Transmedia Storytelling as a Marketing Strategy for Online Games

A Case Study on League of Legends' Transmedia Narrative

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the video game industry has experienced an explosive growth. As the multi-billion entertainment industry is continuously rising, more ways are unfolding as to how products are being marketed. *League of Legends*, a multiplayer online game released in 2009 by American video game developer Riot Games, has become a global phenomenon. With its commercial success, additional content such as music videos featuring the game's characters and a Netflix TV show based on the game were released to both fans and non-fans of *League of Legends*. This has led to the construction of a transmedia narrative that spans across multiple media platforms. Previously, transmedia storytelling has been studied from various angles, such as for movie franchises, but its usage as a marketing tool for online games is rather unexplored. Given the success and social significance of *League of Legends'* transmedia narrative, it was used as a case study to explore the concept of transmedia storytelling in relation to an online game's transmedia marketing strategies. Therefore, this research investigates this topic at the intersection of game, media, and marketing studies, with the following research question: *How is transmedia storytelling used in League of Legends' transmedia marketing strategies?* Based on this question, a qualitative approach was taken to arrive at a meaningful answer. Various academic sources were reviewed to establish a theoretical framework based on the core concepts of transmedia storytelling and marketing, as well as the subject of online games. This was followed by a methodology for which a textual analysis in the form of thematic analysis was chosen as the research method given its suitability for this study. A television series of nine episodes and two music videos were selected as audiovisual content, taken from *League of Legends'* transmedia narrative and were analyzed using thematic analysis, which led to the emergence of three main themes. The first theme, *reinforcing the game's macro story*, shows that transmedia storytelling is used to reference ideas and elements of the game in the transmedia content, which creates a sense of connection for the audience of *League of Legends*. The second theme, *adding additional angles and elements to the narrative*, reveals how new aspects are introduced through the transmedia content that build upon the online game's existing narrative and provide more value for the audience. The final theme of implementing dimension and depth indicates how transmedia storytelling offers new insights that push *League of Legends'* narrative further and impose new dynamics based on the game's universe. Towards the end, the theoretical and social implications of this study are presented, along with the limitations and potential directions for future research.

KEYWORDS: *Transmedia storytelling, Transmedia marketing, Online games, League of Legends, Thematic analysis*

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PREFACE

Gaming has always played a significant role in my life as it often allowed me to escape any harsh realities while growing up. Therefore, I am delighted and thankful to have written my master's thesis about a topic I am deeply passionate about and view this as a love note to gaming.

With that being said, I could not have undertaken this journey without the invaluable support and expertise of my supervisor, Dr. Teresa de la Hera. Thank you for always providing me with new perspectives and for encouraging me in times of doubt.

A special feeling of gratitude to my parents who have taught me that resilience will always pay off. I also wish to acknowledge my sister for being a source of inspiration and whose good examples have shown me to work hard for the things I aspire to achieve.
Thank you all for believing in me.

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1. Introduction

In an era of media convergence, transmedia storytelling becomes ever so present. The ways in which stories are told are everything but linear, partially caused by technological advancements that have led to dynamic changes within digital landscapes (Chakaveh & Bogen, 2007). Nowadays, as digital devices fulfill a multitude of purposes and individual differentiations become blurred, it is natural that changes are in place when it comes to producing and consuming entertainment. This is where transmedia storytelling comes in, a term first coined by Henry Jenkins (2014). Simply put, the concept of transmedia storytelling can be understood as a technique of telling a story over multiple platforms. It can be used to leverage different media platforms and market products beyond a single channel. Yet, an interconnectedness between the different products exists due to the first product that then sparked the creation of new ones to follow. As one of the main aspects of this thesis, transmedia storytelling can be considered a versatile concept that can be used in numerous ways. As a marketing tool, it is commonly found within entertainment culture (Cronin, 2016), with online games being a common medium used as part of a transmedia narrative.

This thesis is focused on the study of transmedia storytelling as a way to market and expand online game worlds. It aims to understand how the phenomenon of transmedia storytelling is used as a strategic marketing tool in the specific case of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), showcasing how it is employed within its transmedia narrative. Following this short introduction to the topic, this chapter will be completed with the following sections: defining the research problem at hand and formulating the research question (1.1), positioning this study based on literature to explain its academic relevance (1.2); arguing for the social relevance of this topic (1.3); and concluding with a section that grants an overview for the remainder of the thesis (1.4).

1.1 Research question

Recently, the growing use of transmedia storytelling as a marketing strategy has been observed within the gaming industry (Pearson, 2021). One game, in particular, is shaped by several transmedia marketing strategies and serves as an excellent case to be investigated for this thesis: *League of Legends* by American video game developer Riot Games. *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) is classified as a multiplayer online battle arena (hereinafter: MOBA) and was first released on October 21, 2009, to open beta. Typical for a MOBA, *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) is a team-based game, in which two teams of five

players each compete against each other, with the main goal of capturing the enemy team's base while simultaneously defending one's own base. Before each match, players need to select one champion to play out of a pool of 159 champions (as of February 2022). Every champion has a unique lore, fictional origin, personalized voice lines, and a unique set of abilities. With the existence of relationships between the characters, there is an abundance of depth and storylines. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2019) counts itself among the most played online games in the world with over 180 million active players (Heimer, 2017; Kelly, 2021).

While *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) primary story is being told through the game itself, Riot Games has recently also ventured into music and television production, which led to the game's transmedia narrative (Lupasco, 2021; Clark, 2021). Think of playing the video game, in which you become more invested with the characters you are navigating. Afterwards, you watch some music videos of a virtual band consisting of the game's characters, on your mobile phone. Inspired by the content, you watch the newly released Netflix TV show based on *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) later and learn more about the game's characters and fictional worlds. This short anecdote encapsulates how one can enjoy *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia content on different mediums.

To specify, the transmedia content includes the virtual music group *K/DA* of which four *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) champions are part of. *K/DA* made its debut in 2018 and proved to be a commercial success. Furthermore, it also includes the critically acclaimed 2021 Netflix show *Arcane*. Both examples, which attracted a large audience of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) players and non-players, will be elaborated upon in later sections. However, this makes the use of transmedia marketing in connection to the online game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) a clear example of the relevance and value of this growing trend in the gaming industry.

Considering both the popularity of *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2019) transmedia narrative, as well as taking media convergence and the rise of the gaming industry into account, this study aims to answer the following research question:

> *How is transmedia storytelling used in League of Legends' transmedia marketing strategies?*

1.2 Academic relevance

As with any dissertation, it is crucial to position one's research within the academic discourse and to discuss its relevance. For that, an overview of previously conducted studies will be provided that are relevant to the thesis and help to identify the gaps it is aiming to fill. These studies can be divided into two categories, namely those that focus on transmedia storytelling and marketing, and those that have explored *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) from various angles.

In the past, numerous studies have been carried out on the use of transmedia storytelling in relation to several industries and sectors. This includes, for instance, educational settings (e.g. Rodrigues & Bidarra, 2014; Munaro & Vieira, 2016) or business and CSR communication (e.g. Coombs, 2019; Hall et al., 2021), which demonstrates the technique's versatility. Furthermore, transmedia storytelling has been studied as part of transmedia marketing (e.g. McClearen, 2017; Hassler-Forest, 2016; Jakus & Zubcic, 2016). However, when it comes to the usage of transmedia marketing within entertainment culture, the majority of literature is focused on television series like the ones on the television network HBO (Bourdaa, 2014), movies or books like the Star Wars franchise (Guynes & Hassler-Forest, 2017), or the music industry (Bengtsson & Edlom, 2021). Although there are few studies on the use of transmedia storytelling in connection to serious gaming (Raybourn, 2014), and video games as part of transmedia narratives (Veugen, 2016), it would be relevant to study how an online game itself employs transmedia storytelling as part of its transmedia marketing strategies. Hence, it becomes clear that recent studies on transmedia marketing in relation to online games are rather limited.

Given *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) global popularity, it is an interesting example to study from an academic perspective within game studies. With a large player base and many possible angles to be explored, it is natural that many studies exist, with a focus on the online game (Demediuk et al., 2018; Ratan et al., 2019; Monge & O'Brien, 2021). While these studies are relevant and timely, they have mostly focused on socialization aspects, player interaction, player experiences, and gender disparity. This shows that researchers tend to study player dynamics of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), considering its fast-paced gameplay, and also the frequently mentioned toxic player community (Kou, 2020).

Furthermore, an ample number of studies focus on *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) eSports sector and the marketing thereof (Lee et al., 2014; Mora-Cantallops & Sicilia, 2019; Kim, 2017; Kou & Gui, 2020). Ever since the growth of the eSports sector in recent

years, more and more scholars researched the topic, while using *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) as a case study (Wang, 2018; Castellanos & Corps, 2020). Overall, how transmedia storytelling is embedded in *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia marketing strategies is rather unexplored in academia and necessitates further investigation. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill the academic gap of studying *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) in relation to transmedia marketing. This makes the thesis academically relevant as it aims to contribute to the research field at the intersection of online games and transmedia marketing with a case study of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009).

1.3 Social relevance

In addition to academic relevance, this thesis also aims to offer relevant insights and value for society. To be specific, gaming industry professionals can take advantage of the findings provided in this research and leverage their marketing strategies through transmedia storytelling. The gaming industry itself is relevant to study from a societal point of view due to its significance and recent growth. In a short period, the global number of active video game players rose drastically from just under 2 billion in 2015 to an estimated 2.95 billion as of 2022, while the industry is expected to grow even further in the years to come, with no signs of slowing down (Clement, 2021). This exemplifies the impact of the video game industry on entertainment and its increasing popularity, particularly in the current digital age and convergence culture. Given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, home entertainment has become of great importance to many people due to isolation and loneliness, which also factors into these developments. Consequently, an increase in video game sales was reported, surging 20% to nearly $180 billion worth (Epstein, 2020), making it one of the most profitable entertainment industries.

Furthermore, *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) success as one of the key players within the gaming industry makes it a relevant example for this case study. As of now, the video game has expanded to 13 different servers across the globe since its release (Heimer, 2017). Not only has the game grown in terms of its player base and popularity over the years, but it has also created an entire fictional universe that is adored by many online communities around the world (James, 2022). Adding to the fictional universe, Riot Games has recently expanded *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) narrative across channels even further by producing the virtual K-pop-inspired girl band *K/DA* and the 2021 Netflix show *Arcane* (Lupasco, 2021; Clark, 2021). Not only have they both been commercially successful, but they have also fulfilled the purpose of attracting new audiences to the game.

Therefore, *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) benefits from a large player base, which makes them an easy audience to target when it comes to promoting further content based on the game. This makes the win twofold since additional content such as music or a TV show gratifies the existing fans and is even considered as a 'gift' to devoted players (Li, 2021), while it simultaneously helps to attract new ones.

An example of a game franchise that has expanded its universe by producing movies and print publications, is the action-adventure role-playing game (RPG) *Assassins' Creed* (Ubisoft, 2007; Ruppert, 2021). Another major title in the same genre that has done something similar is the *Tomb Raider* (Eldos Interactive, 2016) franchise featuring Lara Croft, which stems from the action-adventure game back in 1996 (Anslee, 2021). Although the first game was released more than two decades ago, it was adapted for cinema again only recently in 2018, alongside the release of mobile versions due to the changing technological landscape. This indicates the timely and growing trend of utilizing transmedia storytelling in the gaming industry (Ruppert, 2021). *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), however, is a different game genre and is one of the few MOBA games to exhibit transmedia narratives. (Ruppert, 2021). Furthermore, this could signify the demand for transmedia content from a consumer's point of view. It seems therefore socially relevant to study the potential of transmedia storytelling with the case of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) and how it can elevate the gaming industry's ways to produce and market content.

