspire others to join in*”. Non profit companies invite the players through their SGs to take action, through learning, playing and advocating for the cause. Betting on the player’s feel good conscious, the organizations estimate that the player through playing will feel that he or she supports and fights for a cause in a fun way and rather effortless way. In this case, the player is more likely to spread the word to their online friends, increasing the potential audience of the organization and the likelihood of it contributing to the cause.

Furthermore, regarding the tasks and the in-game hooks and dilemmas of the SGs, the players, in general, through these games, are expected to experience the difficulties of dealing with various resources and urgent needs. Specifically, the majority of tasks of SGs, such as *Disasters Watch*, *Amnesty the Game* and *Plant it Green* require the player to meticulously allocate time and resources through rationalizing, prioritizing or balancing, sometimes conflicting, needs. Hence, through highlighting the challenges and difficulties of dealing with such complex and demanding phenomena in an in-game context, the organizations, struggling to achieve the same results in a real world context, appear more ethical and respectful to their publics. In a nutshell, the SG functions as a tool to visualize and establish an elaborate

understanding of the role NGOs/INGOs , intending to create stronger support and advocacy towards them and their causes.

Regarding the emotions that the SGs of this category generated, anxiety, empathy, disappointment on failure and curiosity were the most prevalent ones. The player in this category examines stress to adequately perform on a given time in *Disasters Watch*, empathy for the characters and their hardships in *Homeland Guantanamo*, determination to “save” the prisoners or disappointment on failure in *Amnesty the Game*, and curiosity to find more about their stories. In this way organizations succeed in transmitting the full picture of a real world phenomenon in the game. Nevertheless, since a core characteristic of games is that actions have no real-world consequences, learners are able to safely practice without the fear of failure (Romero et al., 2014). Thus, a game that only demonstrates the in-game failure or success without translating it to reality misses its connection with the real world concepts, and thus, the organization fails in successfully promoting the cause.

Consequently, as gamers need to comprehend the consequences of their actions and establish a link with reality, SGs that visualized or quantified failure instead of successes appeared to create more determination to play again and more understanding towards the complicated role of NGOs/INGOs acting as intermediates. Specifically, the weapons that *Toxic Blaster* uses for killing the bears frighten and stress the player, while the message which appears when the player fails in saving one of the prisoners from being executed in *Amnesty the Game* generates sadness, disappointment and further determination. Hence, when failure is portrayed and blamed on the players’ actions results in a greater understanding of the situation and consequently, a greater understanding of the multifaceted role of the organization.

Another way of linking the SG with the cause is through storytelling and narratives. Specifically, all SGs had an intro in the form of storytelling either from a little boy or from a prisoner, according to the context of each game. Undoubtedly, this design strategy effectively creates empathy and a more interactive and less wordy understanding of the problem, especially if it is in the form of video. Furthermore, interactivity is deemed also effective in the case of *Amnesty the Game*, where there are interactive elements, such as countries and characters, which the player presses and finds out more about, appear to trigger curiosity and hence, maintain the focus and engagement of the player. Specifically, when I was playing the game, although I knew that the death sentence is only valid in 5 countries, I discovered that by pressing on the other countries of the map the date of the death penalty abolishment in each country appeared, and thus,

I immersed in finding more about my country, and in general, other countries' attitudes around that cause. Apparently, also location appears to be a focal point of the storytelling since the majority of the games are location specific. In this sense, NGOs/INGOs raise awareness of a specific cause, which also happens to be one of the causes and locations their actions are targeted at. Thus, besides educating their audiences they also tie the SGs to their own intentions, aiming at triggering individual or collective real world actions around their cause.

Last but not least, in terms of branding, logos and links, which relate the SG with communities and pages of main or partnering organizations, are embedded either in-game or in the out-of-the game context. Community tools also function as a way to tie the game to the organization's desired outcomes but appear to work only when the game is well embraced and appreciated by the player, who after playing it, is likely to feel the need to spread the word either for ideological or personal reasons, such as the need of demonstrating their conscious side among their friends. Lastly, when the game is part of an ongoing or ended campaign it is important for the organization to keep all the information around the cause, the campaign and the results held together. This strategy not only portrays a complete overview and results in informing the audience but also, demonstrating the campaign's outcomes results in reducing skepticism and increasing the legitimacy and perceived effectiveness of the non-profit in the eyes of its audience.

In general, organizations in this category appear to incorporate a variety of tools that either link to further information about the cause or stimulate action. Nevertheless, the "take action" mechanism is multifaceted and is perceived differently according to its nature and position within the game. Specifically, what is required from the player is twofold; it is either about sharing their activity or doing other low-cost and effort task to raise awareness about the cause, or donating money. Thus, while in the first case pop up messages are well perceived and step into the feel good conscious of the player, in the second one, when the messages are not discrete but instead pressuring they may be perceived as disturbing or annoying during the gameplay. Especially in the case of NGOs/INGOs, whose primary concern is to generate funding for their activities and welfare, the decision when and how to invite the player to take action is crucial in order to lead to their desired outcomes.

On the other side, commercial firms stand as more low-profile when promoting the organization which is behind the creation of the game. Specifically, the underneath company is not at all mentioned within the game context, with Siemens' *Power Matrix* being the only exception to the rule. In contrast, in the out-of-the game context, the partnerships or hybrids

behind the SG are obviously placed, usually in the form of a logo. Thus, the player voluntarily familiarizes with the efforts behind the SG. This is also in alliance with the fact that the SGs of this category promote a variety of abstract, low-cost and less effort initiatives in order to raise awareness or take action for the cause and do not directly or obviously guide the player to support the cause through money donating.

For example, *Darfur is Dying* gives, among others, the possibility to the player to get further educated about the crisis both in game and out of the game. Specifically, while the take actions possibilities are obviously placed on the top of the webpage, the in-game mechanics are also providing a link to activism. To be more precise, during the gameplay, as the user grows more food and the camp becomes more prosperous, the likelihood that the camp will be attacked increases. To keep an attack from occurring the user must “take action now” in various ways, such as through sending a digital letter to President Barack Obama, learning how to start a divestment movement on their college campus, or reading information on the Darfur conflict. Such a plurality of take action tools demonstrates that besides donating several alternatives exist to transmit a socially responsible message. For example, another example of in-game activism mechanics is found in *Dumb Ways to Die*, where the player is linked with the cause only through making a symbolic pledge to avoid accidents in trains.

Nevertheless, while one may say that the firms are doing well by not aggressively promoting their activist side, in order to avoid being perceived as over trying to appear ethical from their publics, they may also be accused of not trying to make a true real world impact. Specifically, besides offering the possibility of education and individual transformation they, in their large majority, fail to establish a real world collective impact. Consequently, a company’s SG may be at risk of being accused as a solely branding to tool, in order to promote its CSR side, instead of a tool contributing to social welfare.

Nevertheless, given the intended outcome of this category’s’ SGs, which is to establish a more in depth connection with a cause, the in-game design features leading to activism appear also differently, compared to the previous one. Accordingly, the assigned tasks do not require “saving a character that is in danger” but rather regard inhabiting somebody’s role, examining and balancing all the conflicting interests and succeeding in ameliorating conditions. Therefore, the game hooks and dilemmas require making decisions and sacrifices in order to comprehend the complexity of a phenomenon. For example, both in *Darfur is Dying* and *Sweatshop*, such sacrificing is illustrated by the fact that children are represented as more fast runners in water

foraging and more productive and low-cost workers in factories. Specifically, in the former, if the player attempts to choose the eldest male, the 30-year-old Rahman, they are told “*it's very uncommon for an adult male to forage for water because he is likely to be killed by the Janjaweed militia*” asking them to switch to another alternative, such as a small child. After choosing a character, the character is then sent to forage for water and the playing of the game actually begins with the chosen character trying to hide from the approaching truck containing heavily armed militia in order to avoid detection. The latter case, includes fulfilling orders for different kinds of garments, such as including hats, shirts, bags and shoes which come down the line, and laborers assembling these products at varying speeds according to their specialty (or lack thereof, in the case of the children). What this SG intends to do is to force the player into the cold logic of sweatshop management and leave them to reflect on their own descent into it (Ferrari, 2011). As a result, both SGs succeed in raising serious ethical dilemmas, requiring the player to decide between cheap, children exploitation and between alternative and rather costly initiatives.

However, what is also interesting about this category of games is that besides portraying the hardships and the difficulties in balancing the different stakeholders' needs, they integrate and introduce small solutions to the problems in the game, catalyzing the individual or collective transformation of the player. For example, in *Power Matrix* the player learns about small energy tips, in *Sweatshop* realizes that a radio or a water appliance increases the productivity of the workers because they work happier, and in *Dumb Ways to Die* finds out, in a rather funny, animated way, the right way to connect an electric appliance without hurting themselves. Thus, a way of compromising the out-of-the game lack of cause-related links is to incorporate within-the-game cause-related features that at least stimulate individual transformation. Nevertheless, while we can certainly see the case for radios increasing morale and fans reducing fatigue, one of the *Sweatshop*'s factoid texts explicitly critiques many sweatshops for not allowing workers to use the restroom in order to maximize productivity (Ferrari, 2011). Thus, are only small solution tips good enough to deal with such inhuman conditions?

Nevertheless, besides providing in-game solutions to real world problems, another way to stimulate activism is to also employ storytelling mechanisms that trigger emotions. While in this category the narratives are more abstract and not that location specific, compared to those of the previous category that also appeared related to NGOs/INGOs' fields of action, intros are mostly highlighting the problem instead of the location. Moreover, since the problems are not all the times visible but instead may emerge after the players' decisions, the initial intros may be in the form of tutorials or simple instructions. Such tutorials, if not extremely long and complicated,

generate anticipation and engagement to proceed in playing the game. However, if a player skips a rather tedious tutorial fails in understanding the purpose of the game and, consequently, the urgency of the cause. In contrast, an interactive storytelling from a character, such as that of *Sweatshop*, succeeds in grasping the player's attention, especially if it brings emotions, such as humor or empathy. In this sense, it may create more engagement and motivation to play the SG and, consequently, succeed in reaching the company's intended goal.

Similarly, SMEs also focus on creating narratives which transmit the message that responding to large societal problems requires individual and collective actions. Through creating in-game tasks and dilemmas based on mutual understanding and compromising, the SGs of this category portray the SMEs point of view regarding social welfare. In this context, effective dialogue, argumentation and negotiations among stakeholders are important elements of mastering a game. For example, *Citizen Science* has two primary interfaces that players have to master: the first is the basic point-and-click town navigation screen, and the second is an interface for constructing logical arguments with townspeople and other game characters in order to persuade them to help you in your goals. However, since the main purpose of these SGs is the exposure and elaboration of a cause, the majority of the SGs are restricted in only providing an appealing gameplay instead of focusing on employing community tools or donation mechanisms to promote further support for the cause. Thus, their association with activism is considered scarcer compared to the previous categories.

Regarding the emotions these games generate, curiosity, anxiety, determination, and even in some cases, anger and disappointment are found to be the most prevalent ones. Specifically, since these games incorporate to a great extent conflicting parties, whose actions unexpectedly alter the so far good result of the game, the player experiences disappointment and further determination to adjust it again. This is illustrated by both *Peacemaker* and *End Game Syria*, which refer to two well-known ongoing conflicts, and also by *Wildfire*, whose menacing "agents," represent various forces opposing positive societal change. Especially in the case of *Peacemaker*, the developers acknowledge the various aspects of the conflict, which have a universal importance and are deeply related to social, economic, and foreign policy issues throughout the world (Burak, Keylor & Sweeney, 2005). In this sense, the SGs succeed in transmitting a real world adjusted situation, where sudden events occur, and the problem solving requires an ongoing, consistent and fair dialogue.