1.4 Chapter outline

This introduction chapter has established a starting point for this study by defining the research problem and stating both the academic and social relevance of the topic. Subsequently, the structure for the rest of this thesis will be outlined by providing a preview of the following chapters. The theoretical framework, which serves as the second chapter, discusses relevant theories and previous literature according to the two main sections of transmedia storytelling and marketing, as well as transmedia in online games. The third chapter presents the methodology of the study, which covers all methodological elements ranging from the research design to sampling strategy, data collection, operationalization, data analysis, and validity and reliability. In the fourth chapter, the findings are presented and analyzed thematically in a structured manner. In the last chapter of the thesis, concluding insights of the thesis and an answer to the research question are given. Additionally, theoretical and social implications are reflected upon, limitations are outlined and angles for future research are suggested.

2. Theoretical Framework

As this study aims to develop an understanding of the ways transmedia storytelling is used for marketing purposes in the case of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), it is necessary to create a theoretical framework that looks at pre-existing literature relevant to this study. Therefore, the following chapter explores previous theories and theoretical concepts, which will be reflected upon. The theoretical framework will not only provide an overview of studies to serve the research question, *How is transmedia storytelling used in League of Legends' transmedia marketing strategies?*, but also discuss those studies from a critical perspective. This chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first section, the topic of transmedia storytelling is introduced from a theoretical standpoint, while delving into its definition, as well as a discussion of media convergence and transmedia marketing (2.1). This is then followed by a section that discusses online games specifically and explores their marketing, as well as how transmedia marketing is used, with the help of previous case studies (2.2).

2.1 Positioning the transmedia narrative

This research aims to explore the usage of transmedia storytelling within the context of *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) marketing strategies. Before this is achieved, it is beneficial to gain an understanding of the current media landscape, in which the online game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) operates. Furthermore, it is essential to arrive at a definition of transmedia storytelling given its theoretical complexity, as well as introduce different concepts of transmedia marketing. Hence, this section of the theoretical framework will serve as an introduction to the main concepts relevant to the topic of the thesis and give attention to convergence, definitions of transmedia storytelling, and the various elements of transmedia marketing.

2.1.1 An era of convergence

As touched upon in the introduction, one first needs to consider the notion of convergence which can be argued to be influential for transmedia storytelling and marketing. Central to this thesis' topic of transmedia storytelling and marketing, convergence plays a major role in which content is produced and consumed given the wide array of multipurpose platforms. Generally speaking, convergence can be distinguished between technological convergence, media convergence, and convergence culture which will be elaborated upon in

this section. Due to an abundance of both technological devices and media platforms in the digital age, the differentiation between them becomes increasingly blurred.

Technological convergence is commonly defined as the process of merging communication and information technologies, which have previously operated independently from one another (Papadakis, 2017). To illustrate this concept with an example, devices such as cell phones or TVs used to have their designated purpose for making calls and watching audiovisual content respectively, whereas nowadays these devices can both be used for streaming or gaming, and much more (Papadakis, 2017). Hence, many devices are not limited to only one function but fulfill more purposes by taking advantage of features from different devices (Olawuyi & Mgbole, 2012). Through these technical advancements, technological convergence changes the way people consume content as they become less reliant on using different devices. This is relevant for transmedia storytelling and marketing as it allows for different types of content to be consumed on a single technological system. Although *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) is an online game, other content as part of its transmedia narrative, such as music videos or a TV show can be communicated through the same device. Not only does this make the consumption more convenient as fewer devices are needed, but it also saves costs and space, while opening up new opportunities for game developers to communicate with their audiences (Olawuyi & Mgbole, 2012).

Moreover, convergence is also defined as "the realm of possibilities when cooperation occurs between print and broadcast for the delivery of multimedia content for the use of computers and the internet" (Lawson-Borders, 2006, p.4). Hereby, the focus lies on the shift and merging of traditional media and technology, which one can relate to media convergence as it focuses more on that specific aspect. However, Jenkins (2004) argues that media convergence goes beyond the mere technological shift, but it is that media can be found anywhere and are all interconnected. By bringing up the example of Viacom, which produces all sorts of media products, and contrasting it to old Hollywood, which solely focused on cinema, the significance of media convergence is being underlined (Jenkins, 2004). Therefore, the concept of media convergence becomes ever so important when looking at the case of Riot Games, which literally has 'games' in its name and started out as game studio, is now producing other media products collaboratively as well (Pei, 2019). This shows that media convergence applies to this case study of *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia narrative, which stems from a company that actively conforms to the concept.

Lastly, convergence culture can be understood as a constant flow of content across various media channels, which is a change in the digital landscape that is impacting culture

and society (Jenkins, 2007). On the other hand, Granitz and Forman (2015) propose a similar definition, with the addition of different industries and audiences for the flow of content, instead of just the media platforms. This indicates that convergence culture is not only about the media platform, but also includes the flow across industries and different audiences. To be even more specific, five pointers are listed, namely 1) different (parts of the) stories, 2) different platforms, 3) different entry points, 4) for different users, and 5) different ways for consumers (Granitz and Forman, 2015), which emphasizes the interconnectedness of this phenomenon. Deuze (2007) discusses convergence culture with a focus on the creative industries and mentions that participation has become an important part of media culture. This leads to new work environments, to which media and creative industry professionals have to adjust. As part of this convergence culture, new opportunities are opened up for businesses and professionals that want to speed up the distribution of their messages, whereas consumers are able to control that flow. When applied to the case study of *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia narrative, it becomes clear that audiences are an important part of convergence culture and that their interest needs to be established for any further consumption of the transmedia content. It is therefore the consumer's decision what to consume across industries and platforms.

A combination of these different concepts of convergence present a dynamic and rapidly changing environment that allows transmedia storytelling to thrive and come to fruition. Having multi-purpose devices, companies that branch out and produce content of different mediums, as well as audiences that actively take part in the flow of content, has led to an ideal breeding ground for transmedia narratives.

2.1.2 Defining transmedia storytelling

Since transmedia storytelling is a key concept in this study, it is necessary to first discuss its definition. Initially, Jenkins (2014) introduced the term by explaining that transmedia storytelling deals with the systematic dispersion of different pieces of a story through multiple platforms, which are then supposed to actively engage with the respective audiences. However, in addition to this definition of transmedia storytelling, Jenkins (2016) also referred to the idea of cross media ownership, which caused media convergence in the first place, as described in the previous section. This describes how products are owned across platforms, as well as different media industries, which shows similarities to transmedia storytelling given the utilization of multiple platforms. Thus, it signifies how closely related transmedia storytelling is to media convergence. Nevertheless, despite the similarities

between these two notions, transmedia storytelling shall not be confused with cross-media storytelling, which Peterson (2006) describes as ways in which physical mediums are used to send messages across platforms during the production process.

Although Jenkins (2014) was the first to introduce transmedia storytelling, he is not the only one who has defined the term. Other scholars have focused more on the consumer side of transmedia storytelling and its implications relating to the audience's immersion within the story (Rose, 2012). Hereby, Rose (2012) explains that audiences become more encapsulated through an immersive experience, due to all the content that is available over multiple channels. Philips (2012), on the other hand, argued that transmedia storytelling can also be understood as a single story that is simultaneously told through multiple platforms. Here, the platforms can vary, ranging from movies, books, podcasts, (digital) games, print media, music, or even physical exhibitions (Gliddon, 2020). Considering the comprehensive definition by Jenkins (2014) that relates to both the dispersion of story pieces and the engagement with audiences on multiple platforms, it seems to be the most suitable one when it comes to finding an answer to this study's research question.

2.1.3 Elements of transmedia marketing

While transmedia storytelling can be utilized to establish a transmedia ecosystem full of interconnected story pieces, it is a technique that can also be used to market products. In essence, transmedia marketing refers to content that is produced and distributed via different media channels, ultimately with the goal of marketing or promoting another single product. Therefore, it can be argued that when transmedia storytelling is being utilized by dispersing story pieces via different channels (Jenkins, 2014), then transmedia marketing is always indirectly in place as well. While it may not always be the intention, transmedia marketing can be considered an indirect side effect of transmedia storytelling, which is why these two terms are sometimes used interchangeably (Ryan, 2015).

Scolari (2009) argues that there are four different types of strategies that are applicable to transmedia theories which help us understand the value of transmedia storytelling used for marketing purposes, namely the creation of *interstitial micro stories*, *parallel stories*, *peripheral stories*, and *user-generated content platform*s. *Interstitial micro stories* refer to stories that aim to fill a gap between breaks and *parallel stories* explains the strategy used when creating "another story that unfolds at the same time as the macro story" (Scolari, 2009, p. 598). When creating *peripheral stories*, the goal is to create stories that are only loosely connected to the macro story. Finally, *user-generated content platforms* focus on

external content created by audiences, such as fan fiction (Scolari, 2009). Given their applicability, this theoretical framework can be used in this study for the analysis of the transmedia content created by *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009).

Furthermore, a study from research consultancy Latitude by Gaskins (2012), suggests that it is also important to research the perspective of the respective audience when conducting transmedia marketing. Following this study, four concepts should be explored when analyzing transmedia marketing strategies: *immersion, interactivity, integration, and impact* (Gaskins, 2012). *Immersion* deals with strengthening the sensory experience of feeling submerged, whereas *interactivity* deals with the question of whether the audience has an impact on how a story unfolds. *Integration* looks into the cohesiveness of the story, and *impact* refers to the influence a story has on the audience that inspires them to take action. *Impact,* for instance, could be seen as a prerequisite to Scolari's (2009) strategy of *user-generated content platforms* as the audience needs to feel inspired enough by the impact of the story to take action, before producing user-generated content. Given the complementary value of this framework to Scolari's contribution, it will be relevant to relate the findings of this study to the game's audience.

Concerning these strategies, Bourdaa (2013) generally sees transmedia storytelling as a way to expand a product's reach by finding more potential viewers. By reaching out to audiences on different platforms, it is likely to reach people who do not consume the original source of the transmedia narrative. Because we live in a world where people engage with content on different devices and platforms, it is necessary that organizations make use of transmedia storytelling to appeal to the current generations of users (Thibeault 2013, as cited in Cronin, 2016). This emphasizes that transmedia storytelling is not an opportunity, but rather a necessity in today's media landscape. Furthermore, Cronin (2016) elaborates that it is ultimately about creating a "unified and coordinated consumer experience with the brand, with each medium making its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" (p. 89). Yet, it is important that when using transmedia storytelling as a marketing strategy, each contribution needs to be able to stand on its own (Cronin, 2016). A combination of these perspectives on transmedia marketing will be used to gain an understanding of the specific case of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009).

To illustrate transmedia marketing with an example that uses some of the aforementioned strategies, a previous study by Sánchez (2014) will be used. Although unrelated to gaming due to the limited research in that field, the transmedia campaign was called "#Dropped Transmedia Universe' and is a case on Heineken, which investigated

transmedia marketing in corporate communications. Through seven different audiovisual products and platforms, an entire narrative that featured *parallel stories, peripheral stories, and user-generated content* was created. These seven products and platforms include 1) television, 2) a web series on their YouTube channel, 3) their website, 4) live events at airports, 5) social media including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, 6) co-created content like parodies, 7) and an online game (Sánchez, 2014).

2.1.4. Transmedia marketing and the audience

Now that several transmedia marketing elements were discussed, it is worthwhile to review the audience perspective of transmedia storytelling and marketing. Gaskins (2012) of research consultancy Latitude explains that it is of great value to understand one's marketing audience in order to cater to their specific needs. A classification of four types of audiences is made, namely *Seekers, Relaters, Realists,* and *Players* which all differ in their demographic interests. Furthermore, a connection is made between these four audience types to the aforementioned transmedia marketing strategies concerning *immersion, interactivity, integration, and impact* (Gaskins, 2012). First of all, *Seekers* are the ones that seek out additional information about the products. This can be in the form of any bonus content like short stories, trivia, or user-generated content. They can be considered a curious group of audience that wants to experience more and become fully immersed with the story, hence it is most closely related to *immersion*. Secondly, *Relaters* refers to an active audience that feels gratified when experiencing *interactivity*. There are multiple ways for this interaction to occur, either by interacting with fictional characters of the story and establishing bonds with them or by connecting with other audience members, such as fandoms and online communities, who share the same interests and passions regarding a story. The third audience type is *Realists*, which is characterized by a preference for non-fictional stories due to the impact that can be made. An example of this could be a biographical one that allows the audience to gain value and feel inspired to take action themselves by improving their own lives. Lastly, *Players* is a type of audience that are argued to embody all four aforementioned transmedia marketing elements. Driven by their passion for stories, they entail aspects that are related to *immersion, interactivity, integration, and impact* (Gaskins, 2012). Therefore, they are full of passion and would not be satisfied with only seeking out additional information, but also strive to contribute to the stories themselves by producing their own stories and actively engaging with others for example. Although these audience types can act as useful guidelines, it can be argued that they are not generalizable for every person. Hence,

it would not be surprising if people could identify themselves with more than one audience type or perhaps find themselves switching between multiple types depending on the story and their feelings. It is therefore important to realize that these audience types are not perfectly descriptive of every individual but should rather be taken as indications to which people can relate in a broader sense.

By outlining the connection between transmedia strategies and audience types, it offers new revelations about the possible intentions behind certain campaigns. Hence, it becomes a task for this thesis to identify any patterns within *League of Legends*' (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia narrative and to understand what audience types were possibly catered to.

2.2 Marketing of online games

Now that the notions of convergence as well as transmedia storytelling and marketing have been laid out, this following segment will cover academic literature on the marketing of online games. Naturally, online games play an important role in this thesis as *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) serves as a case study in which transmedia storytelling is explored. Therefore, it is important to look at the business and marketing of online games and also discuss this medium from an academic standpoint. Ultimately, this second section builds upon the first one and provides a framework with the help of literature that focuses on the marketing and transmedia storytelling of online games.

2.2.1 Online games as a business

With *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) being the case for this thesis and a well-established product by Riot Games, it is beneficial to gain an understanding of the marketing of online games. Given the fact that transmedia narratives are built upon the game, it is safe to assume that *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) remains the main product of Riot Games that sustains the company financially. A quantitative study by Mathews and Wearn (2016) explored how modern video games are marketed, through a survey method distributed among the gaming community and some game design students. A differentiation is made between AAA games, which are considered games by large commercial studios that can assert a high marketing budget, and indie games, which are rather small-scale and led by small teams without many financial needs (Mathews & Wearn, 2016). Taking into account the aforementioned insights on *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), it is clear that the online game falls under the description of the former, which is why the survey results relating

to the AAA games are taken into account. Hereby, the results show that the majority of respondents tend to find their friends' and families' opinions to be the most trustworthy, which indicates the efficiency of word of mouth. Contrary to advertisements in television, another entertainment industry, which were less well-received, video game companies should focus on stimulating word of mouth that will lead to people's friends and families recommending the games they consume. While word of mouth can be stimulated by companies to a certain extent, it is ultimately dependent on the content that sparks conversations between people.

While this idea is not focused on transmedia marketing of online games, but rather marketing of online games in a more traditional sense, it can still be related to the study of this thesis. Additional transmedia content of an online game could be argued to encourage word of mouth, especially between different types of audiences. There are different instances of how this could play out; 1) *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) players recommend its transmedia content to non-players through word of mouth, or 2) *Seekers*, a term used for audiences that seek out additional information (Gaskins, 2012), convince other *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) players—who might be less tempted to consume its transmedia content—to do it regardless. This shows that transmedia storytelling can be effective in marketing online games due to word of mouth, which aligns with the findings of Mathews and Wearn (2016).

In support of this, Zackariasson and Wilson' (2012) chapter on video game marketing explains that video games should not be published with the expectation to gain traction and sell well right from the start, despite high marketing efforts. Instead, it is more about identifying a gap within the industry or a specific segment that one needs to adapt to and serve a certain need (Zackariasson & Wilson, 2012). Therefore, this study of transmedia marketing in online games could potentially fill that gap for online games since new content across different channels could reach a larger and more diverse audience. With audiences that are exposed to various platforms, it becomes advantageous to leverage transmedia marketing strategies and serve the individual needs that are tailored towards a certain platform. In sum, this research contributes to the field of marketing online games by exploring the angle of transmedia storytelling and marketing within the medium based on a popular case.

2.2.2. Transmedia storytelling and online games

As previously mentioned, there are only limited studies that have discussed transmedia storytelling and marketing of online games despite its growing usage within the medium. However, with the example of the massively multiplayer online role-playing game *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), Barabás (2020) explains how transmedia storytelling is present in the game's geographical space with many different storylines as part of the worldbuilding, but also how different stories are spanned across media channels. Hereby, it is argued that a player's game and lore knowledge acquired from previously released content can determine one's in-game decisions and elevate the gaming experience (Barabás, 2020). This signifies the influence of transmedia narratives and how online games can be experienced completely differently due to the player's preexisting knowledge. It can also be explained by the fact that online games are an interactive medium, in which players can actively interact with the game.

Contrastingly, Schröter (2015) took a different approach by analyzing the games created that serve as additional transmedia narratives to the television series *Game of Thrones*. While this example does not originate from an online game, but rather a book series, it can still be considered relevant. By comparing three *Game of Thrones* online games, he concludes that the notion of *game logic* is an important factor when it comes to the design and success of such games. *Game logic* relates to the narrative continuity concerning settings, characters, or events from the source of origin (Schröter, 2015). However, this is not employed by every game as many do not stay true to the original macro story and follow different strategies. In this case, the original material is a book series that was also previously adapted by TV. This includes a focus on the cinematic experience that offers depth or simply producing a game that is economically efficient and takes on a free-to-play model. Therefore, this thesis will apply the notion of *game logic* to the findings and investigate its appropriateness for the case of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009)

3. Methodology

This chapter provides a methodological overview of the study that helps to research the topic of transmedia storytelling and marketing in relation to the case of the online game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) with the following research question: *How is transmedia storytelling used in League of Legends' transmedia marketing strategies?* While the findings of the analysis are not exactly replicable given the qualitative nature of this study, all methodological choices are justified systematically to ensure credibility (Brennen, 2012). Hence, a thorough rundown of all steps taken during the research is presented, which offers insights as to how the research was conducted.

This chapter is divided into seven sections. Firstly, the case study is introduced, and it is explained why a case study was suitable to research the topic of this thesis (3.1). This is then followed by a discussion and justification of the research design, which is of qualitative nature (3.2). Then, the sampling strategy alongside a detailed explanation of the sample is presented (3.3). Afterwards, it is revealed how the data was collected and stored (3.4), followed by a section on the operationalization of concepts that stem from the theory (3.5). Next, the data analysis process is indicated, as well as the steps leading to the code tree (3.6). In the final section of this chapter, the validity and reliability of this study are elaborated and critically reflected upon (3.7).

3.1 Case study

In order to answer the research question *"How is transmedia storytelling used in League of Legends' transmedia marketing strategies?",* it was necessary to conduct research from a qualitative approach to dive more deeply into the topic's phenomena in a meaningful manner. Considering that quantitative studies are mostly characterized by close-ended, or cause-and-effect questions that aim to quantify the analysis of data while testing theories (Creswell, 2018), it further reaffirmed the choice for a qualitative approach following the research question.

In addition to that, this study makes use of a case study to explore the complex phenomena of transmedia storytelling and marketing, with the selected case being the online game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009). According to Brennen (2012), case studies are commonly used in qualitative research and social sciences and should be considered when wanting to focus on one single subject. This makes case studies especially useful for the study of a specific subject with the aim of gaining in-depth knowledge on the matter,

regarding its implications and characteristics. *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) serves as an appropriate case for the study of transmedia marketing in the gaming industry given the amount of content that has been created as part of its transmedia marketing strategy. As previously explained in the introduction (1.3; 1.4), *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) is a commercially successful video game that has grown significantly in terms of the number of players. In combination with its grand transmedia ecosystem that has been established over the recent years, the relevance and suitability for a case study based on the topic of this study become prevalent. Despite these aspects, *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia narrative has yet to be studied extensively from an academic point of view. Therefore, this study analyzed two of *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia products in particular, which can be classified as audiovisual. The content analyzed consists of (1) the online music videos of the virtual music group *K/DA,* and (2) the animated Netflix TV show *Arcane*, which are both parts of the transmedia marketing strategy of the game. In the sampling section (3.3) of this chapter, more details are provided about the selection of these two content examples for the study.

3.2 Research design

Within media studies, Brennen (2012) argues that a qualitative method should be considered when the researcher wants to study the values and meanings that media holds, which apply to this thesis. Additionally, qualitative methods are known for their meaning-making potential and deep comprehension of social phenomena that go beyond the surface (Brennen, 2012). Given the fact that transmedia storytelling can be a multifold concept that is utilized in many different ways, it was deemed appropriate to select a qualitative method that interprets the findings in a meaningful way. Furthermore, Flick (2018) explains that qualitative research aims at understanding social phenomena that are naturally occurring without any interference, which applies to the case of transmedia storytelling and marketing, and the narratives that are constructed. Therefore, a qualitative research method allowed the researcher to derive more in-depth meanings from the data, which made it the most suitable approach for this particular case study.

Now that the methodological standpoint has been laid out, one now needs to justify the chosen method of this study. Schreier (2013) explains that textual analysis enables a systematic approach when it comes to interpreting the meaning of content, which in this case is both data-driven and theory-driven. Through the combination of an inductive and deductive approach, the researcher was able to seek findings based on predetermined

concepts, as well as allow for the emergence of new themes based on the raw data. Therefore, textual analysis, which deals with the thorough understanding of textual data (Brennen, 2012), can provide the researcher with a more holistic overview of the online game's transmedia narrative from multiple angles, making it easier to compare and contrast the collected data. Hereby, textual data can be retrieved from various sources such as movies, music, or games, and it is the researcher's task to identify the underlying meanings and constructs that are present within those texts. Brennen (2012) explains that textual data contains a wide array of meanings, which can be analyzed with various qualitative research methods. In this case, a textual analysis was selected because it is not only a very versatile method that can be used for many different types of text, but it is also a suitable method to retrieve rich qualitative data and meanings. In the case study of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), audiovisual texts in the form of television episodes and music videos were used for the analysis.

3.3 Sampling

This section describes what considerations were made in terms of sampling techniques, and which criteria were used to select the sample. What kind of content falls under *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia narrative? For this study, any type of content and medium that relates to or is based on the online game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) could be considered to be part of the transmedia narrative. However, given the scope of this master's thesis, inclusion criteria were utilized for collecting the units of analysis. In the following, it is explained how the selection was made, with the addition of a detailed explanation of the selected sample.

When it comes to the sampling technique, a purposive sampling method was selected as it was deemed the most efficient one, which is also one of the suggested methods for qualitative research (Flick, 2018). Purposive sampling is an effective strategy that allowed for a conscious selection of the sample (Flick, 2018), which in this case was focused on the transmedia content as part of the marketing strategy developed for the online game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009). This sampling technique led to a data set that is relevant to the study and was guided by purpose, yet it remained as unbiased as possible. Flick (2018) explains that there are variations to purposive sampling, of which the sample of this study falls under cases selected according to their *intensity*. This means that the selected cases were chosen since they exhibit intriguing characteristics or processes based on how intense the content deals with the topic of interest (Flick, 2018).