Deaths and sacrifices also play an important role in maintaining the interest of the player. Apparently, as well as in the previous categories, visualizing failure results in further engagement and determination to master the game. For example, *Citizen Science* begins the storytelling by showing that the dog of the main character is just about to get hurt from the polluted waters of the lake Mendota, and in order to prevent *this* from happening the character travels back in time to save the lake. In the same line of reasoning, *Peacemaker* incorporates real videos during the gameplay, demonstrating the chaos that chosen or unexpected events generated. Besides creating strong emotions, such as empathy, anger or determination, such interactive bits also succeed in nicely creating a link with reality, enhancing the educational and cause-related significance of the game.

Furthermore, since their only way to raise awareness is through creating a complete and coherent experience, intros are extremely important to enthusiastically drive the player into the concept and cause of the game. Yet, usually this category incorporates less storytelling and more tutorial-based intros. One explanation of this fact is mainly because such games are primarily accessed through SGs' databases, such as www.gamesforchange.org and, thus, the player is already familiar with the educational dimension of the game and desires to play the game in order to experience the cause. Thus, although somebody would expect that the SGs of this category would integrate a fancy storytelling in order to engage the gamer, the sample demonstrated that these SGs rather use a simple intro and ensure that the game itself is worthy to maintain the player's focus and transmit the cause-related message. However, location-based content is deemed important, since, especially if it discusses a major and heightened conflict, can provoke reactions and raise further awareness about the SG and the SME behind it.

Lastly, in terms of branding tools, although the logos are obviously placed, the majority of the games do not incorporate community tools in order to share the word or donation mechanisms and other initiatives in order to support it. Thus, it appears no association between the developer organization and the real world actions. Moreover, this is also obvious by the fact that the organizations, either unsure about the quality of content that they are providing or eager to deal with any suspicious criticism, transparently demonstrate the sources of the game. In other words, if the organizations were active in this field, as NGOs/INGOs do, would not feel the need to endorse the educational reliability and validity of the content. Nevertheless, regardless of the underlying motive, through meticulously presenting every detail about the game, even its sources, SMEs appear credible to their audiences and succeed in demonstrating and justifying the work behind the project.

Last but not least, entrepreneurs' SGs use long descriptions and enthusiastic slogans in order to catch the audience's attention. Specifically, "*an eco-noir mystery*" sounds more fascinating than "*endure the hardships of the 3rd world*" in order to grasp the first impressions. In this example, although the *3rd World Farmer*'s context is much more engaging and succeeds in adequately promoting its cause, its description is less attractive than that of the *Riverbed*. As a result, a gamer entering the "Games for Change" platform, in research of a good game, is more likely to choose the *Riverbed*, which as we stated previously, although of high quality, fails to associate itself with the real world cause, than *3rd World Farmer*, which achieves exactly the opposite. Thus, in terms of branding, slogans and descriptions are playing an important role in this category.

Continuing with the in-game tasks and dilemmas, there is no serious differences regarding their content, with the previous categories. Specifically, the main dilemmas of the games require wisely selecting, prioritizing, balancing and sacrificing time and resources in order to master the game and the most prevalent emotions that are generated are anxiety, determination, curiosity and empathy. However, there are some cases where dilemmas are not experienced by the game play but there are rather explained during the storytelling as a narrative. This is also one of the main reasons *The Riverbed: An Econ Noir Mystery* fails to create an effective link with the real world context, as it orients to solving the mystery rather than immersing the player into the understanding of the cause. In a nutshell, in SGs that rely only in their context in order to associate the player with the cause and do not provide any other cause-related tools, if the context fails to effectively deliver the message, the SG, and consequently, the entrepreneur also fail in their purpose.

In this sense, using real world stories and location based scenarios is found to be more engaging and educative than illustrating abstract causes, such as "*recycling*" or "*stepping into the shoes of an autistic child*". Moreover, another important element in order to keep the engagement of the player and succeed in raising awareness for a cause is to translate the in-game hooks and narratives into real world situations. In my sample, this is twofold and *3rd World Farmer* is the best example to illustrate both ways of doing it. First of all, in-game, the SG incorporates an annual report after the actions that the player had to take are completed. Specifically, it demonstrates that although crop management may have the possibilities to generate a high income for the family, an "Event of The Year" paints a bigger, usually gloomy picture wherein poachers, disease, and political turmoil threaten the life and livelihood of the farmer and family. In this sense, such unexpectencies effectively portray the complexity of real life and invite the

gamer to understand the cause beyond a safe and adjusted gameplay. In addition, in the out-of-the game context, the SG also provides a “take action” possibility, acknowledging that *3rd World Farmer* is just a game, and through integrating links to NGOs/INGOs that are active in fighting for this cause, invites the player to visit them and support it.

Hence, in terms of branding, a discrete combination of in-game and out-of-the game cause-related features succeed in generating a strong educational impact that results in perceiving the game as well developed and engaging. Moreover, after the game is perceived as worth to be played, the gamer is more likely to notice who is behind the project and, eventually, find out more about the entrepreneur, since the SGs always feature and give credits to their developers. In this line of reasoning, the gamer is also eager on sharing the game and spreading the word. Thus, in this category, good games that establish a combination of good quality, good first impression and a relevant educational context manage to achieve an effective branding experience.

To sum up, the sample revealed a series of different branding patterns that vary according to the type of organization. On one hand, NGOs/INGOs demonstrate the trend of using SGs as a way to illustrate the complexities and work behind promoting social good in the not-for-profit sector. In this sense, by integrating persuasion mechanisms and by generating emotions which lead to sympathizing them, such organizations, prefer to promote location-specific causes which are related to their main fields of action in order to achieve their goals to their maximum. On the other hand, commercial firms appear more modest and low profile in persuading the gamer to take action that risk to be accused of failing to achieve a real world impact. Nevertheless, they incorporate in-game solutions to societal problems, which promote the individual instead of the collective transformation of the player. Moreover, through keeping all the information together in one place, organizations are able to demonstrate their consistent efforts towards that specific cause, namely their CSR contribution. Specifically, even if a campaign is already over and cannot lead to further donations, incorporating its outcomes in the same place with the game enhance the organization’s perceived credibility and effectiveness. Similarly, for companies such might be considered an effective branding tool, helping the company to appear ethical to its publics. Lastly, NGOs/INGOs appear to rest on the premise that the gamers, based on their feel good conscious, will be eager to share the game, spread the word and even donate money for the cause, and, thus, incorporate, in an in-game and out-of-the game context, various action tools in order to provoke it. Companies, on the other hand, offer a variety of low cost and effort “take action” initiatives in order to discretely stimulate activism. Hence,

while in the non-profit sector aggressively promotion efforts are incorporated in the SGs, in the commercial one, less effort is being placed on persuading the gamer to collectively take action.

Accordingly, SGs developed by smaller organizations or individuals, do not offer a large variety of tools to persuade and stimulate activism but instead depend on their educative and appealing content. Specifically, those games gain little attention, compared to the other two categories which are developing games under an umbrella partnership between well known organizations. Thus, in order to grasp the player's attention, they need an attractive description, slogan and an appealing content to sustain the player's engagement. In this case, the gamer is also likely to embrace and further share the game. Moreover, a way to enhance their connection with the real world cause, and thus, stimulate activism, is through highlighting the urgency and complexity of phenomena along with the low predictability of unexpected events which worsen the situations. Lastly, through advocating the accuracy of their sources and providing extended information about the game's context they justify their work and thus, appear more legitimate to their publics.

4.3 Organizations overview

During the research phase and after accessing each game, I divided my focus into four parts: (a) where the game is placed, (b) to which platforms it is hosted and how it is possible to be accessed, (c) whether the game provides in-game or out-of-the game community features and, (d) whether the organization states anything around socially responsible gaming. Hence, this subsection contains an extended overview of how the different organizations incorporate and promote the SGs they develop, intending to shed lights to those similarities and contradistinctions that will help me answer my two remaining sub-questions *how do SGs implemented by non-profits differ from those implemented by for profit organizations* and *how does branding via SGs vary between large and small organizations*.

To begin with the NGOs/INGOs, the majority of the selected games are integrated in the organizations webpage. Nevertheless, this may be translated as a double edged sword. Specifically, when a game is part of a campaign it is usually integrated in the specific place where the campaign is mentioned in the form of a link. Sometimes this placement may generate frustration to somebody who is not interested in finding out everything about a campaign and then play the game but, instead, is interested in doing the other way round. Thus, games that can only be found in the bottom of a long campaign presentation may never reach the potential player because of their bad positioning. Moreover, some outdated campaigns can even generate

confusion, since they contain some broken links which make the transitions to the game or to the campaign's result impossible. Apparently, once the campaign was ongoing everything was properly working. However, now these broken links only create confusion, and may lead to abandoning the will to eventually play the game.

On the other hand, games such as *Plant it Green* or *Toxic Blaster* that are easily spotted under the "Games" section of National Geographic and WWF respectively. This indicates that one who enters the website can easily access the games without the need to be informed about the specific social or environmental topic or campaign that the game is about. Although such a placement strategy may be, at a first glance, diminishing the educational experience of playing the game, as it labels the SG just a "game", it may create a positive effect as the player embrace the game. Specifically, it also applies to the notion of "pull-knowledge" instead of "push-knowledge", which, according to Breuer and Bente (2010), fosters more self-directed and proactive learning as it generates motivation and curiosity. Thus, the player may later reach on their own more information regarding the specific discourse. This, of course, not only requires the game to be of appropriate quality and thus, engaging enough to foster active participation, but also to be in an obvious place, requiring little research. For example, Christian Aid categorizes its SGs among others under the theme "resources", in order to "fight poverty", not clearly putting it into the centre of attention, at risk of going unnoticed.

Lastly, there are games hosted on specific, independent websites, especially made for these games and, thus, can be accessed independently. Undoubtedly, these web pages, either in the in-game context or clearly placed somewhere in the webpage, have an obvious link to the specific organization or campaign or even a logo, to demonstrate who is hidden behind the game. Moreover, one of the advantages of the special website is that it can also incorporate the results of the campaign, if the game is part of an ended campaign. Thus, the player not only can further experience the problem but also admire and appreciate the organization's effort, perceiving it as more legitimate and effective. Furthermore, according to an interviewee, member of an INGO, in Spitzber et al.'s (2006) paper, having an independent webpage may attract new audiences, not only the ones that have been active already or are familiar with the specific cause. Specifically, he mentions that usually people who enter the NGO/INGO websites have already the basic information about a topic. Thus, in order to achieve a maximum reach is mostly suitable for the NGO/INGO to place the game in an independent website.