League of Legends' (Riot Games, 2009) can be considered one of the pioneers of having a large transmedia ecosystem. From short videos to social media posts, games on different platforms, as well as music videos and a TV show—the list of different content is long. Considering this, a list of sampling criteria needed to be established to narrow down the sample. One sampling criterion was to include bigger and more relevant releases that were commercially successful in terms of their rating and viewership. Contrastingly, short videos on YouTube or social media posts are of smaller scope and do not compare to projects that were released on a larger scale. Furthermore, another sampling criterion called for content that is a different medium than online games to get a more differentiated dataset from the online game itself, which naturally excluded other online games tied to *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009). Therefore, it was ultimately decided to select two music videos of the virtual band *K/DA* and the entire season of the Netflix show *Arcane*, which are cohesive narratives that were commercially (Riot Games, 2009). Hence, two types of mediums were selected (music videos and TV show) as sample, which is in line with the textual analysis approach that calls for a limited dataset to be used, according to Silverman (2019).

After selecting the two types of audiovisual content as sample, they were accessed online and will now be introduced in greater detail. First of all, the virtual group *K/DA* (Figure 4.1) was created in 2018 as part of an in-game cosmetic line, so-called "skins" for four characters that are part of the band (Ahri, Akali, Evelynn, Kai'Sa) (Lupasco, 2021). Skins are a cosmetic feature in *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) and change the appearance of characters, often centered around one theme. Hence, skins merely offer a different look but do not give players an advantage in any way. Similar to other games, skins in *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) are one of the main sources of income for its company Riot Games and are therefore always promoted on *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) social media channels. However, for the *K/DA* skins, which are thematically centered around a K-Pop-inspired music group (hence, each character portrays a band member with their skin), the promotion was taken to another level. Through the production of real music for which well-known singers were hired as well as music videos created, *K/DA* has now become a well-established virtual band with a large following on social media (Lupasco, 2021).

Figure 3.1. K/DA group members (Akali, Ahri, Kai'Sa, Evelynn). (YouTube, 2018).

So far, the group has released two official music videos in total, namely 'POP/STARS' and 'MORE', which were both used as part of the sample. 'POP/STARS' was released on November 3rd, 2018 as part of *K/DA*'s debut. It was uploaded on *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009*)* official YouTube channel of 14 million subscribers and has gained almost 500 million views (Figure 4.2) (League of Legends, 2018). Two years later, a second set of *K/DA* skins were released, which is why *K/DA* then returned with their song 'MORE' and its music video, which was released on October 28th, 2020 (Figure 4.3) (League of Legends, 2020). The large social media following and number of views on the music videos are proof of the success of this group, which was initially only created for the promotion of the skins. However, these factors make the two music videos a highly successful example of transmedia content, which complies with the sampling criteria.
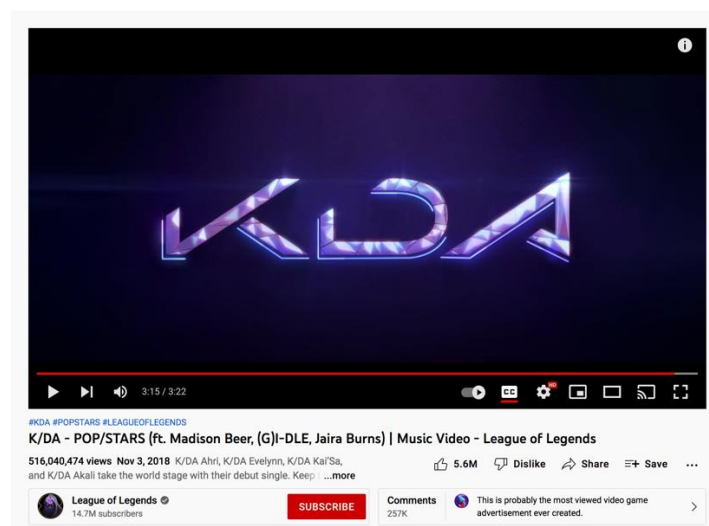

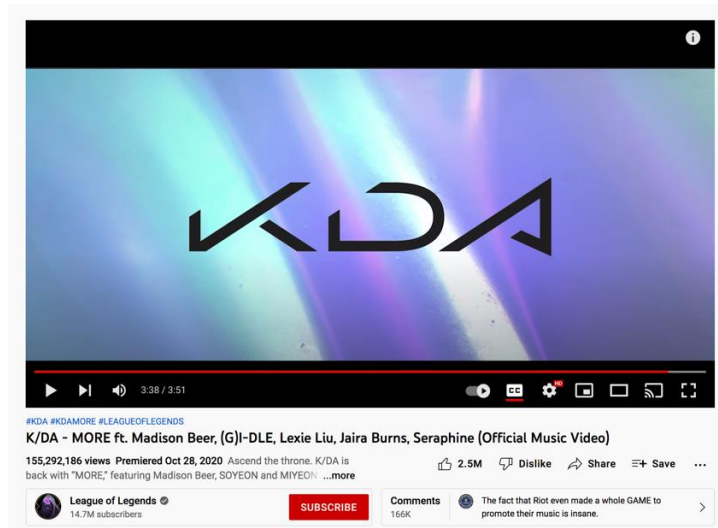*Figure 3.2. K/DA – POP/STARS music video. (YouTube, 2018).*

Figure 3.3. K/DA – MORE music video (YouTube, 2020).

Secondly, Riot Games has stepped foot into the television industry by producing the animated series *Arcane* (Figure 4.4). The first season of nine episodes was released on November 6th, 2021 on the streaming service Netflix, and the entire season was used as part of this study's sample. The TV series includes characters from *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) and is based on the game's lore and fictional worlds. It follows the story of the sisters Jinx and Vi, who are both characters in *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), and takes place in the futuristic city of Piltover and its opposing, underground city Zaun. *Arcane* has become one of the most-watched shows on Netflix, topping charts in 52 countries as the #1 most-viewed series (Tassi, 2021). Furthermore, it was released to critical acclaim with an IMDb rating of 9.4/10, which speaks for the commercial success and quality of the series (Moore, 2021). In total, *Arcane* consists of nine episodes, with each episode lasting between 39-44 minutes. A second season was announced by Riot Games on November 20th, 2021, which is slated for a post-2022 release. Therefore, the data set comprises the first and, as of yet, only season of *Arcane* and the two existing *K/DA* music videos, which is in accordance with methodological guidelines.
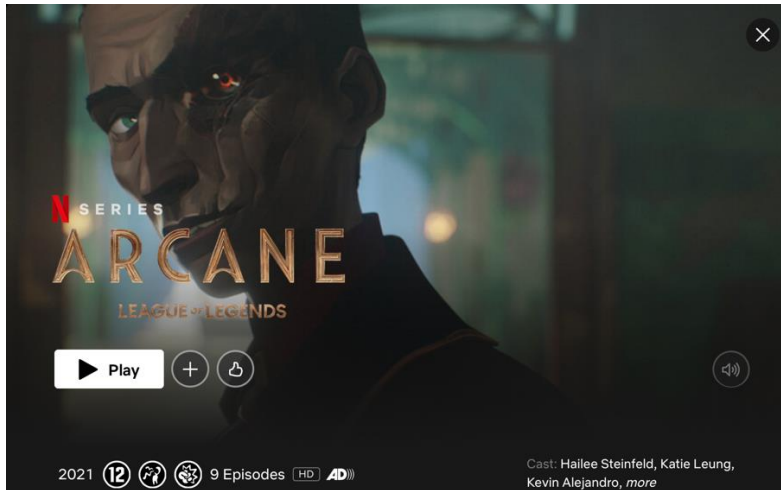
Figure 3.4. Arcane. Netflix, 2021).

3.4 Data collection

As previously described in the sampling section, this data set is comprised of two examples of transmedia content from the online game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009). Both the music videos of 'POP/STARS' and 'MORE' by virtual girl group *K/DA* and the animated TV show *Arcane* were located online. As with most official music videos, the most common platform for such a medium to be uploaded is the web-streaming platform YouTube. This also applies to the *K/DA* music videos, which were both uploaded on the official YouTube channel of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009). *Arcane*, on the other hand, is a Netflix-original production and was therefore created for the streaming service Netflix.

After having located the data, both the *K/DA* 'POP/STARS' and 'MORE' were retrieved via download, and additional screenshots were taken of relevant sequences. The same applies to the show *Arcane*, of which screenshots were taken of various sequences from all episodes. All screenshots were then stored in appropriate folders, which allowed for a structured overview of all collected data. Labels were then also given to each screenshot for context. Moreover, notes were written down while viewing and studying the data extensively, of which some were also added to the screenshots of the *K/DA* music videos and *Arcane* episodes for future reference.

3.5 Operationalization

This operationalization helps to establish a link between the theories and the data analysis process by identifying the transmedia marketing concepts within *League of Legends*' (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia narrative. For this, one can refer back to the previously

outlined theoretical framework that provides a basis for the partly deductive data analysis (Table 3.1). Hence, several concepts were outlined in the theoretical framework which were considered to be of relevance for the operationalization.

First of all, the concepts of *transmedia storytelling* (Jenkins, 2006) and *transmedia marketing* (Cronin, 2016) were taken into account. These served as a backbone for the entire operationalization process as many other theoretical concepts are based upon them. As such, *transmedia storytelling* (Jenkins, 2006) and *transmedia marketing* (Cronin, 2016) were contemplated throughout the whole study. This was then followed by the theoretical concepts by Scolari (2009), which are also seen as strategies of transmedia marketing, namely, *interstitial micro stories, parallel stories, peripheral stories, and user-generated content platforms*. All of these concepts fulfilled different purposes for the analysis of transmedia marketing. For *interstitial micro stories*, it is about identifying stories that aim to fill a gap, whereas *parallel stories* deal with stories that unfold simultaneously. *Peripheral stories* is focused on side stories that are loosely connected to the macro story, and *user-generated content platforms* is about content created by external audiences.

Although this study is not exactly focused on the consumer side of transmedia storytelling and marketing, it was still beneficial to consider different audience types when it comes to *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia narrative. Therefore, while studying the given data, the researcher also aimed to gain an understanding of the different indicators that were tailored to either *Seekers, Relaters, Realists, and Players* (Gaskins, 2012).

Furthermore, the four I's of storytelling laid out by a study from research consultancy Latitude (2012) were applied to this study, concerning *immersion, interactivity, integration, and impact*. Each element is related to the experiences and actions of the audience that are evoked by the content, in one way or another. Finally, we arrive at the concept of *game logic* (Schröter, 2015), which was also investigated for this case study as it describes the continuity of the transmedia narrative.

Concept	As defined by	What was looked for
Transmedia storytelling	Jenkins (2006)	systematic dispersion of different pieces of a story through multiple platforms,

		active engagement with respective audience
Transmedia marketing	Cronin (2016)	unified and coordinated consumer experience with the brand, each medium making its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story
Interstitial micro stories	Scolari (2009)	stories that fill the gap between breaks, relating to the macro story
Parallel stories	Scolari (2009)	stories that unfold at the same time as the macro story
Peripheral stories	Scolari (2009)	stories that are loosely connected to the macro story
user-generated content platforms	Scolari (2009)	external content created by audiences
Immersion	Gaskins (2012)	strengthening the sensory experience
Interactivity	Gaskins (2012)	audience becomes active and takes a role as to how the story unfolds
Integration	Gaskins (2012)	cohesiveness of the story
Impact	Gaskins (2012)	influence of the story on audience, making the audience take action
Seekers	Gaskins (2012)	audience that seeks out additional information to the products

Relaters	Gaskins (2012)	audience that feels gratified when experiencing *interactivity*
Realists	Gaskins (2012)	audience that is characterized by a preference towards non-fictional stories
Players	Gaskins (2012)	audience that embodies all aspects together, including those of *Seekers*, *Relaters*, and *Realists*
Game logic	Schröter (2015)	narrative continuity of the game

Table 3.1. Operationalization.