To continue, NGOs/INGOs appear to have a specific preference regarding the way the game is mediated. Although all the organizations seem to acknowledge in their websites' statements the importance of new technologies and mediums, only few of them derail from the traditional gaming platform, the PC. Specifically, *Amnesty's International* "who we are" statement highlights the immediate nature of mobile phones, describing them as "panic buttons for activists". Accordingly, *Amnesty the Game* is a game that can only be played via Facebook, either on PCs or mobile phones. However, while one may think that developing a Facebook game may appear rather exclusive, making harder for the organization to reach a wider segment of players since not all the targeted audiences may own a Facebook profile, nowadays, figures confirm that over a quarter of Facebook's 1.06 billion monthly active users play games, forming one of the largest gaming communities in the industry (Nayak, 2013). In this sense, Facebook, given its tremendous growth, could undoubtedly boost the game's reach to wider audiences. Moreover, Generation X or Millennials, who generally prefer to connect with charities through technology, such as websites, social media and mobile devices (The Millennial Impact Report, 2013) and thus, creating and disseminating a cause-related message to such platforms may catalyze the NGO/INGO's process of obtaining donations for a cause.

Regarding the way the socializing and community aspect of the SGs is realized, all organizations incorporate in-game community tools, such as spreading the word through sending the game as an email to a friend or sharing it on Facebook. However, interestingly, the games that are part of a campaign do not hold a specific online community on a social media site (i.e. Facebook). Apparently, this indicates a preference from the part of the NGOs/INGOs to keep all the information organized around one single place, whether this is their specific campaign page on the website (*DetoX campaign - WWF*) or the particularly developed website for hosting the game and eventually the whole campaign (*Homeland Guantanamo campaign - Breakthrough*).

Another reason why not-for-profit organizations may prefer to keep everything about a campaign neatly organized in their own space (either the main organization's website or the campaign's/game's one) is because usually the end goal of those campaigns, besides comprehending a problem, is to take action. This is also justified by the Work's (2008) coding, which, when applied to the sampling, showed that games developed by NGOs/INGOs either state that they desire to bring "comprehension and knowledge acquisition" or "persuasion and attitude change". In addition, although several organizations state that the SG only aims at educating, when their website features a "take action" button subconsciously intends to provoke further actions. Thus, in this case, placing the SG near to the space the organization's discourse can

persuade the players to take further action, such as donating or learn about alternative ways to take action, bringing them one step closer to the organization's goal. An example of this can be found in *Christian Aid's* and *WWF's* web pages, where the donation frameworks stand static or are highlighted respectively, in order to persuade the gamer to donate money for the cause.

Lastly, a positive relation between a game of good quality- in terms of what was previously explained as quality for the purpose of this thesis- and the press coverage it has received appears. Apparently, those games that contain really good graphics and give the impressions that they were primary designed for main branding resources of the organization instead of supplements have received extra coverage. However, this may not be solely the only reason. Both *Amnesty the Game* and *Homeland Guantanamo* discuss two contemporary problems regarding human rights, the abolishment of death penalty and the harsh conditions of detention centers, which are not only problems of underdeveloped or under famine countries, but also problems of the Western world, and especially of USA, and, thus, this may be the reason why they gathered so much attention.

Nevertheless, besides the end results of the promoted campaigns or the "hits" each game had, none of the organizations acknowledge anywhere in the website the importance of socially responsible gaming. Instead, they are describing in details "what" they do and "how" they do it, trying to appear more legitimate and transparent to their publics. Moreover, they publish in public all the reports or information about their potential partnerships, specifying their field of actions and needs. Especially about gaming, although they acknowledge the importance of new media and technologies for their operations, they treat games as supplements, not as stand-alone branding tools. Thus, SGs are portrayed from the part of NGOs/INGOs as an extra "touch point" between the organization and their publics and as a way to increase the traffic of their main web page. As Henry Jenkins states in the New York Times (Thompson, 2006, July 23),

"The generation that grew up with Super Mario is entering the workplace, entering politics, so they see games as just another good tool to use to communicate"

On the other side, similarly, the commercial firms host games either on their own website space, or provide a special domain only for the game. In this case, the majority of games are hosted outside of the company's website. However, games such as Siemens's *Power Matrix* and BBC's *Climate Challenge* that are related to the companies' activities and interests are embedded and presented in the commercial websites. In the same line of reasoning, *Dumb Ways to Die* is placed in the form of a banner in the main webpage of Metro Trains Melbourne. On contrary,

games that are arbitrarily developed by companies in order to raise awareness about an emerging social cause are hosted on independent websites. Hence, a distinct pattern appears; that of integrating a SG on a company's webpage only when the topic of the game efficiently correlates with the field the company is active in. In this sense, when a company has not previously been involved by any means with a specific cause and, consequently, has a low brand/cause-fit (Bloom et al., 2012) is mostly likely to promote its SG to an independent website.

However, there is a thin line that no company should cross; that of overestimating the level of motivation of the player. For example, while *Power Matrix* nicely introduces ways that the environment could be greener even in high industrial cities, through a sustainable energy management, it appears falling into several miscalculations. First of all, using branded content is not always the right way to persuade the player about the environmental benefits of an action. Such it may be perceived as a bad advertising trick, annoying the player and creating an adverse outcome for the company. Next, using hard terminology immediately restricts the audience's reach. Even if Siemens states that the game is not only targeted to energy experts but also to other interested individuals and online gamers (Siemens Website, 2013), the emerging in-game issues are complex and require a lot of time and thinking. Lastly, designing the game in a way that the player might get stuck is also a non-effective way to promote the company's cause since frustration lowers the motivation. This may result in the player getting disappointed on the game and failing to reach the end goal, namely to comprehend the problem and take further individual or collective action. Hence, although games, such as *Power Matrix*, are introduced as a game/simulation-part of the company's discussion or field of action, organizations should not overestimate the player's fervency and refrain from integrating and highlighting the fun dimension of the game.

Another fact about the commercial games is that the majority of them not only host an extended presentation both of the game and of the social problem but also incorporate features such as "celebrities who are playing", which are meant to function as, what Dawkins (2004) suggested in Du et al. (2010), opinion leaders, or provide extended factsheets and links to "take action" websites, in order to extend the dialogue and further promote the cause. Some of them even mention the sources from where they have taken the information they have put in the factsheets in order to appear more legitimate. These are all parts of their CSR communication strategy. As the developer of *Darfur is Dying* explains to Mark Brown of Wired (2011, July 22),

“It's more about creating a conversation about the bigger picture; corporate responsibility, and Western consumer demand for more, cheaper, quicker products. We want to inspire people to think about whom they buy from and how those companies conduct their business.”

Nevertheless, the most striking feature, regarding their placement, is that the four of them were developed with the intentions to go viral and rely on WOM. While *Darfur is Dying* from MTVu in its press release use the term "viral" to describe its planned distribution method (Ruiz, 2006), *Sweatshop* from Channel4 incorporates a wide array of community tools to share the player's activity, *Power Matrix* in its press release invites people to “*be part of making this go viral, spread the word*” in their personal social networks, and *Dumb Ways to Die* from Metro Trains Melbourne began the campaign with first launching a YouTube video and then introducing the main game. Specifically, this video quickly became a viral video sensation, with more than 50 million views on YouTube alone, thanks to its catchy theme song, darkly amusing animation and playful lyrics (PR Newswire, 2013, June 24). This is also in alliance with what was previously described in the theoretical part that companies as part of their CSR strategies should not solely invest in their company-controlled communication channels but rather invest in the consumer as an informal yet credible advertising agent (Du et al., 2010). Furthermore, as part of the way branding is realized, it is interesting to mention the fact that some of the companies besides the game offer also multimedia branded content. That is either a multimedia song, wallpaper or other downloads inspired by the game. Especially, after *Dumb Ways to Die*'s Metro research, Metro is developing a dynamic line of licensed merchandise to serve the exploding demand for the millions of fans around the world (Wolfe, 2014). Thus, another important difference with the non-profit sector is that companies put the game in the forefront and develop content around it while NGOs/INGOs rather use it as a supplement to an existing campaign or discussion.

In the same line of reasoning, besides the variety of the different community tools, such as sharing buttons and tell a friend mechanisms, almost all the games of this category own a social media videogame page or fan page. Siemens's *Power Matrix* and *Dumb Ways to Die* seem to better capture the admiration of the public. To be more precise, the former game combines an in-game forum with the social media community. As a result, it enriches the interactions with the public, providing extra touch points and extra possibilities to discuss about the game. Thus, what was previously assumed about the game creating a frustration may be outweighed by the fact that the company tries to extend the dialogue and create a strong community around the game to

sustain the player's motivation. As far as the latter is concerned, the publicity that the game gained could not justify an absence from the social media realm.

Lastly, the majority of the games have received extended press coverage. In some cases, providing the link to the press articles is used as a communication and branding tool in order to appear more credible and legitimate to their publics. Interestingly, while in these articles the developers and creators of the games or the companies behind them advocate about socially responsible gaming and serious games, in their main websites, besides the case of BBC, which refers to *Climate Challenge* as “a fun challenging game which consists a good introductory into climate change” (BBC Website, n/a), no other company acknowledges or justifies their serious game development. Thus, companies, along with NGOs/INGOs, expect the game to be self-explanatory, relying on its powerful nature and fell no need to justify their activity on serious gaming.

Nevertheless, the fact that there are cases where the games are mentioned under the CR section of the company refutes the theory that companies do not use company-controlled branding tools. Nowadays there is a lot of skepticism for a company that tries to appear socially responsible, especially if it is a large one (King & McDonnell, 2012). Companies tend to demonstrate their good deeds in their corporate websites in order to appear more sensitive and legitimate to their publics. However, even there, they do not mention anything specific about SGs, failing to justify the reason why the game was developed. Instead, they expect the game to go viral and transmit the socially responsible message of the firm. In this sense, when the content of the game has even no intention to trigger any individual or collective attitude change and generate a real world impact, the firm is at risk of being accused for “greenwashing” and therefore, at risk of deteriorating its reputation.

Lastly, regarding how the games are mediated, similarly to the previous category, PCs are the main way to access the majority of the games. However, while *Power Matrix* can be played both through a PC and a mobile, *Dumb Ways to Die* is solely a mobile game. While the former scores in all the categories, by creating as many touch points that no other game of the category does, the latter is unique in the category. This is explained by the fact that the campaign is mostly targeted to the younger segments and, as Katsaliaki and Mustafee (2014) asserts, the consistency of mobile games correlates with the audience that is primary targeted, the youngsters. Thus, an effective way to target the younger audiences is to invest on mobile gaming, as *Dumb Ways to Die*'s campaign demonstrated by its remarkable success (PR Newswire, 2013, June 24).

Continuing with a rather specific category, that of SME's active in game development, several similarities and controversies with the two previous categories appear. First of all, regarding the placement of the games, no specific pattern appears. Specifically, games can be found either in special websites or integrated in the main website of the SME. However, whether they can be accessed outside or inside of the main webpage, all games are mentioned as projects in the SMEs' websites. That resonates with the fact that these SMEs are primary gaming companies, and thus, the SG is a testimonial of their action. Moreover, there are cases that the companies were formed after the development of the game. For example, the developers of *Wildfire*, formed the company ByImplication after the completion of their project, which was the main game. Nevertheless, even if they are not truly popular, comparing to larger well-known companies, the fact that they affiliate the game to SG's platforms and databases such as "*Games for Change*" helps redirecting the player to the main website, and so the SME gains publicity. Thus, branding the game in such platforms is enhancing the game's reach.