3.6 Data analysis

After having outlined the sampling, data collection, as well as the operationalization process, it is crucial to now explain what data analysis method was chosen and to justify that choice. Out of many options that are suitable for textual analysis, it was ultimately decided to utilize thematic analysis for this thesis. Braun and Clarke (2012) describe thematic analysis as a flexible method that enables an understanding of various patterns found within the data. After having created codes and structured the data into patterns, it was then possible to analyze those in a systematic way. Furthermore, by having identified patterns, themes emerged, and critical interpretations were made on that basis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This was especially beneficial for the analysis of the transmedia marketing content of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) because it allowed for the data, that is retrieved from the music videos and TV show, to be presented in a thematically organized manner, despite being two different mediums. Although a semiotic analysis could be argued to have been a suitable data analysis method as well, given the audiovisual content that was analyzed, this study did not intend to put an emphasis on identifying and unraveling the meanings of symbols and signs. Instead, it tried to understand how transmedia storytelling was used in *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia universe based on identifiable patterns, which is why a thematic analysis was the most favorable option.

In order to conduct thematic analysis, the six-step guide by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed as it enabled a gradual and structured approach to the data analysis. This ensured a systematic way of handling the data during the analysis process while maximizing

validity and reliability. As a first step, the researcher needed to familiarize himself with the data. This happened naturally during the intensive data collection process while watching the music videos and TV show multiple times, but it also urged the researcher to establish some links or patterns from the start. Secondly, it was necessary to generate initial codes, which was the first step during the data analysis process. During this step, a total of 23 codes were identified which contributed to the generation of the themes and sub-themes. Those initial codes can be considered rather descriptive and overarching labels. Once those initial codes were created, it was time to identify patterns within the data, which allowed for the grouping of the initial codes as part of the third step. This step is also known as axial coding and resulted in the creation of 9 sub-themes in total. The fourth step focused on the critical evaluation of the sub-themes, which then ensured cohesion within all the sub-themes that were created. For the fifth step, the final themes were defined based on the 9 sub-themes, of which 3 final themes were created. The 3 final themes are coherent and aligned with their sub-themes and serve as the answer to the research question. The sixth and final step of the model by Braun and Clarke (2006) called for keeping a clear overview of all themes and reporting the results. This included all the findings, which then had to be related to previous chapters such as the research design and theoretical framework. A coding tree that details these coding steps is attached as appendix B.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the coding software Atlas.ti was used for the analysis. Having uploaded the content such as the *K/DA* music videos, as well as screenshot sequences of the TV show *Arcane*, eased the data analysis process and supported the researcher to keep a better overview of all data. Through Atlas.ti, it was possible to create the initial codes and groupings, which eventually led to the main themes. Therefore, it contributed to the overall data analysis process and eased the process of following the six-step model (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7 Validity and reliability

For the final section of this methodology chapter, it is necessary to discuss the ethical implication, and the validity and reliability as those contribute to a study's credibility. From an ethical standpoint, there are no harms associated with this study. This is mostly due to the type of data that was used. As mentioned before in the data collection process section, all material that was used as data is completely fictional and can be publicly retrieved from online streaming platforms, such as YouTube and Netflix. Additionally, those streaming

platforms are freely accessible and did not require any consent to be used for research purposes.

When it comes to the validity and reliability of this study, both concepts needed to be evaluated according to the chosen research methods, which are of qualitative nature. The data analysis process was overseen by the master's thesis supervisor in its entirety. Therefore, it enabled the researcher to contrast perspectives under the supervision, which lowered the risk of subjectivity and increased the validity. While subjectivity cannot be completely avoided in qualitative research, all academic sources were carefully reviewed in order to provide not only an encompassing outlook on theory but also support this study's validity further.

On the other hand, reliability is concerned with the replicability of the study and to what extent it can be repeated in the future while guaranteeing the same results (Silverman, 2011). In order to achieve that, it was crucial to maintain transparency throughout the entire thesis, like the research design, sampling, data collection, operationalization, and data analysis process. All steps were documented as clearly as possible, while also being substantiated by academic literature. Furthermore, theoretical transparency was maintained, which concerns the basis on which interpretations of the data were made to provide more substance. All these aspects were taken into account when conducting this research, so that reliability can be satisfied.

Since the data analysis, in the form of textual analysis (Brennen, 2007), implemented the six-step model (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as previously described, each step in the data analysis process was explained thoroughly. By having followed the six-step model (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the reliability increased as it ensured a systematic process and a clear overview. This ultimately resulted in more transparency as well, which makes it easier for future research to reproduce this study step-by-step.

4. Results

This study delves into the topic of transmedia storytelling and transmedia marketing with a focus on the online game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) as a case study. It aims to investigate how an established online game is being further marketed through content that spans across a transmedia narrative and how this is being used to the game's advantage in a strategic manner. Especially in an era of media convergence, digital devices can facilitate the usage of various media products which is favorable for transmedia marketing (Papadakis, 2017). Coupled with the continuous growth within the video game industry in recent years, as well as *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) success and its subsequent success of various transmedia products, the following research question was formulated: *How is transmedia storytelling used in League of Legends' transmedia marketing strategies?* This chapter presents the results of a thematic analysis that was conducted on two distinct products, namely, two music videos of *K/DA*, a virtual girl band inspired by *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) characters, and the nine episodes of the Netflix TV show *Arcane*, which are also based on the game. Through the six-step coding process as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006), a coding tree was created (see Appendix B) with three main themes which serve as answer to the research question and are elaborated upon in this chapter. The first theme concerns how *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia content reinforces and references ideas and elements of the game (4.1). The second theme discusses how new aspects are introduced through the transmedia content, adding new angles and elements that build upon the existing game's narrative (4.2). Lastly, the third theme discusses the implementation of dimension and depth, which is about expanding and pushing the existing game's narrative further (4.3).

4.1 Reinforcing the macro story

The first theme that stems from the thematic analysis focuses on the reinforcement of the macro story and product, which is the game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) itself, within the transmedia narrative. As previously explained, *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) serves as the source of origin that inspired additional products and content like *K/DA* and *Arcane*. During the thematic analysis, various references to *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) were found in the data which ultimately led to this pattern of reinforcing the macro story. Through the interplay of video game characters which come with their own backgrounds, origins, and personalities, a wide array of aspects are available for adaptation.

Therefore, the main finding that represents this theme deals with reinforcing certain elements of the game within the transmedia content, which concerns characters and settings for example. Additionally, given that the macro story falls under the medium of a video game, gameplay mechanics were also discovered during the analysis. This pattern could resonate with *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) fans as familiar themes could be recognized within the transmedia narrative. However, this could also work reversely as audiences of *K/DA* or *Arcane*, who do not play *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), could have their interest and curiosity sparked towards the macro story.

The findings of this theme show that reinforcement is primarily achieved through referencing. While it can be expected to encounter characters from the online game in the transmedia content, certain references are more subtle. Similarly, aspects of the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) lore were also found, which basically covers the background story of the overall world, relationships, and characters. Lastly, to stay true to the video game medium, references to gameplay aspects were found, which are most likely more appreciated by the player audience. Overall, this theme consists of three sub-themes. These sub-themes illustrate how the macro story is reinforced in the transmedia narrative, namely through *referencing the character* (4.1.1), *referencing the lore* (4.1.2.), and *referencing gameplay mechanics* (4.1.3).

4.1.1 Referencing the character

When it comes to video games, characters are often accounted as one of the most important assets as they are being controlled by the player. This also applies to the case of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), where a character pool out of over 150+ characters exists. Hence, it is natural that players develop a preference for some characters. Aside from the mere portrayal of characters within the transmedia content, it was also found that certain aspects that feel authentic to the character were hinted at. This led to the first sub-theme of referencing the character, which can be seen through character identity, character attributes, as well as lyrical reflection of the character.

All characters in *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) show aspects that are inherent to their identity and character background. Whether it is something that relates to their personality, region of origin, or general champion style, there is a multitude of identity-related aspects that can be referenced. The first example of referencing the character was found in the *K/DA* 'POP/STARS' music video. Four *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) characters are included in the virtual girl band *K/DA*, which is inspired by Korean popular

music and culture. This alternative universe is constructed to serve a cosmetic skinline, in which characters are rather detached from their in-game personas. Nevertheless, despite the characters' portrayal as pop stars, some references are made to their identity as *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) champions. Akali, one of the four characters as part of *K/DA*, can be seen in figure 4.1 with a dragon motif on her jacket. This idea of Akali's dragon motif is further supported through a dragon graffiti visual in the 'POP/STARS' music video. While the purple jacket in *K/DA* is part of her new look in the alternative universe, the dragon motif creates a reference to the character's identity, who has an identifiable dragon tattoo on her back in her original look. This is shown in figure 4.2, both in Akali's splash art, as well as her in-game champion model. Moreover, this ties in with Scolari's (2009) theory of peripheral stories, as one of the four different techniques of transmedia storytelling and marketing. It describes the idea of transmedia content being somewhat connected to the macro story, albeit loosely at times. In this case, while Akali is positioned in a different universe as a member of the girl band *K/DA*, minor details like her dragon motif establish references to the macro story regardless.
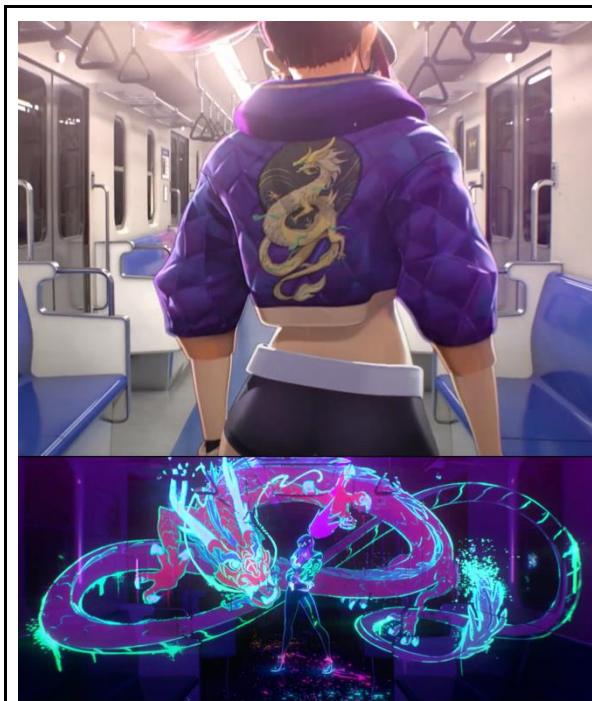

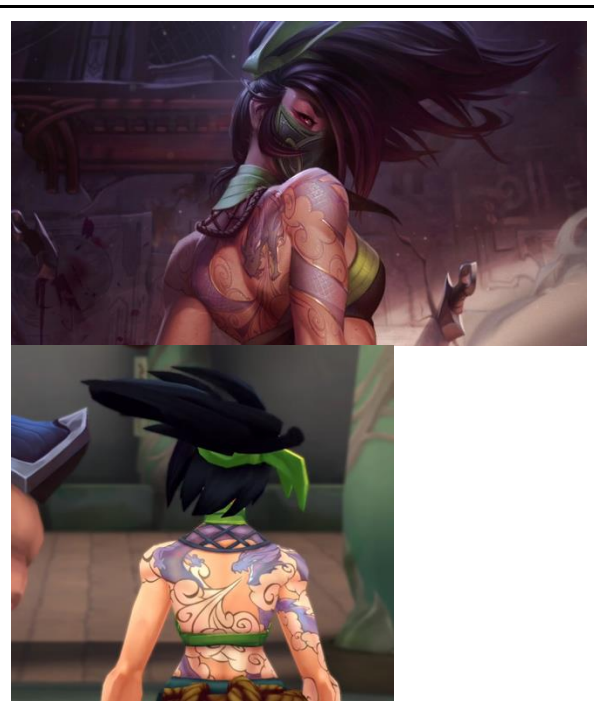|	
Figure 4.1. Akali's dragon jacket and dragon graffiti background in K/DA 'POP/STARS'. (YouTube, 2018).	*Figure 4.2. Akali splash art and in-game model with dragon back tattoo. (League of Legends, 2018).*

Similarly, it was also found that references are made to the champion's attributes or traits. This way, the center of attention is on the behavioral aspects and characteristics of that champion, instead of their identity or motifs. An example that illustrates this can be seen in figure 4.3, a screenshot taken from the first episode of *Arcane*. During a heist scene through Piltover city, Vi and her team are trying to trespass a building. It can be observed that Mylo, a character who has a talent for lockpicking, is trying to unlock a door. However, shortly after, Vi becomes impatient and kicks the door open with force. This action captures Vi's character trait as a champion in *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), who is known for her blunt and violent attitude. One of her most famous lines in the game is "Vi? Stands for violence" ("Vi/LoL/Audio", n.d.), which reflects her character, but is now also reflected in her actions in *Arcane* as a reference to her character trait. Again, this ties in with Scolari's (2009) theory of peripheral stories since Vi's action in this sequence is connected to the macro story, in which her character traits are present.
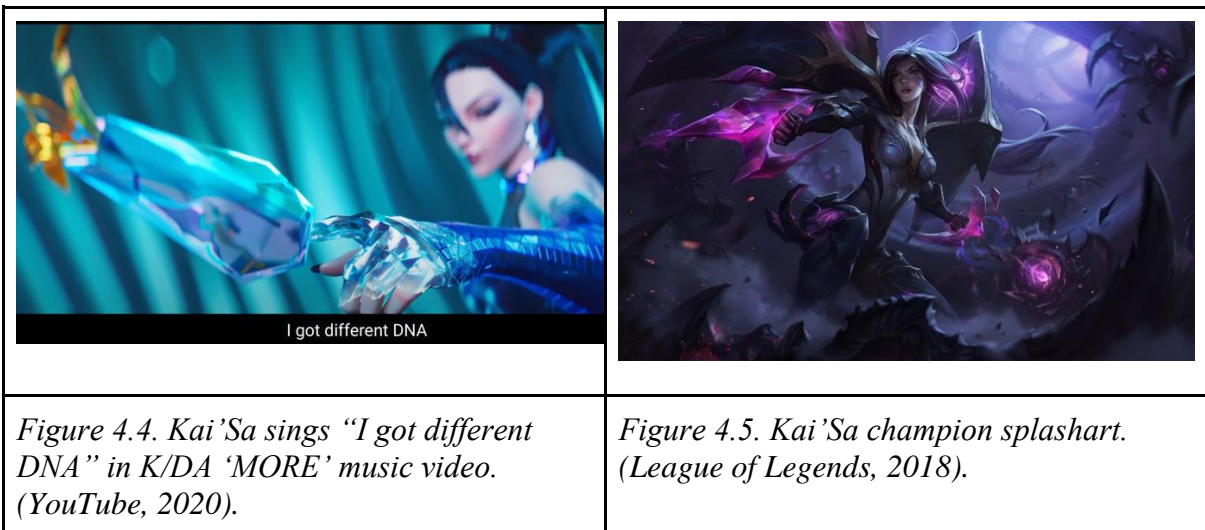

Figure 4.3. Mylo tries to lockpick the door, which Vi kicks open shortly after. (Netflix, 2021).

Moreover, besides referencing in-game characters through identity-related aspects or actions that are reflective of their attributes, it was also found that lyrical reflections of characters are present in the music videos of *K/DA*. In both 'POP/STARS' and 'MORE', references are made to the champions that are part of the music group. While this way of referencing the character might not seem significant at first since it only concerns the lyrics, it is also shown in the visuals of the music video. In *K/DA* 'POP/STARS', the character Kai'Sa sings the line "I got different DNA" (see fig. 4.4), which is a direct reference to her origin as a *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) champion that reflects her mutant DNA. Kai'Sa comes from the Void, a fictional location in the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) universe that is known for "monster" champions that resemble mutants or creatures, instead

of humans (see fig. 4.5). For people who do not play the game, this reference might not work as they would not understand the meaning of this specific line in the lyrics, but it does create a sense of connection for fans of the game.

Similar to the previous example that references Akali's dragon motif on her *K/DA* outfit, the champion Kai'Sa is present in another universe as part of *K/DA*, and yet the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) champion is referenced. The purpose of this can be considered twofold; it not only shows the creator's thoughtfulness when creating new transmedia products while staying true to the characters, but it also connects these different mediums by establishing links between the products. This is in line with what Hackman (2016) explains as the emotional bond that is created between play and character and plays into the overall importance of characters and the value they hold within the game.

| Figure 4.4. Kai'Sa sings "I got different DNA" in K/DA 'MORE' music video. (YouTube, 2020). | Figure 4.5. Kai'Sa champion splashart. (League of Legends, 2018). |

4.1.2 Referencing the lore

While the characters are inarguably one of the most important assets to *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), one cannot neglect the game's extensive lore that provides a foundation for the entire *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) universe. Hereby, it is important to differentiate between game story and game lore as they are treated as two different concepts when talking about video games. Unlike the lore that surfaces in the background, the game story is present in the game and refers to the set of events that take place during the gameplay, which is followed throughout the gaming experience. The lore, on the other hand, can be considered the overall backbone and source for the world, in which all aspects of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) take place. This includes, but is not limited to the different regions, character backgrounds, and also relationships. Furthermore, the lore

is filled with rich backstories and ties all the above-mentioned pillars together, which ultimately create the universe. Given the fact that *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) falls under the genre of multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) with short and fast-paced matches, a storyline does not exist in the game itself, but it is the lore that grounds the information about the world. Considering this, the lore is what shapes the worldbuilding and the game's fictional universe by intertwining different texts and elements. Information regarding *League of Legends*' (Riot Games, 2009) lore information can be mostly retrieved online ("Universe of League of Legends", n.d.).

Following this, it is therefore not necessary to know the lore in order to play *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) and it is likely that casual players are not aware of it. However, dedicated fans and audiences that are constantly on the lookout for additional background information might be interested in the game's lore. This also ties in with Gaskins' (2012) idea of players that are considered *Seekers* who seek out further knowledge. With *Arcane* being a television series that is based on *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), it opens up opportunities to showcase the game's lore through a different medium. Therefore, references to the lore that establish links to the macro story were found in the data. This can be divided into locations, relationships, and champion abilities.

Locations play a big role in the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) universe because of their connection to the characters. Many champions' characteristics are derived from their regional background, which is often a determining factor for their theme. For instance, the city of Piltover is known for its futuristic and progressive nature, which exerts a strong influence on innovation ("Piltover - Regions - Universe of League of Legends", n.d.). This nature is also reflected in the characters that come from Piltover, who are shaped by their craftsmanship or by their abilities. To properly reinforce this aspect from the lore, *Arcane* does a great job at illustrating two regions, namely Piltover and Zaun (see figs. 4.6 & 4.7). Taken from the first episode, the viewer gets introduced to those two regions through an encompassing shot, which happens at the same time as the main characters arrive at those places. Piltover and Zaun are not only the central regions in the television show in which most events happen but they are also contrasted which adds to the lore of a clash between two opposing cities.
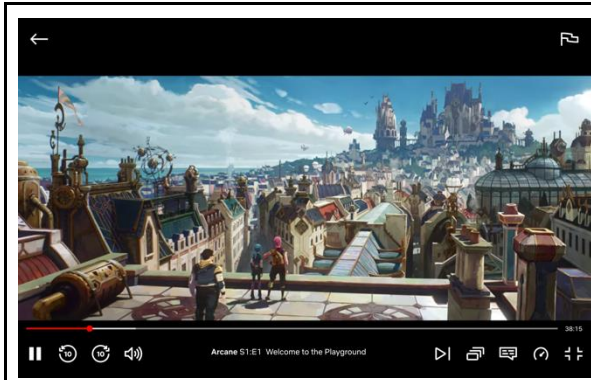
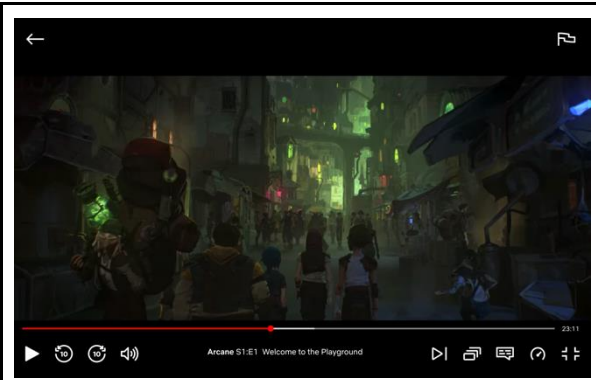|	
Figure 4.6. Shot of Piltover city. (Netflix, 2021).	*Figure 4.7. Shot of underground city Zaun. (Netflix, 2021).*

Just like the characters' place of origin, dynamics and family relationships also play a role in the lore of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) as they add a certain liveliness and authenticity, given that the characters exist in the same fictional world after all. Therefore, another code under referencing the lore was the relationship of characters. Unlike the two regions that were presented in *Arcane* as a reference to the lore, the show has actually confirmed a specific relationship that was theorized prior to the show ("Vi/Trivia", n.d.). Rumors by the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) community surfaced upon the release of the champion Jinx, who is characterized by a crazy and manic identity. One of her famous quotes goes "You think I'm crazy? You should see my sister", which led to fans speculating that the champion Vi is the person in question ("Vi/Trivia", n.d.). Right off the bat in episode one of *Arcane*, the audience gets to see Vi and Jinx together as they witness their parents being murdered (see fig. 4.8).

This scene introduces the viewer to the two protagonists of the series and shows the relationship and close bond of Jinx and Vi as sisters. Confirming their sisterhood also gives closure to the players and community since it is an answer to the previously theorized relationship. This is especially significant to *Players* and *Seekers* (Gaskins, 2012), who are invested in the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) lore since it offers an answer to a mystery, resulting in satisfaction and the reinforcement of the macro story.
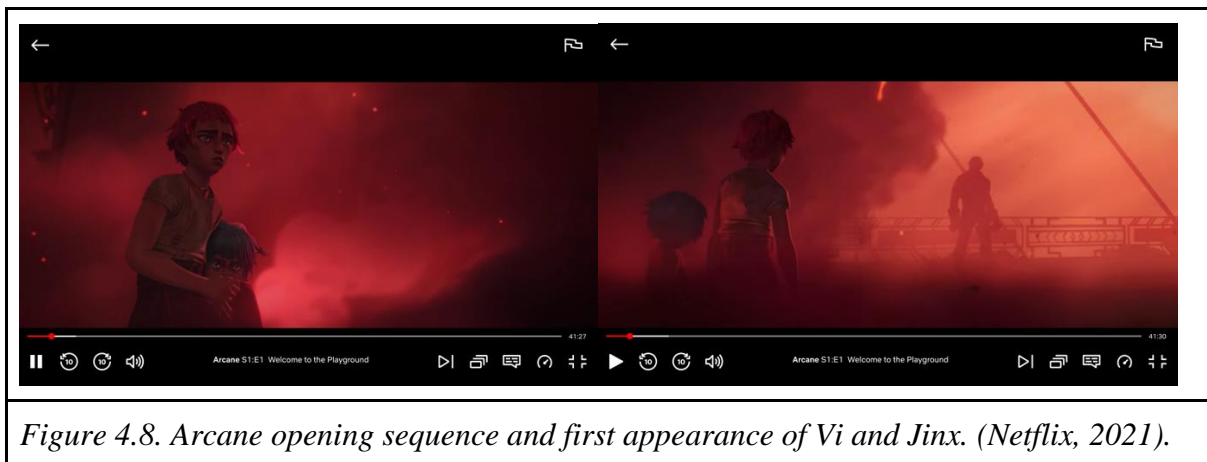
Figure 4.8. Arcane opening sequence and first appearance of Vi and Jinx. (Netflix, 2021).