Another interesting fact about this category is that almost the majority of the games are specific and reactive. To be more precise, *Wildfire* uses the theme of volunteerism after the Philippines were devastated by wild weather in 2009 (Parsons, 2010, July 12), *Peacemaker* and *End Game Syria* are news games that bring attention to two of the most bloodstained conflicts of the Eastern World, *Citizen Science* is focusing on the ecological needs of Lake Mendota in Madison as well as the surrounding community (Games Learning Society, n/a), and *Polar Plunder* discuss the pollution of the Arctic Ocean. This is also in alliance with the SGs category they belong in, namely aiming at "exposure and elaboration". In this sense, if the date and time of launch of these SGs correlates to certain extend with the news coverage of the topics they discuss, there is a high chance that they will attract more publicity by the media. However, in the current date, if the games were not affiliated the gaming platform, it would be really hard to find more about them and access them. Consequently, those SGs would have never reached their main goal.

In the same line of reasoning, while these games poorly provide community tools in-game the majority of them owns a social media game pages or a blog. However, besides *Polar Plunder*, a game accessed only via mobile, the only one with a viable fan page on Facebook, the rest do not really support their game via SNSs, as none of them have a fan page of the game. In this sense, the game cannot benefit from eWOM. Moreover, press coverage in this category also appears minor. Apparently, also in this category there is a high correlation between the quality of the game and the press coverage, and that is explained from *Peacemaker* and *End Game Syria*, two of high quality and with excellent graphics games, which received extensive press coverage.

However, this may not be solely the reason accounting for their publicity, since these games, besides from being of good quality, simulate a real world phenomenon which represents a heightened debate between two in war countries. Thus, if we are to accept the quote by Henry Jenkins (Thompson, 2006, July 23), that “*with games it’s like with film; we think first of using it for entertainment, but then also for education and advertising and politics and all that stuff*”, then as a movie with nice storyline and impressing settings would have been a blockbuster such an SG can become popular because of its appealing content. Consequently, having an appealing or even provoking content is a generator of interest in this category, and thus, ameliorates branding.

Interestingly, *End Game Syria* may also have another reason of gaining publicity. While all the other games of the category have restricted access only to PCs or mobiles, the aforementioned game have all the possible touch points available for access. Moreover, its sensitive nature generated a big discussion about the game, due to its first ban from Apple (Dredge, 2013, January 8) and its re-launch with a new name, *End Game: Eurasia* and slightly modified content, with no direct references to Syria (Grubb, 2013, March 21). However, the game is available in its primary format in all the other touch points, triggering the curiosity to try the original instead of the adapted one, reaching the end goal of the game through presenting and transmitting news as it is. Therefore, having various touch points prevents any form of censorship and enables the game developers to expose the truth to their audience and trigger reactions and change. However, whether SGs enable freedom of speech or this absence of control and censorship enable telling the news in a rather biased perspective is something that will be discussed later.

Lastly, what is interesting, but rather expected, is that all the companies acknowledge the importance of gaming in their websites. Some of them specify that they are active on socially responsible gaming on their websites or on their Facebook page. One of the main reasons the present their orientation with such clarity is because they want to defend their “*raison d’être*”, meaning the reason why they were primary developed. However, another reason may also relate to the fact that their limited resources, compared to companies of a larger size, hinder any redundant effort for promoting their company name and game. Thus, by meticulously presenting themselves they can defend and clarify their work and position themselves to their publics.

As far as the last category, that of entrepreneurs, is concerned, it contains three games related to the environment and two related to social causes, such as third world conditions and

autism. Since the main goal of these games is “comprehension and knowledge acquisition” games, regardless of where they are placed, they are presented with an extended description. Even *Floodie Hell*, which in the only game that can only be accessed through an iOS interface, is presented in the main webpage of the entrepreneur, along with all the information surrounding his *water4all* campaign. The rest of the games are almost entirely affiliated to the “Games for Change” website or to other SGs’ initiatives, with extensive information around their context.

Similarly to the previous category, due to their limited resources, this may be the only way they can brand and position themselves. What is more, in *3rd World Farmer*’s description the fact that the game is developed under a restricted budget is acknowledged. Similarly, in *Riverbed: The Eco Noir Mystery* is missing seven of eight conceived episodes due to limited funding, which renders it unfinished and lowers the player’s motivation and the game’s capacity to reach the end goal.

Furthermore, game developers do not seem to be willing to promote their games in SNSs. Only *3rd World Farmer* of the five holds a Facebook fan page which is liked by 4.712 people. In addition, press coverage is also limited. Apparently, the game that generated relatively much more press coverage than the other four is *Auti Sim*, due to its controversial topic. The rest is either prototyped by students or by solos who never really caught the attention of the press. Thus, the only way such games reach their audience is mainly through affiliation platforms such as “Games for Change”, where they can be found categorized under their specific theme.

Lastly, those entrepreneurs in their majority advocate for social responsible gaming in order to justify their project. Since all the games of this category introduce a cause related topic, the descriptions are again extended, given the fact that these may be the only touch point they have with their publics. Thus, descriptions are deemed very crucial, as they generate the first impression, which has to be good and engaging for the player.

What is interesting is that although their main goal is to expose a situation and to educate their publics about a social or environmental issue, *3rd World Farmer* deviates from the norm. Specifically, the game developers, in the game’s specific interface, describe it as “just a game”. In addition, they provide links to NGOs/INGOs that are active on trying to eradicate poverty and famine, persuading the gamer to take action. Thus, although such games are not meant to pursue the gamer to donate money or take any other form of action, *3rd World Farmer* introduces this option in a very discrete and low-profile way, which in combination with the good quality of the game is likely to trigger action and attitude change, based on the notion of “pulling knowledge”.

To sum up, this initial analysis generates few points of discussion. Specifically, after collectively examining the content of each category several insights regarding the way branding is realized are emerging, which, eventually help to provide answers to the second and third sub-questions *how do SGs implemented by non-profits differ from those implemented by for profit organizations* and *how does branding via SGs vary between large and small organizations*.

First and foremost, regarding the various placements of the games, one of the main differences between the non-profit and the for-profit sector is their whole attitude around the game. Specifically, while the NGOs/INGOs, already enough active in their field of interest, treat the game as a resource or supplement while the companies put it in the forefront. This is mainly explained by the fact that the game is obviously placed and positioned in an independent website which includes an extended presentation of the game or the campaign. Moreover, company games provide various ways of interaction; community tools, fan pages, or multimedia branded content which create a complete branding experience and, apparently, extend the interest and motivation of the gamer. On the other side, the majority of the non-profits' games are poorly developed and hidden in the bottom of long discussions. However, since their intentions are to persuade the player to change its attitude and take action over a cause they succeed in achieving a link between the game and the "take action" offered possibilities. Apparently, NGOs/INGOs place more efforts in using the game to extensively promote their own goals than contributing to the individual or collective transformation of the gamer. Yet, there are two games in the sample, developed by non-profits, which appear to disrupt the pattern through being of high quality and independently placed on their own unique channels.

Variances are also spotted in the way the branding is realized. In alliance with the previously mentioned theory, companies tend to rely on consumer's eWOM and press, avoiding company controlled branding channels. Specifically, such is also demonstrated by the fact that most of the games of the sample are considered viral games. Moreover, they appear to acknowledge both the contemporary consumers' needs and requirements without overreacting on their CSR statements. This is also validated by the fact that they do not state anything special about socially responsible gaming or SGs in their website but, instead, expect the game to be self-explanatory or leave the press speak for themselves. On the other hand, non-profits prefer to integrate and promote their game in the same space with the specific topic or campaign it belongs with. Such an action resonates with the fact that people usually entering the organization's website are already aware of the phenomenon and they may be eager to play a game related to it

and find out more about. However, this is a vicious circle, since the game ends up informing people that already had an idea about the cause and fails to reach any new audience.

Regarding the third sub-questions, differences in the way branding is realized among larger and smaller companies mostly occur not only because of limited resources but also of reputation as well. SMEs and entrepreneurs over try to appear socially responsible and create extended presentations regarding their games. Given the fact that online may be the only way to approach their audiences in a rather inexpensive way, they might leverage Facebook or other SNSs in order to create various touch points with their audiences. However, this is not always the case, since in many games there is no community or fan page, a fact that deteriorates their audience reach. Furthermore, in terms of branding, they almost entirely rely on collective SGs' platforms and online databases to affiliate there their games, incorporating links and descriptions that spread the word about them and their work.

Nevertheless, what is interesting about these two last categories, which constitute the smaller-sized and of less resources and reputation segment, is that the content and topic of the game dramatically increased its media coverage. In other words, for the organizations of this category, designing a game which its provoking or controversial content will generate discussions and argument serves as a branding tool in order for the game and the developers to get some media attention. In addition, combining an appealing content and topic with offering multiple points of access can boost even more its reach. Thus, there are times where the size and resources of a company do not really predict the amount of coverage and reach the game will achieve. Instead, the underlying narrative is positively related to the amount of success that the game will get.

4.4 Emerging Partnerships and Hybrids

Following the previous discussion, in an attempt to investigate the different ways branding is realized in each sector, and to what extent it is affected by whether the organization is of large size or medium to small, I came several times across what is mentioned in the theory as "cross-sector partnering" (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012). In other words, a clear outcome of my sampling rests on the premise that the corporate, educational, research and non-profit sectors work in tandem in order to promote social good. As a result, not only the non-profit/for-profit boundary is blurred but also new forms of organizational instruments emerge, introducing hybrid initiatives which collaborate in order to exchange value.

First of all, as it is expected, organizations lacking the know-how of game development are partly collaborating with a game developing or creative agency. Very few were the examples of organizations developing in-house their game, such as Siemens's *Power Matrix*, which is an initiative developed under the company's supervision, and WWF's *Toxic Blaster* which, as was previously mentioned, is a resource supporting WWF's *DetoX* campaign. The rest of the SGs that belong to the first two categories, that of the NGOs/INGOs and that of the large corporate firms, resulted from various types of partnering. In all the web pages of the SGs, the partnerships are obvious usually in the form of integrating the partners' logos.

Specifically, Christian Aid hosts in its website a very elaborate description of its different ways of funding its actions, as well as extended information around the organizations' partnering agents. In the case of the *Disasters Watch*'s development, the NGO partnered with a London-based independent digital company, Playerthree (www.playerthree.net). In the same line of reasoning, *Amnesty the Game* was created after a volunteering, also location-based partnering was established, between the Greek department of Amnesty International and the Hellenic Game Development Association, a non-profit, hybrid initiative created to bring together professionals, companies and game development teams (www.facebook.com/hgdagr?fref=ts). Moreover, *Dumb Ways to Die* was delegated to McCann Workgroup, a creative agency situated in Melbourne. These three examples are indicatives of location-based partnerships and collaborations meaning to exchange knowledge and resources through sharing similar values and understanding.

Next, other forms of partnerships that arise are those that put on the forefront the educational and research dimension of the game development. An example is the development of *Plant it Green* by CONNECT! Transform the Future, a collaboration between the Center for Science (a network of leading science centers), National Geographic, General Electric and local energy companies across the country (www.connectenergyed.org), whose main mission is to "enlighten, educate, and engage the nation's youth in a conversation about the future of energy". Accordingly, Games Learning Society (www.gameslearningsociety.org), the developer of *Citizen Science*, is a mixture of in-house game artists, designers, programmers, and researchers supported by various partners such as neuroscientist, game developers and the Microsoft Research team. Similarly, *Polar Plunder* is created by AIMS Game Center at Miami University, which intersects two educational pillars in order to serve as a hub for experiential education, persuasive play research, and innovative production in the fields of games for change. However, besides the non-economic objective of such merges, namely the knowledge exchange, partnerships are also seen

as a way for agents to overcome financial constraints, gain access to commercial capital markets and attract talent (Austin et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, there are also games primarily conceived by companies that themselves partner with the non-profit sector. In my sample, this is realized by two different ways; Firstly, companies are partnering with NGOs/INGOs as a way to acquire more support and general acceptance by their publics (Labib Eid & Robert Sabella, 2014). Since, cross-sector partnering, is viewed by academics and practitioners as an inescapable and powerful vehicle for implementing CSR and for achieving social and economic missions (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012) companies demonstrate their partnering with the “doing good” organizations in order to appear more legitimate to their publics. However, in the case of MTVu (www.mtvu.com/) it would be harsh to say that it uses the partnership for “greenwashing” since it is an active college student television network with the mission to “*profile college students, activism, and emerging new music*”. *Darfur is Dying* was born by a team of students, after winning a game contest launched by MTVu and the Reebok Human Foundation and it was finally sponsored in combination with the International Crisis Group. Thus, since the content of the game is collapsing with the field the INGO is active in, we conclude that the partnering is not a branding trick but an attempt to transmit a full and accurate picture of Darfur’s suffering.