4.1.3 Referencing gameplay mechanics

Something that should be stressed again is that the data as part of the transmedia marketing strategy is based on an online game. Given that the original product falls under the medium of online games, it was found that parts of that specification are represented in the transmedia content as well. This means that certain gameplay elements and mechanics were reinforced in the transmedia narrative to stay true to the medium of the original source. Therefore, specific attention was given to game mechanics within the data during the analysis and coding process. In this case, a differentiation was made based on the findings between champion ability and in-game spell. The code "champion ability" refers to the set of abilities a champion has in the game, which are unique to each champion specifically ("Champion ability", n.d.). However, there are also spells, named "summoner spells", which are power-ups one player can choose before every match ("Summoner spell", n.d.). Those are not champion-specific, but up to the player to pick according to preference and utility. Both are integral aspects of the gameplay that every player uses, which makes it interesting to see them referenced in the transmedia narrative.

Examples of champion abilities can be found in the *K/DA* 'POP/STARS' music video of multiple champions. In figure 4.9, a screenshot taken from the music video, shows the champion Kai'Sa shooting out various missiles. This is a direct reference to her in-game champion ability called "Icathian Rain", which can be seen in figure 4.10. Similarly, taken from *K/DA* 'MORE', the champion Ahri is holding a glowing orb in her hand, which she then releases a second after (see fig. 4.11). This is another reference to her in-game champion ability named "Orb of Deception", one of her most iconic abilities (see fig. 4.12). While these examples reinforce the macro story by implementing a part of the gameplay, it is not something that would be understood by a non-player of the game. Hence, this aspect is

significant for people who are familiar with the macro story and creates a sense of cohesion that can also be understood by the concept of *integration* (Gaskins, 2012). Hereby, the music videos—which are the transmedia content—create a cohesive narrative by integrating existing elements from the game.

Figure 4.9. Kai'Sa using "Icathian Rain" in K/DA 'POP/STARS' music video. (YouTube, 2018).	*Figure 4.10. Kai'Sa's champion ability "Icathian Rain". (League of Legends, 2018).*
Figure 4.11. Ahri using "Orb of Deception" in K/DA 'MORE' music video. (YouTube, 2020).	*Figure 4.12. Ahri's champion ability "Orb of Deception". (League of Legends, 2018).*
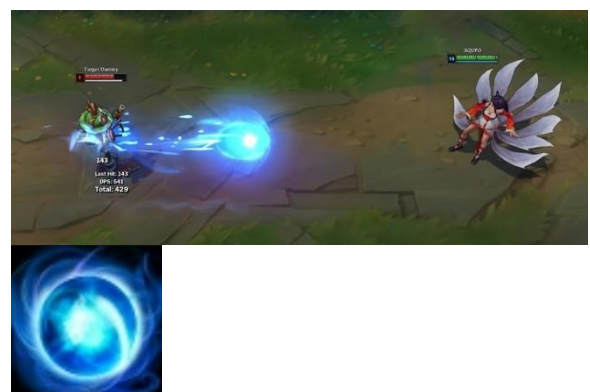
As previously explained, gameplay mechanics can also be displayed through the summoner spells, which become prevalent during the second episode of *Arcane*. What is seen in figure 4.13 is an undisclosed character, who resembles a mage with a wand in his hand, creating a vortex. This could be considered a reference to one of the most commonly used summoner spells "Teleport" seen in figure 4.14, which changes the location of a champion after a few seconds ("Summoner spell", n.d.).
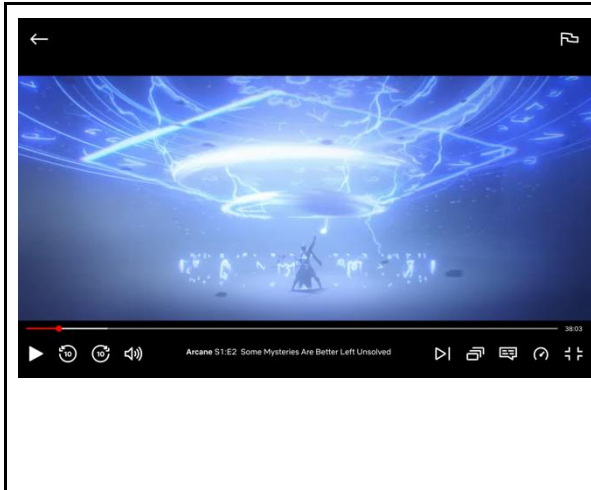
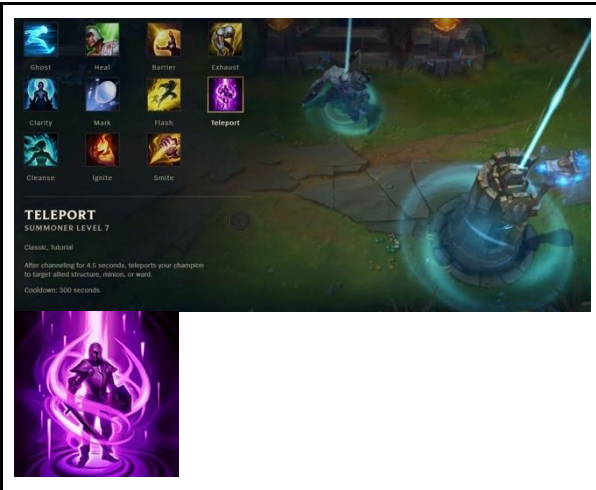|	
Figure 4.13. Mage casting spell in Arcane episode 2. (Netflix, 2021).	*Figure 4.14. Summoner spell "Teleport". (League of Legends, 2018).*

However, it can also be argued that the scene depicts another *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) champion named Ryze, whose ability "Realm Warp" is being referenced. "Realm Warp" is a champion ability that teleports Ryze and fellow teammates to a short distance after a few seconds. When looking at figure 4.15, it becomes clear that the vortex from *Arcane* in figure 4.13 does indeed resemble Ryze's ability. In the end, it is up to the audience's interpretation since there is no confirming answer provided. Given the fact that the character who casts the spell in *Arcane* has not been identified, and that the champion Ryze does not possess a wand, makes the first argument of it being a reference to the in-game spell "Teleport" a valid one.

Figure 4.15. Ryze's champion ability "Realm Warp". (League of Legends, 2018).

4.2 Adding new angles and elements to the narrative

The first theme showed that a major part of transmedia storytelling is in the reinforcement of the familiar, which can be seen through the establishment of links with the macro story of the game. Not only does this create a sense of connection for *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) players, which makes it easy to market new products to an existing fanbase, but it also conveys a sense of continuity that is aligned with the original ideas which ties in with Schröter's (2015) concept of *game logic*. Nevertheless, it was found that completely new angles and elements were added to the existing narrative as well, which actually expand the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) universe. By adding new elements such as external elements, characters, or settings, it opens up the possibility of enlarging the universe while allowing the audience to gain more value through new information and extra layers. Moreover, it can evoke further enthusiasm as it keeps the new transmedia content surprising and interesting. What is also worth pointing out for this theme is the fact that the addition of new angles found in the data is both new to players and non-players of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009). Unlike the previous theme, which is mainly understood through knowledge of the game itself, the new elements feel fresh to any type of audience. Altogether, this second theme covers aspects relating to *addition through external elements* (4.2.1), which will be further explained later, *expanding characters* (4.2.2), and *expanding settings* (4.2.3).

4.2.1 Addition through external elements

The first sub-theme of adding new angles and elements to the narrative as part of the transmedia marketing strategy was found to be the addition of external elements. This refers to elements that are not directly part of the transmedia content but come from an external source. Hence, these do not necessarily contribute anything to the story or events within the *K/DA* music videos or the television series *Arcane* but fulfill a different purpose which will be elaborated upon with specific examples. When watching the beginning of the *K/DA* 'POP/STARS' music video, the first thing that becomes noticeable is a silver-colored fist logo on a car as seen in figure 4.16. This visual trademark represents the logo of *League of Legends*' (Riot Games, 2009) company, Riot Games (see fig. 4.17). While this does not add anything to the music video itself in terms of plot or references to the macro story, it does showcase *League of Legends*' (Riot Games, 2009) brand in an eye-catching way. At first glance, the logo is present and almost fills up the entire screen, which is then followed by a zoomed-out frame that captures various cars. This includes a car in the middle with the Riot

Games logo attached, which resembles a car brand logo. Although those shots happen in quick succession, having the Riot Games logo right at the start sets the tone and brands the music video. Hence, by adding this new element in the form of a visual trademark, it becomes clear that *K/DA* 'POP/STARS' falls under the same brand as the main product *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009).

4.16. Riot Games logo in K/DA 'POP/STARS' music video. (YouTube, 2018).	*4.17. Riot Games logo. (Riot Games, 2022).*

In the transmedia content, newly added angles were not only observed in the form of visual trademarks but music elements by external producers were also found. Naturally, the musical elements by external producers were found in the Netflix show *Arcane*, as the *K/DA* music videos are fundamentally focused on music already. Like many other television shows, *Arcane* does not miss out on the opportunity to include an introduction song at the beginning of its episodes. In this case, the song was specifically produced for the show, titled 'Enemy', and is performed by the American pop-rock band Imagine Dragons, featuring rapper JID. Amplified with visuals that represent characters of the television show, 'Enemy' is played at the beginning of all nine episodes after a short introduction scene (see fig. 4.18). While the song, again, does not directly add anything to the plot or change the content of the show, it is an element that complements the show. The lyrics of 'Enemy' are kept vague and do not

mention specific events or characters, however, the themes addressed could be considered an allusion to the plot ("Imagine Dragons & JID – Enemy Lyrics | Genius Lyrics", 2021).
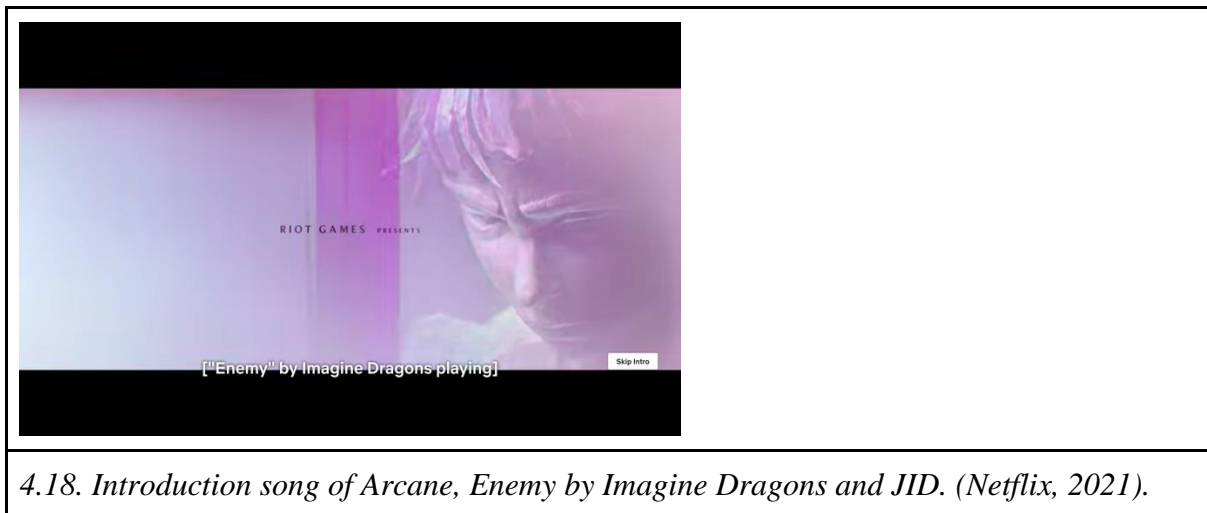
4.18. *Introduction song of Arcane, Enemy by Imagine Dragons and JID. (Netflix, 2021).*

4.2.2 Expanding characters

In section 4.1.1 of the previous theme, the importance of characters in video games was discussed as well as the value of referencing them in the transmedia content. Given the role they play in any narrative, it should not come as a surprise that a sub-theme concerning characters emerged in this second theme of adding new angles and elements as well. When familiarizing with the data, comprised of the *Arcane* episodes, it became clear that characters are the core and essence of the product which move the storyline forward. Besides the code of adding new characters, it was found that there are more ways to add a new layer to the narrative. This was done through the revision of character looks and revision of character relationships, which challenge the familiar through new changes, but also champion skins.