Moreover, the reason for such a partnering may also fall into the second pattern introduced in my sampling, that of companies partnering with non-profits because they need an expert to validate their content. NGOs/INGOs or different hybrid forms of organizations that are actively involved with a cause are unlimited sources of knowledge. In addition, developing a SG of inaccurate content may not only fail to reach the game’s end goal but, if developed by a company, may trigger reactions from activists. In this sense, both *Homeland Guantanamo* and *Sweatshop*, besides firstly collaborating with two creative agencies, Free Range Studios, active on viral digital activism, and Littleloud respectively, they then partnered with the Detention Watch Network, a collaboration in advocacy of the immigration detention, and Labor Behind the Label respectively, which specializes in causes related to sweatshops, in order to cross check and confirm the game’s real life context. Lastly, in the case of *Auti-Sim* the developer partnered with specialist advisor and aims to expose a relevant picture of how a child might experience sensory overload in a busy playground (Tracey, 2014). Thus, another emerging need covered by cross sectional partnerships is that of ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the game content and, eventually, the credibility of the developer, which in the case of the company is extremely crucial in order to avoid being targeted by activists.

Another interesting aspect is that of SMEs acquired by larger and more reputable creative agencies in order to combine their resources and capabilities. Specifically, Impact Games, the developer of *Peacemaker*, was acquired in 2010 by Hybrid Learning Systems (www.hybrid-learning.com/), which has a long history as an innovator in the mobile and e-learning space. According to them, this merge aims at combining their know-how and resources under a common mission, to “*make learning an experience, and encourage interaction and communication between learners*”. Thus, another form of collaboration emerges from acquisitions, which are not only resource-oriented but also mission-oriented.

Last but not least, the last pattern of potential partnering is solely because of the lack of financial resources. This phenomenon usually occurs in the last two categories, and especially, in that of the entrepreneurs. Specifically, the developer of *Auti Sim*, Taylan Kay, explains that although the game is not for profit, she is looking for funding either from government agencies or other people and groups that wish to help raising awareness for autism-related difficulties (Orland, 2013, March 5). In this specific case, even if the game has no potential to be further developed, the developer intends to promote the cause beyond the game, requesting funding for a potential awareness campaign. On the contrary, the designer of *The Riverbed: An Eco-Noir Mystery*, Mary Wharmby, as explained her concern on the Google forum of “Games for Change” (Appendix A2), she has been funding the first episode on her own and now she is seeking a partnering with a non-profit in order to develop the other 7 episodes and also link the SG with a donation mechanism in order both to raise awareness and to trigger action. Thus, in this case, the designer seeks a partnership both for completing the game and for further promoting the cause.

To sum up, an interesting finding that emerged from the sample is that regardless of the intentions of each organization, namely either to be for-profit or not-for-profit oriented, partnerships are a common phenomenon. Moreover, different types of partnering emerged; location-based partnerships which share a common language and understanding, mission-related partnerships among companies, educational instruments and individuals which refer to knowledge and talent exchanging in order to promote a common vision, business partnerships with non-profits, in order for businesses to appear more credible and legitimate to their publics, and finally, partnerships in order to acquire more resources and capabilities. Moreover, each organization of the sample is completely transparent, acknowledging the contribution of each partner. In this sense, in terms of branding, partnerships are not only a way to exchange value but craft hybrid organizations, spanning the for-profit/non-profit boundary. These organizations, regardless of their various motives, pledge to contribute to social welfare, sometimes even by

only volunteering or self-absorbing the costs. In this way, they appear more eager to contribute to social good to their publics, create a positive attitude or converting any possible skepticism to approval.

4.5 Realities shaped by SGs

In the previous sections, the association between the game and the real world context not only was defined as extremely important, but was also widely discussed. The sample confirmed that when a SG has no intended impact on the player in a real life context it misses its pivotal purpose (Mitgutsch & Alvarado, 2012) and results in failing to link the player with the cause. In addition, various emerging design mechanics in the same sample exposed a preference towards contents and images that trigger emotions such as empathy, indicating a trend towards portraying realities that shock the player. In this sense, also discussed previously, through providing multiple touch points with its audience the organization refrain from any form of censorship regarding its content. Undoubtedly, a new, multifaceted capacity of SGs emerged from the sampling, namely that of delivering news and shaping realities. As Susanna Ruiz, who helped in the creation of *Darfur is Dying*, admits in *New York Times* (Thompson, 2006, July 23):

“There's an audience that can approach this and think about Darfur that would never pick up a newspaper article on it.”

First of all, as previously highlighted, the importance of a relevant and appealing content is a milestone that every type of organization acknowledges. In this sense, the content needs to both objectively portray a real event and be attractive enough in order to sustain the player's interest. One great exemplar which manages to combine both parts is *Homeland Guantanamo*, which, according to Leslie Dreyer in *ArtThreat* (2010, February 12), creates a virtual facility to match the Elizabeth Detention Center, where the main character of the story, who is an existing person, was detained, and design the story around the actual events and people involved. Moreover, the video and written evidence reveal human rights abuses that mimic those committed at Guantanamo and other U.S. secret prisons. Hence, by incorporating a simple mystery around the cause and linking the real stories with the clues required in order to solve it (the player has to carefully listen to a detainee's story, answer one simple question and then they obtain a clue for the game) the SG succeeds in both raising awareness, educating and entertaining the player.

Nevertheless, incorporating real discourses is a mixed blessing for the designers. In the case of *Amnesty the game*, for example, the developers faced several challenges in order to deliver a relevant and educating content. According to *GamePolitics.com*, which quotes the

content developer Tasos Flambouras, one of the hardest parts of designing the game was to avoid portraying the inmates as angels, recognizing that they are scum and they've committed crimes, but there are other reasons why they shouldn't be executed. Hence, this illustrates that SGs are sometimes torn between accuracy and sensitivity, in order to deliver the right message on behalf of the organization.

In this sense, games can also be found far exceeding the boundary between accuracy and fiction. Such SGs may be at the risk of being accused of bias when unevenly promoting only one side of the coin. For example, while in *End Game Syria* the player's only option is to represent the "rebels" and understand the conflict from their point of view, in *Peacemaker*, the player has the option to play as an Israeli, Palestinian or neutral prime minister. Specifically, on the one hand, *Endgame* is a two-stage card game and the player is cast as the rebels countering the regime's political and military choices, fighting for points to raise your support and lower the regime's and learning what decisions are available to the sides. However, before playing, the user cannot pick sides; they can only play from the side of the rebels. On the other hand, in *Peacemaker*, the various choices enable the user to reflect upon the game on their own, providing a more impartial view of the news. Furthermore, in the article of Thompson (2006, July 23) in New York Times, the developer of *Peacemaker*, Mr. Burak, admits that when he first showed the game to Israelis and Palestinians and pushed them to switch positions they ended up developing a more nuanced understanding of the cause. Thus, while in the former case the SG delivers a one-sided view, without really providing the gamer the possibility to deeply comprehend and evaluate a phenomenon, in the latter, the gamer can advocate for different sides and consequently, envisage the full picture. In this sense, SGs should not solely be considered "newsgames", but instead, since their main purpose is to raise awareness and stimulate activism they should rather incorporate features that promote peaceful solutions based on mutual understanding, as *Peacemaker* do, otherwise they miss their pivotal purpose.

In addition, another rationale behind incorporating real news with caution rests on the premise that the organization blamed for the SG's development may be eventually harmed. Specifically, in the sample, BBC's game *Climate Challenge*, MTVu's *Darfur is Dying*, and Channel 4's *Sweatshop* incorporate real life facts and calculations to reinforce their arguments. Nevertheless, all three companies are in the edge of being criticized; First of all, while nobody is challenging BBC's calculation, according to an article on Counterfire, the sample from which the statistics derive might have come from not-so-representative polls of middle-class liberals (Gough, 2012, February 13). The author argues that in the game BBC is giving the governmental

view on the cause, promoting that individual changes are the main way to tackle climate change, and, at the same time, providing options, based on soft-laws, which barely touch the private sector. In a slightly different context, MTVu's game about Sudan has been characterized from Sudanese peace advocates as uneasy (Thompson, 2006, July 23), due to its simplified content. Lastly, *Sweatshop* justifies in a way the bad temper of the intermediary factory owner, when it demonstrates the dialogue with the partner fashion company that insists for more products and threatening for contract termination, portraying the discomforts of stakeholder management. In other words, since, as previously discussed, commercial firms are at risk of being targeted by activists, they should be meticulously verifying their content and sources if they desire to grasp the intended outcomes of their CSR efforts.

Apparently, SGs are emerging as potential political instruments. In my sample, those SGs of my sample that appear to be highly political and aim at creating a relevant real world connection, manage to incorporate two distinct features; the former entails acknowledging the presence of various stakeholders who either directly or indirectly affect the result. Moreover, these games integrate the public opinion as a performance indicator for every taken action. In this way, the player understands the complexities of handling such conflicts beyond simply satisfying the needs of the one side. The latter, as previously discussed, rests on the unexpected nature of events, which twists the plot of the game. Specifically, by lowering the player's control of the gameplay during the game the SGs achieve a smooth transmission to reality, where those events are part of everyday life. In combination with the insertion of sources, where the player can double check the relevance of such events (*End Game Syria*), or real life testimonials and videos which visualize the terror (*Peacemaker*), the player obtains an objective understanding.

Hence, similarly with what was previously investigated by Arora and Itu (2010) for NGOs/INGOs, which tend to promote their own perspectives in their SGs, companies, regardless of their size, also fluctuate between realism and favoritism. The main distinction is that while for the non-profit sector such an attitude might go unnoticed, in the commercial world, where activists crave for such deliberate mistakes, the reputation of the firms may be seriously threatened.

5. Conclusion

This thesis was set out to explore the multidimensional nature of branding through SGs from different organizations' perspective. One of the main milestones of the project involved defining the content of the sampling in order to be illustrative of the organizations' practices. The

games were researched and accessed online, and were mostly selected to portray the online efforts of organizations for a specific cause. In alliance with my theoretical framework, the SGs I sampled validate the existence of some of the most pressing and urgent social problems, as explained by Adeola (2010), which deteriorate human rights and the ecological background, and emerge as a medium to fight against them

During the process I acted as an explorer (Bartle, 2004, as cited in Gee, 2011), motivated by the different design features and narratives that render the game engaging. Through triangulating the results which derived from the content analyses and the auto-ethnography, I managed to obtain a wider understanding of those similarities and contradictions which helped me answering my two sub-questions, *how do SGs implemented by non-profits differ from those implemented by for profit organizations?* and *how does branding via SGs vary between large and small organizations?*. Moreover, by shedding more light into the various design mechanics and activist tools employed by the SGs of my sampling, I managed to answer my first research sub-question, namely *what are the different design strategies of SGs for promoting social awareness and activism?*, and, hence, understand how branding through SGs is realized among various agents of social change.

At this point, it is important to be reminiscent that while various classifications and taxonomies of SGs have been also crafted by many scholars (Michael & Chen, 2006; Ratan & Ritterfeld, 2008), there is no sufficient evidence of how SGs apply in the field of CRM, and, especially, how the different branding patterns vary among the for-profit and the non-profit world, reducing the literature gap regarding what being in the CSR sector entails (Pohl & Tolhurst, 2010). Hence, I believe that my findings bring new insights to the field of CRM, and specifically, advocate the contribution of SGs to it, reveal the strategic alliances that are created under this mission and provide managerial and practical implications for those organizations who desire to be active on this novel field.

During this process I sampled twenty SGs, five from each category of organization, such as INGOs/NGOs, large commercial firms, SMEs and individual entrepreneurs. It is important to remind the reader that while my initial design was set out differently, the explorative and inductive nature of this thesis resulted in switching several times some parts of the methodology in order to acknowledge emerging discourses that are inextricably linked to the proposed theoretical debates. In a nutshell, through following the principles of grounded research, which, as previously described, entails a constant interaction between the various used methods, namely

the content analyses and the auto-ethnography phase, I let my sample unfold, providing valuable insights. Nevertheless, due to the rich, yet restricted, nature of this thesis project, I decided to maintain a limited scope, that of treating the SG itself as a focal point, and examine the various branding patterns accordingly.

Feel-good online activism or real world impact?

First and foremost, organizations were found to differently describe and promote their games, especially through their slogans and statements. As Work (2008) explained, SGs have three layers of intended outcomes, namely exposure and elaboration, comprehension and knowledge acquisition and, persuasion and attitude change. In this sense, SGs can be developed either for raising awareness or for both raising awareness and provoking further individual or collective action. Nevertheless, a theory developed by Mitgutsch and Alvarado (2012) counter the previous argument, suggesting that SGs who fail to establish their intended impact on the player in a real life context miss their pivotal purpose. This is validated in my sampling, as not all games included intend to build a real world impact throughout the gameplay or by any other means. This approves the trend described by McCafferty (2011) of activists, making full use of online tools to promote their message and gain support with no intention to translate it to an offline, real world impact.

Specifically, in my sample, on the one hand, the SGs of NGOs/INGOs succeed in bridging the gameplay with the real world cause, mostly through offering the possibility to support the cause through donating money. Such an act resonates with the environment in which they operate in, which demand from individuals to advocate for a cause and support, mostly through donating. Moreover, apparently fundraising is not only fundamental for the cause but also for the continuity of the organization. Indeed, as it was previously explained, such organizations aim at catalyzing the direct transformation of the individual through their program activities and their organizational praxis (Edwards & Sen, 2000). Thus, the SG is mostly treated as another touch point of the organization with its audience in order to effectively achieve its organizational outcomes through adopting a more distinctive and complete political role in society (McClosley, 2011). Nevertheless, another trend which was observed was that of bright green non-profits (Hoffman et al., 2012), outweighing the dark green ones, and demonstrating a clear shift towards partnerships with commercial firms or educational pillars in order to solve environmental or social problems. In this sense, an initial picture of the relations between the for profit and the not-for-profit sector is starting to emerge, where non profits, instead of confronting

commercial firms and the market, are starting to observe and grasp the vested interests of collaborating and partnering.

On the other hand, commercial firms are mostly creating educational games meaning to act as stand-alone branding tools and go viral, in order to attract new audiences and disseminate both the cause-related message and the socially responsible side of the firm. Indeed, given the fact that businesses, nowadays, are operating in an increasingly cynical world, where their actions are under constantly criticized by the media and by INGOs/NGOs (Frankental, 2001) they invest in CSR communications in order to reap the desired benefits. Furthermore, they sometimes even extend the branding experience, through providing various interaction and community tools, along with branded multimedia or even branded offline content. Overall, they use gamification features such as “tell a friend” mechanisms mostly to raise awareness and, then, as a secondary goal, to obtain monetary support.

In a nutshell, compared to NGOs/INGOs, companies offer a variety of low-cost and effort “taking action” initiatives, such as sharing the SG on Facebook or sending it to a friend via email, instead of solely persuading straightforward support through displaying a donation mechanism. As a result, they appear to engage consumers in a low-cost heroism without meaningfully increasing their awareness of the struggles of people they are supposed to be helping. This distinction between the not-for profit and for-profit is a typical example which validates the schism between “token support” and “meaningful support” (Kristofferson et al., 2014, as cited in Jones, 2015), facilitated by the principles of Web 2.0 (McCafferty, 2011).

Nevertheless, the majority of them, while at risk, cannot be accused of failing to achieve a link to the real world, and, consequently, of greenwashing or “slacktivism”, since during the gameplay they incorporate solutions and tips which catalyze the individual transformation of the player. Those eye opening solutions intend to raise awareness not only about the problem itself but also about the ways the problem can be solved. Indeed, in my sample one new function of SGs appeared, validating the unique property of media instruments and, specifically, the expressive nature of SGs, in awakening the “political self” (Van Zoonen, 2007, as cited in Neys & Zansz, 2010). Moreover, since sharing a SG is not considered a slacktivist act, but instead a motivator of interest to find more about a cause (Jones, 2015), the message dissemination is likely to add to civil engagement.

As a consequence, after confirming the role of SGs as vehicles for individual or collective transformation, the link between SGs and social change was established, demonstrating

a clear trend from the part of organizations, of branding themselves and their cause through a SG. Indeed, those characteristics of SGs, such as learning the results of the player's actions, forcing the players to view the world from a different angle, and always teaching them something new are, undoubtedly, skills required to facilitate social change (Neys & Jansz, 2010). Last but not least, the sample, which contains SGs targeted mostly at adolescents or youngsters, confirmed their function as facilitators of adult education (Hoff & Hickling-Hudson, 2011), emphasizing on social change and social action.

Free of censorship or free of content control?

Nevertheless, such in-game solutions are sometimes found to transfer fictional or biased points of view either through their storytelling or through the different options they provide the player with during the gameplay. In this sense, while a SG and, especially, a SG which is accessible from many devices is regarded as a free medium, refraining from any kind of censorship, it is likely that, if its content is not relevant, it will let the player experience only the one side of the coin. What is more, the category of entrepreneurs, which, as Dacin, Dacin and Tracey (2011) explained, attains much growth just because large groups of people are critical of the ability of governments, businesses and non-profits to meaningfully address social problems, is expected to create SGs which transfer an objective and impartial point of view. However, who is cross-checking the content of these SGs and who can tell that they cannot be viewed as propaganda?

Indeed, previous studies on SGs acknowledged the potential of INGOs/NGOs being eager to transmit their own perspectives through their SGs (Arora & Itu, 2010), lured by their strong will to reach their organizational outcomes and to stimulate donations. Hence, drifted by persuading their own survival and welfare, non-profit organizations tend to exaggerate in the way they portray their "doing good" side and respectively, the "bad" side of the perpetrators of the discussed cause. Furthermore, this thesis, through investigating the commercial sector, revealed that also companies have a tendency to misrepresent reality, mainly through the different in-game options they provide the player with. Specifically, some SGs, such as *Climate Challenge*, were found to praise and justify the corporate sector through promoting the capitalistic way as the only way to interpret modern realities. Interestingly, no distinction was made between large or small companies, as both categories were found to include SGs that appeared partly biased. Hence, displaying one-sided content introduced the political dimension of SGs which can be traced to a certain extent in both sectors.

In this line of reasoning, the most prevailing action that both the non-profit and for-profit actors seem to take in order to avoid such skepticism from their publics, and simultaneously, seize other kinds of benefits, is creating partnerships, which blur the boundaries between the two sectors. Specifically, different partnerships emerged from my sampling, which validate this point of view; location-based cross sectional partnerships, based on common knowledge and understanding, educational-centric hybrids between non profits, educational instruments and large commercial organizations, partnerships in exchange of knowledge and resources and lastly, CSR partnerships, in order to strengthen the socially responsible side of the firm.

Such alliances rest on the premise that the gamer is more likely to trust a hybrid, which is the result of both sectors working in tandem, regardless of their individual desired social or economic benefits, for a common social cause, than a single entity. Moreover, the content is - or at least, gives the impression to be - cross-checked in order to deliver a real world experience and impact. Lastly, as confirmed by Dawkins (2004), as cited in Du et al. (2010), NGOs/INGOs are keen on seeking and disseminating information regarding a company's CSR deeds, especially if there is a partnering in behind, based on mutual benefits, and might further strengthen the company's image.

Overall, in my sampling the majority of partnerships were presented with transparency and respect, giving me the impression that the SG is simply an exemplar of their whole, consistent effort towards social change and that the hybrid's "raison d'être" is oriented towards creating a real world tangible impact. Nevertheless, as there are risks and costs associated with such partnerships, which may prohibit a win-win situation for parties involved (Hemat & Yuksel, 2014) the selection of partner must be executed with caution, as it may be extremely harmful. To be more precise, nobody can deny that an impulsive selection of partner, based on false judgments and assessments, could have been proven disastrous for all the involved organization and thus, before proceeding into such alliances, an organization needs to find that partner who is driven by a similar mission and vision towards the specific social cause and assess the associated opportunities and risks.

Last but not least, cases which also avoided any potential skepticism were those that according to Du et al. (2010) did not solely invest in company-controlled CSR communication channels but instead penetrated various communicators of CSR, such as media or customers. As a result, they got positive coverage from more independent, unbiased and credible source such as editorial coverage on television or in the press or word-of-mouth. Specifically, in my sampling,

firms had relatively less company-controlled references regarding the SG than the NGOs/INGOs. Instead, they heavily relied on the press and on an impressive array of community tools in order to disseminate the message. Few examples even relied on “brand aid” (Ponte & Richey, 2014), introducing celebrities who are also playing the SG as ambassadors. In this sense, one of the reasons companies appear less eager to promote the game relevance to the real world context, compared to non profits, might be due to their fear of being accused of over trying to appear ethical, and thus, of greenwashing. Hence, they choose to appear more modest, relying on external coverage due to their fear of stakeholders becoming leery of their motives (Du et al., 2010) and translating their CSR efforts into a public relation which intends to manipulate consumers (Frankental, 2001).

Does size matters?

Similarly, such a distinction is also noticeable between large and small commercial firms. Specifically, the SGs of SMEs, which neither are outcomes of a cross sector partnership nor are created by well-known and reputable firms, have a lower potential to gain publicity than larger ones. In this sense, the content that the games are discussing is deemed extremely important, and, even sometimes, is considered a performance indicator of the SG, namely that it predicts whether the SG will succeed in delivering the goal it was developed for. In my sample, such is portrayed by games that discussed more specific rather than abstract discourses (Syrian conflict vs. recycling) and appeared to gain relatively more publicity. This rests on the premise that SGs which discuss heightened debates and relevant conflicts generate the interest of press, and, especially if their launch date coordinates with peak of the conflict in the real world context, results in boosting the games’ reach to its maximum. Hence, companies which struggle with fewer resources and capabilities, embrace the principles of disaster porn (Recuber, 2013), and, instead of aggressively promoting the game development, appear to rather invest their resources in the content, which is important to be both attractive and relevant in order to succeed not only in gathering first the attention of the audience but also the attention of the press, or vice versa. This process functions politically as an affective attunement aiming at mobilizing the affective awareness and attention through the shock of the encounter (McCosker, 2013).

In the same line of reasoning, the way the game is described, along with the language and the slogans used, is also crucial to be attractive, especially for small sized organizations. However, an interest finding which emerged from my sampling was that although, in general, low quality SGs with poor graphics and frustrating navigation tools deteriorated the gamers’ engagement and created frustration and a likelihood to abandon the game, the likelihood was

greater in the case of NGOs/INGOs than in the case of entrepreneurs. In a nutshell, while for small sized entities a poorly developed game, although frustrating, was acceptable to me, especially after taking into account the developers' statements regarding the hardships of self-funding the SGs, for large, well known non-profits, it felt rather disappointing, since the gamers' expectations before playing the game do not eventually correlate with the ones after. Personally, I expected that at least such large organization, although non-profits had the know-how and the minimum of resources to provide at least a decent SG.

Thus, while one would expect that small sized companies are disadvantaged compared to larger, non-profits or commercial firms, apparently, they might be often excused when their game is of poor quality and generate low engagement. This finding, in terms of CSR, validates the theory of King and McDonnell (2012) that firms often fly under-the-radar because of their weak reputations and are able to even get away with irresponsible behavior. Lastly, in terms of branding, this example introduces discrimination in terms of size, in favor of small sized entities, where low developing efforts are less criticized than those of larger organizations and judged based on the effort rather than on their final outcome.

Many to one or one to many?

Nevertheless, firms that succeed in convincing their audiences about their socially responsible side are usually those which maintain all the information concentrated in one place. Specifically, regardless of whether the organization objectives are socially or financially oriented, having a powerful webpage in which the organization express their concerns, actions and results about a cause, along with their scientific relevance, assists in establishing a sense of respect towards it. Its observed effectiveness is twofold; on the one hand, regarding the firms, by utilizing a specific campaign or game website they can benefit from more space to demonstrate their good deeds and extend the dialogue beyond the game. Specifically, they can incorporate facts, community tools, affiliations with NGOs/INGOs active in supporting the specific cause, or, in the case of a campaign, incorporate the campaign's results, demonstrating their effectiveness in supporting the cause and creating a more legitimate company profile.

On the other hand, a campaign or independent website appears to benefit the non profits as well. Specifically, while incorporating the SG on the main organization webpage, next to its specific cause, creates a coherent experience, it results in attracting only those people who would have been interested in the discourse regardless of the SG. In contrary, the independent website is able to boost the SG's reach and attract audiences that wouldn't have been attracted otherwise,

succeeding in further raising awareness and stimulating activism. Moreover, even when the SG is accessed elsewhere, for example, in SGs' platforms such as "Games for Change", if it is attractive enough and of high quality it might succeed in pulling knowledge (Breuer & Bente, 2010) instead of pushing, namely persuading the player to voluntarily look up for sources and finding more about the cause. Thus, whether the SG is integrated in or combined with a larger discourse does not guarantee the SG's success in educating or raising awareness. Instead, an easily traceable, accessible and appealing gameplay with the potential to be shared among friends on SNSs is eager to trigger more cause-related outcomes.

Overall, the organizations, and especially the firms, of my sample were found torn between integrating the SG on their website and launching it independently. The findings, though, revealed a pattern of them, integrating the SGs, only when their content had any potential correlation with the field of their action (i.e. Siemens- *Power Matrix*, BBC-*Climate Challenge*), namely a high cause/brand fit. Undoubtedly, this demonstrates a tendency of firms checking for the existence of reciprocal relations between a cause and the firm before developing a SG and furthermore, integrating it in their own website.

Theoretically speaking, Van Eck (2006) supports that by playing a game what someone must learn is directly related to the environment in which they learn and demonstrate it, applied and practiced within a context, implying that an SG should be adjusted to a relevant and familiar context. This can justify the tendency of INGOs/INGOs to create SGs that correlate with their field of action and usually incorporate them in their website. Nevertheless, an interesting point raised by Bloom et al. (2012) introduces that there are cases where the lack of surprise and uniqueness may harm the effectiveness of the message, and a low-fit social cause might actually help to differentiate a brand, leading the consumers to react more positively to the promotional initiative. Indeed, with firms, where I had no previous knowledge or expectations regarding their field of social action, I was surprised when I explored the topic that their SG discusses. On the contrary, with NGOs/NGOs, where I almost entirely knew what to expect regarding the SG's topic, I even refrained from including some in my sample and, eventually, playing them when I realized their intending discourse.

Thus, according to these authors, a cause which is original, relevant, yet random to the linked brand or industry, might be more well embraced than an expected branding action which may be perceived as opportunistic. In this sense, fresh and interesting discourses appear more engaging than predictable CRM actions, regardless of how well the cause correlates with the

organization's policies. However, this cannot be traced and applied across both sectors, since the non-profits are expected to use their know-how and long experience in their field to develop an SG with a high fit. In any ways, as previously stated, if the organization desires to obtain the maximum audience reach its SG should be accessible if not via both ways then independently.

CSR or simply a branding tool?

Overall, a potential conclusion for this explorative study rests on the premise that people are nowadays extremely skeptical, both towards the not-for profit and the for profit sector, and, thus, organizations are expected to thoroughly justify by all means not only their intention to “do good” but also the significance of the SG for society. In this sense, the content of the SGs if not illustrative should be at least impartial in order to obtain the respect of the audience. Overall, the purpose should be reflected directly in the aim of the game and its topic, but also in the designer's intentions and their goal to impact the players in a specific way (Mitgutsch & Alvarado, 2012).

This is also validated by Labib Eid and Robert Sabella (2014) who firstly discussed such partnerships as social alliances which aim at building both reciprocal support and social acceptance. Specifically, they function as guarantors of integrity and fairness, as they entail a mishmash of both sectors, in terms not only of resources and capabilities but also control. Therefore, during my research I felt that branding is perceived more altruistic when it derives from an ‘alliance building game’ (Labib Eid & Robert Sabella, 2014), the SG's content is perceived more trustworthy and relevant and, consequently, the core organization is appreciated as socially responsible and active on cause related marketing.

Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that such a CRM attempt does not mean that a firm is active in CSR. To be more precise, if we are to accept the notion that CSR entails a company's long-term footprint on society (Frankental, 2001), then, companies that do not partner for a cause, or, that, in general, do not appear to be consistently active for a cause, fail to comply with the continuous logic of CSR, which is based on constantly examining and improving its stakeholders' impact and viewing the firm's long term reputation within the context of the social and ecological sustainability of its operations. In this sense, companies which desire to build a competitive advantage around CSR should not only rest on developing one SG or one campaign which also includes a SG. By doing that, they risk of being accused of greenwashing and opportunism and in this case, the SG is solely considered a branding and PR tool and is likely to fail disseminating the right message.

5.1 Managerial Implications

Besides the choice between integrating the game in the organization's website and launching it independently, other interesting patterns emerged, capable of shedding further light to emerging concerns and dilemmas of branding practitioners and managers. First and foremost, practitioners should keep on mind that the nature of the targeted audience, which affects crucial decisions, such as how the SG should be mediated, is a crucial predictor of success. Would *Darfur is Dying* have succeeded as a viral game if it was not targeted at the youngsters of MtvU? Would *Dumb Ways to Die* have such a tremendous success if they would not have been mediated via mobile? In this sense, the intended outcome of the SG, the audience to which is targeted at and the nature of the medium (which in this case is that it is directed to young audiences and its "on the go" nature correlates with the addictive nature of the SG) are three variables that, if well combined, may predict and guarantee the success of the game. Furthermore, in terms of sector and size, the medium which will be selected to deliver the SG is not indicative of the resources and capabilities of the organization, since mobile games appeared equally distributed in the sample. Thus, the medium choice appears to be rather a matter of compatibility than of available resources.

In a nutshell, this validates the point of Sheikh and Beise-Zee (2011) who suggest that the causes should be either oriented towards the personality traits and the cultural characteristics of the audience or towards the specific industry of company and, consequently, towards its reputation, its cause/brand fit and so on. Thus, each organization should carefully examine all the parameters in order to decide (a) what cause to promote, (b) where to advertise the SG, and (c) where to launch it and make it accessible.

Moreover, developers, regardless of the sector they belong in, should also be cautious of the way they use the different design features in order to avoid losing the engagement of the player. Specifically, time pressure needs to be used to a certain extend and according to the nature of the SG, namely whether it is a past-time, simulation or strategy game. Moreover, the possibility of getting stuck or, in contrary, the possibility of impulsive playing should be compromised by the presence of an in-game narrator, willing to function as a helping hand, by the or by a supporting out-of-the game community forum where people can share their concerns, and an in-game display of feedback after each taken action, in order for the player to familiarize with the consequences of their actions respectively, according to the motivation paradigm introduced by Ritterfeld and Weber (2006). In addition, inhabiting a role (Gee, 2007) is found to create a stronger sense of in-game responsibility, which can be transferable to a more real world

responsible attitude towards the cause, while leaderboards with high scores and difficulty levels (Breuer & Bente, 2010), are found to boost the player's engagement while contributing to the player's determination to replay in order to imitate the higher success of others. In this sense, in games that players could compare scores among friends, or where they were offered the possibility to publically demonstrate the success, greater player's engagement and will to spread the word about the SG emerged, due to what is introduced by Ritterfeld and Weber (2006) as the reinforcement paradigm and due to their need to communicate their socially responsible side among their friends (Neys & Jansz, 2010). Therefore, developers should not overlook these elements. By incorporating them there is a high chance that the player's engagement remains sustained during the gameplay, long enough so the gamer realizes and comprehends the cause in a real world context.

Another way to establish a real world impact within the game is by generating emotions through visualizing chaos and failure. Those reported emotions were found to extend the player's engagement, their motivation to retry and their deep understanding of the cause, through realizing them as consequences of their own actions. Moreover, in combination with interactive features such as video and real life testimonials they appeared to sustain the player's interest and to trigger emotions that catalyzed the understanding of the cause. This is what is described by Breuer and Bente (2010) as narrative interactivity. However, the SGs should balance between demonstrating failure and success, depending on their desired outcomes. Moreover, the SG should be challenging yet doable (Gee, 2009). For example, while failure creates further determination to play again and understand the discourse, the player is more likely to share on his personal social media page a message which demonstrates his success (i.e. in saving the prisoner) than failure (i.e. you didn't manage to save the prisoner on time and now he is executed). Thus, given the fact that there is evidence suggesting that a player, after playing the game is more likely to share the experience with their friends (Neys & Jansz, 2010) the organizations' readymade messages must wisely fluctuate between triggering guilt/disappointment and happiness/pride for the sake of reaping the benefits of eWOM. Moreover, especially if the organization is commercial and solely rely to eWOM and viral communications, its success messages should outweigh the failure ones, maximizing the likelihood of the player sharing the game. This is also in alliance with the blending paradigm of Ritterfeld and Weber (2006) which implies that the gamer is persuaded by the acquisition of knowledge and skill in order to enjoy a mastery in a game.

Lastly, regarding the activist tools employed by the SGs, practitioners should find the golden mean between pressuring donations and other low cost or effort alternatives. On the one

hand, companies, which rest only on disseminating the message without generating an obvious collective real world outcome can be accused of greenwashing, while, on the other hand, one way “take action” initiatives, which pop up during the gameplay are considered annoying from the player and might result in abandoning the SG. Similarly, NGOs/INGOs, which aggressively persuade the player to take action, are not only at risk of not raising money for their cause but their welfare is also threatened. However, given the fact that SGs should be able to generate a real world impact, which in the case of NGOs/INGOs is not only raising awareness but also persuasion and attitude change, they should stress the issue of donation in a more discrete way in order to effectively raise money for the cause. In this sense, they could tie a display of features, which could facilitate the gameplay (i.e. more money, more time etc) with the donation mechanism, so that the player indirectly, through playing supports the cause. In this sense, the continuity or mastery of an appealing SG compensates for the money donated. Accordingly, a post that can be shared among friends, which demonstrates the player’s socially responsible profile, also enhances the player’s will to contribute for the cause.

In a nutshell, regarding the persuading nature of SGs, developers should pay attention to equally distribute those mechanics that lead to activism and create a real world impact. In this sense, according to Antle, Tanenbaum and Robinson (2013), who introduce three distinctive persuasion models which lead to behavior change, the SGs either incorporate sufficient information which lead to change of values and attitudes, either rely on the processes and activities that they require the player to immerse in while playing the game to drive the change, or trigger social mobilization in support of collective behavior change through emerging dialogue. Thus, given each SG’s nature the in-game strategies which link to activism need to be selected accordingly in order to boost the SG’s acceptance.

5.2 Limitations and Guidelines for Further Research

Although this study attempts to create a relevant taxonomy of SGs used from different organization, yet, its results are restricted to the specific purposive sampling. Specifically, while a satisfactory number of SGs were deeply examined and contradicted, a wide array of similar, existing SGs is left aside, weakening the ability to generalize from my sampling. Nevertheless, various findings emerged from this specific sample, shedding more light to possibilities for further research.

In this sense, the investigation of SGs not only validated their function as powerful branding tools, in order to promote both the causes and the underlying organizations, but also

exposed a novel role, namely that of trendsetting and shaping the news. Moreover, empirical evidence also confirms substantial changes in gamers' knowledge and opinion about issues addressed in mostly political SGs (Neys & Jansz, 2010). Thus, future researchers should assemble SGs that discuss solely political discourses and examine in depth their nature and characteristics, along with their underlying strategies that lead to civil engagement and/or activism.

Furthermore, as previously stated, when playing the games it is crucial to take into account the different types of gamers. Specifically, for the purpose of this study, I was an explorer, and thus, I may not be representative of the gamers' population. In this sense, my personal reflections may differ from those of an achiever, for example. A way to investigate how the results of my study would have altered in this hypothetical scenario would be to survey and further do an experiment with a satisfactory number of users, observing their attitudes and emotions during the gameplay. Although expensive, it would expose various angles, which tend to be overlooked due to the nature of this current study, bringing a wider understanding of not only how branding is realized but also how it is impacted on the audience and discussing various practical implications for the organizations. Moreover, in order to test the persuading nature of SGs it would be extremely interesting to conduct a post gaming research and investigate the ratio of attitude change or, similar to what Neys and Jansz (2010) explored, their post gaming behaviour, namely the need to interact with their friends about the game and spread the word.

Lastly, I could not refrain from discussing the only deviant case of my sampling, that of *Auti Sim*. In this sense, I tend to agree that there are cases where SGs are only labeled games, but there are merely simulations of social phenomena with no real game elements incorporated. An interesting guess, though, is that few would have been interested in retrieving and playing it if it was not labeled and launched as a game. Moreover, as discussed in Gobbons's work (2013), labeling *Auti Sim* a game transmits the message that disability should not be understood through the lens of pity, raising an interesting point regarding how disabilities could be treated and taught. However, in this sense we revert to the initial debate on serious games definition. Thus, further research should incorporate and sample such modern deviant cases and focus on clearly defining both the contours of what a serious game should consist of and on clarifying the boundaries between SGs and similar simulating initiatives.

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6. Appendices

Appendix A - Selected SGs

A.1 NGOS/INGOS and other non-profit organizations

INGOS/NGOS and other non-profits	Description
Christian Aid-Sneaky Snakes or other initiatives	Help sort out things that just aren't fair.
National Geographic+GE+partners – Plant it Green	The goal is to enlighten, educate, and engage the nation's youth in a conversation about the future of energy.
Amnesty International-Amnesty the game	Amnesty-the Game” is a serious game which supports the efforts of Amnesty International to globally abolish The Death Penalty
Breakthrough- Homeland Guandamos	Spotlights the inhumane conditions in immigrant detention centers
WWF- Toxic Blaster	Every person, every animal has been exposed to a cocktail of dangerous man-made chemicals. WWF, the conservation organization, needs your help now to fight the chemical threat.

A.2 Large For-Profit organizations

For profit organizations	Description
MTVU+ partners - Darfur is Dying	Darfur is Dying is a viral video game for change that provides a window into the experience of the 2.5 million refugees in the Darfur region of Sudan. Players must keep their refugee camp functioning in the face of possible attack by Janjaweed militias. Players can also learn more about the genocide in

	Darfur that has taken the lives of 400,000 people, and find ways to get involved to help stop this human rights and humanitarian crisis.
BBC+ partners - Climate Challenge	Gives an understanding of some of the causes of climate change, particularly those related to carbon dioxide emissions, gives players an awareness of some of the policy options available to governments, gives a sense of the challenges facing international climate change negotiators.
Channel 4 + partners - Sweatshop	Sweatshop is a light-hearted game, but it's based upon very present realities that many workers around the world contend with each day.
Siemens – Power Matrix	Supply your city with the perfect energy mix. Build power plants and use wind, solar and hydropower. Balance your resources. That's how your city will become wealthy, grow and prosper in a clean environment- becoming a successful manager of the city.
Mc Cann – Dump ways to die	<i>Dumb Ways to Die</i> really wants people to avoid dangerous situations around trains — and other life-threatening scenarios such as extracting toast from a toaster with a fork or dancing in piranha-infested waters.

Note: the research of the different organizations and SGs is completely realized on the Internet, through Google search. In the final thesis I will include the sources and a justification of my selection.

A.3 Small to Medium (SMEs) For-Profit organizations

SMEs for profit	Description
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<p><i>ByImplication- Wildfire</i></p>	<p>Wildfire is a game about saving the world. Opponents like rampant poverty, gender inequality, inadequate education and environmental degradation cannot be defeated by marching armies, secret potions or magic swords. This is a game about how they can be defeated.</p>
<p><i>Impact Games- Peacemaker</i></p>	<p>PeaceMaker challenges you to succeed as a leader where others have failed. Experience the joy of bringing peace to the Middle East or the agony of plunging the region into disaster.</p>
<p><i>GLS – Citizen Science</i></p>	<p>In <i>Citizen Science</i>, players meet characters that each plays a part in the pollution of your local lake. To change the course of history, you are sent back in time to gather evidence by exploring the environment and asking questions. All the evidence gathered can be used to create “arguments” that are key in being used to change the future.</p>
<p><i>AIMS Game Center – Polar Plunder</i></p>	<p>The game brings attention to problems that polar bears face in the Arctic, particularly those caused by pollution and human neglect, without ever having to hammer its point into players’ heads.</p>
<p><i>Auroch Digital – End Game Syria</i></p>	<p>Players must balance the in-game currencies of morale and support against the costs of fighting in the war, and decide when and if the time is right to accept a peace treaty. Events in Endgame: Syria can be replayed to show how different choices and strategies lead to different outcomes and maximize players’ understanding of this complex environment.</p>

Note: the research of the different organizations and SGs is completely realized on the Internet, through Google search. In the final thesis I will include the sources and a justification of my selection.

A.4 Social Entrepreneurs and other individuals

Individuals/ Social Entrepreneurs	Description
Grace Ching-Yun Peng - Wasteland Adventure	Time: 3010 AD. After humans destroyed the ecosystem. The earth lost the ability to heal and the environment continues to get worse. The fresh air and clean water are polluted. People have to wear breathing masks lest the toxic air rots their lungs. Human beings encounter a next critical crisis. The son of a scientist, BOBO is very interested in the garbage that has polluted the earth. He collects all kinds of usable garbage to make into his toys. However, BOBO has an evil self. Sometimes he will become lazy. One day BOBO falls asleep in the garbage...”
Frederik Hermund, Ole Fabricius Toubro, Jakob Elias Nielsen, Roman Spycher – Third World Farmer	In the game, the player gets to manage an African farm and is soon confronted with the difficult choices that poverty and conflict can cause.
Ruben IJpelaar – Floodie Hell	Pick up your boots and get ready for action. A major flood is ahead. The water rises fast and the lives of your citizens are in danger. YOU have to save them! Experience the dilemmas of rescue workers and find out the most efficient way to transport people and sandbags before and during the big flood.
Taylan Kadayifcioglu, Matt Marshall, Krista Howarth – Auti Sim	Step into the shoes of a child with autism.
Mary Wharmby – The Riverbed: An Eco	Water IS the new oil. The Riverbed is a first-

Noir Mystery

person interactive experience: part game, part story. The fictional murder-mystery set in a land devastated by water scarcity.

Appendix B – *Letter of Mary Wharmby, developer of The Riverbed: An eco-noir mystery*

Retrieved from:

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/gamesforchange/inQfor4dZG0/2OfXTL1PNOMJ>

Hello Everyone,

My name is Mary Wharmby and I apologize in advance for a long post :). I'm an independent game designer (and instructor at Academy of Art in San Francisco). For the last two of years, I've been working on a serious game about water scarcity entitled *The Riverbed: An Eco-Noir Mystery* (www.riverbedgame.com). I've completed the first episode and am hoping for some advice and possibly assistance to finish the other seven.

The game is a first-person interactive experience (part game/part story) about water scarcity. The fictional storyline is based on several real-world cases (Aral Sea, Colorado and Ganges Rivers). The *Riverbed* is designed to raise awareness about water scarcity and help players to better understand the dynamics at work. The *Riverbed* visually and interactively illustrates the power of water to transform landscapes and directly change people's lives. Issues like upstream/downstream, sustainability, conservation and the security dilemma are explored in a fun and engaging way.

Episode One of the game was an exhibitor at the G4C Expo this year where it received a positive response. It also won Best in Show at the Academy of Art Annual Show and was a Semi-Finalist in the ADAA.

So far, I've done all the work and financing on my own. Now that I have Episode One complete, my hope is to connect with a non-profit or other entity dealing with water related issues who might be interested in sponsoring the game. The goal is to create a mechanism whereby fresh water or infrastructure will be donated to water-scarce areas on a per play basis. In this way players are learning about water and helping to solve the problem simultaneously. I am wondering if anyone can offer help or advice in finding an interested sponsor.

Another area in which I was hoping for advice is research. I'd like to conduct a controlled research study using *The Riverbed* in an A/B model to explore the relationship between serious message "dose" and user response. By tweaking the dose levels of the serious (environmental) message, I can create a control case to look at how players respond to different levels and placement of messaging. I'm wondering if anyone can give me advice in this area, such as what's been done before and how I might structure the test for results which will be more useful for the serious games community. I have access to the Academy of Art's user testing lab to work on this study but am looking for some guidance.

Thanks for reading this and for any light you might shed on how I can move forward with this labor of love!

Best Regards,

Mary Wharmby
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