Starting out with the addition of new characters, several examples were found in *Arcane*. Many of *Arcane's* characters did not exist in the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) lore or universe prior to the release of the television series. Adding new characters has led to new relationships and dynamics, but also revealed new information and even introduced new subplots. In order to limit the number of examples, figures 4.19 and 4.20 show two main characters that are new additions to the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) universe, who are named Vander and Silco, respectively. Not only do they both have a common history, in which they were close allies in the past, but they also play pivotal roles in the show. Vander took care of Vi and Jinx after they became orphaned and acts as a father figure, who also advises and protects them. Silco, on the other hand, is a drug lord and chemist, who is the antagonist of the television show and constantly strives for power. The

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addition of both these new characters is central to the plotline and enriches the existing *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) universe.
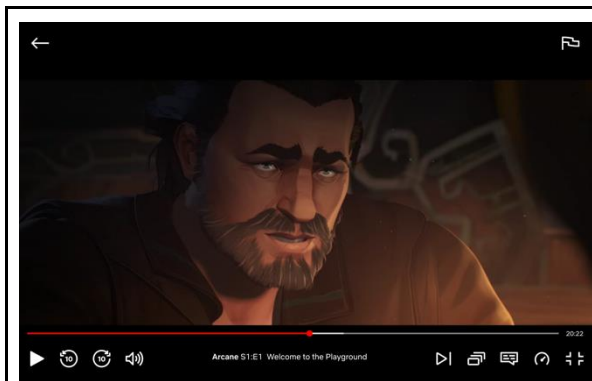

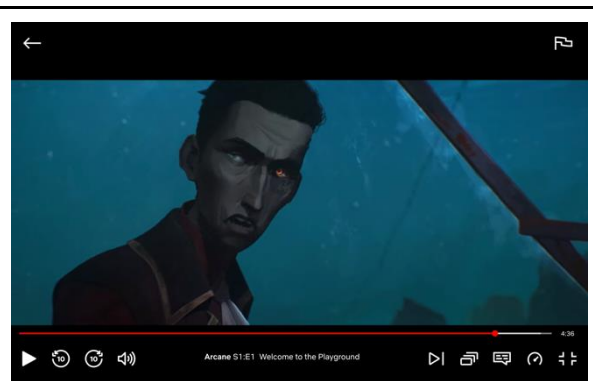|	
Figure 4.19 Vander in Arcane. (Netflix, 2021).	*Figure 4.20 Silco in Arcane. (Netflix, 2021).*

Similar to reinforcing existing relationships from the lore in section 4.1.2, it was also found that some character relationships were revised and changed through the transmedia content. Having added new angles through the revision of relationships, new dynamics were created that can be seen as an interesting twist to the narrative. It is important to note that this is a change to the game's lore as it does not stay true to it. However, in some cases, it makes sense to slightly revise relationships in order to fit a certain narrative, as long as it does not change their overall essence. Furthermore, it gives producers more creative liberty when it comes to their storytelling. An example of this in *Arcane* was found within the relationship between Viktor and Jayce, two *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) champions who can be considered secondary main characters in the show, that carry the storyline of a subplot (see figs. 4.21 & 4.22). Both of them are from the futuristic Piltover city, which aligns with their innovative and forward-thinking mindsets, as well as drive for scientific challenges. Within the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) lore, it is known that they have worked together which led to a business relationship, but nothing has been mentioned regarding their emotional bond ("Jayce/Trivia", n.d.). In *Arcane*, however, Viktor and Jayce are seen as brothers that discover the secrets of magic, regardless of their strong appreciation for science. The audience gets to witness Viktor's journey throughout the eight episodes of *Arcane*, where his health continuously declines while Jayce develops an instinct to save him. This makes their relationship different since this angle adds new facets to both characters, but specifically shows Jayce's soft and caring side which drastically differs from his cold image in the lore ("Jayce - Biography - Universe of League of Legends", n.d.).
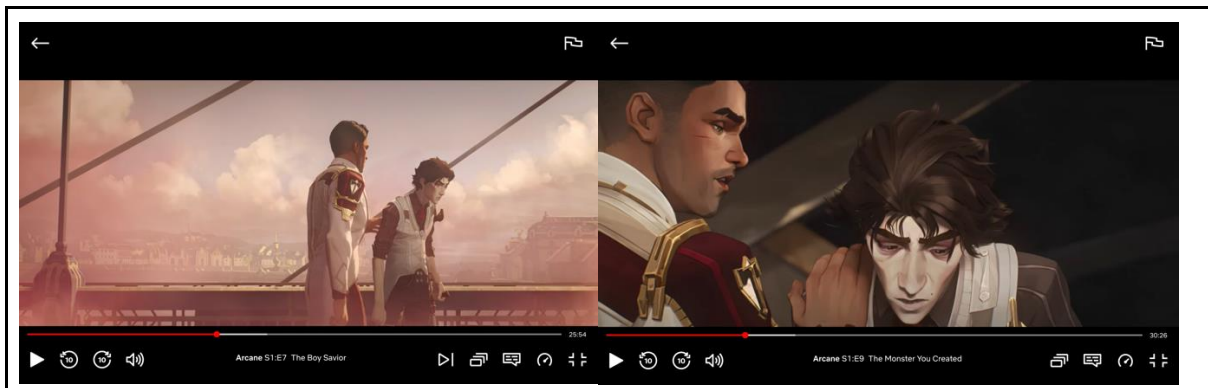
Figure 4.21. Relationship of Jayce and Viktor. (Netflix, 2021).

Relationships are not the only aspect that sometimes experience revision within transmedia content. During the data analysis process, it was also found that the look of characters has been adjusted in both the *K/DA* music videos and *Arcane* series. Giving characters a new look helps to situate them in a new environment that fits the narrative and feels true to the occurring events. To illustrate this, an example is shown in figure 4.22 of two of *Arcane's* main characters, Caitlyn and Vi. When comparing their *Arcane* looks to their in-game looks as *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) champions in figure 4.23, one will quickly realize that they are different. Caitlyn (left) wears a white blouse with a purple vest, as well as purple pants, while her hair is tied up in a bun. Her in-game model in *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) wears a purple hat, as well as a short purple dress on top of a white blouse, with her hair down. Vi (right) wears a white top with a dark collar underneath a pink jacket, while brown pants make her look complete. Her in-game model, on the other hand, is wearing heavy armor in dark gray and brown tones and is accentuated with the color pink. The observation is that although the *Arcane* characters were given new looks that fit the narrative, they still resemble the game characters in terms of color scheme, making them more easily identifiable. Overall, the revision of looks also helps to distance the characters from the same look at all times in the game and offers a change to it that is more situation-based and realistic.
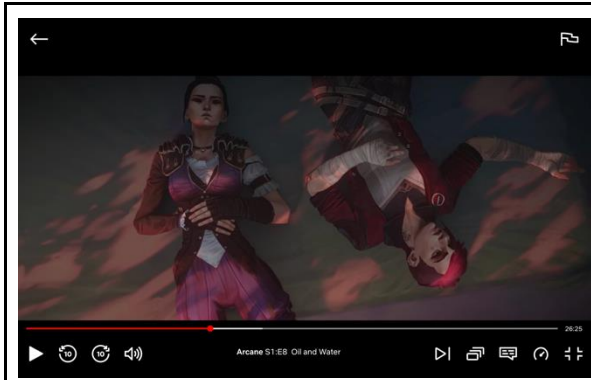
| Figure 4.22. Look of Caitlyn and Vi in Arcane. (Netflix, 2021). | Figure 4.23. Look of Caitlyn's and Vi's in-game models. (League of Legends, 2018). |

A form of revision of looks was also observed as in-game cosmetics, named skins. Skins are a very common asset in video games in general ("Champion skin", n.d.), which can usually be purchased with real-life currency. Generally, they do not give players an advantage or benefit and neither do they have an influence on the gameplay. Instead, skins are merely a cosmetic feature that change the look of different items, such as characters, weapons, maps, and more. Considering that *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) is primarily financially sustained through skin purchases as a monetization method (Krasilnikov, 2017), it is natural that skins are given great importance. Hence, skins that fall under the same theme are referred to as "skinlines", which establish new universes and lores that are separate from the actual *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) lore. The virtual music group *K/DA* was initially created for the *K/DA* skinline, which fulfills the fantasy of pop stars in glamorous looks. A champion like Akali, who is a ninja assassin with a dragon tattoo, would realistically not become a pop star. Therefore, skinlines create their own universes and are also a revision of looks which are detached from the original lore. This is why it differs from above example of Caitlyn and Vi in *Arcane*, who are still in the same universe, only with revised looks. Whereas the *K/DA* 'POP/STARS' music video represents the first set of *K/DA* skins (see fig. 4.24), the *K/DA* 'MORE' music video features the second edition with a new *K/DA* skinline (see fig. 4.25), including an additional member. It is without a doubt that the *K/DA* skinlines could have been released without the music videos and actual music, just like any other regular skinline. However, by producing new music and making songs for the skinline, which represents pop stars, it served as a strategy to market the product and attract fans who do not have a connection with *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009).
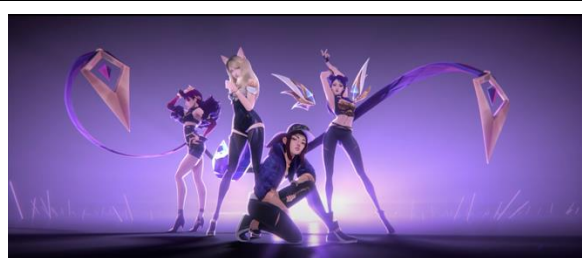
Figure 4.24. K/DA Skins from 'POP/STARS' music video. (YouTube, 2018).	*Figure 4.25. K/DA Skins from 'MORE' music video. (YouTube, 2020).*

4.2.3 Expanding settings

The third and final sub-theme of adding new angles and elements to the narrative concerns the settings. Although being a term that is quite broad in the context of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), it can be explained as the environment or surroundings where events take place. When looking at the video game itself, most matches take place on the map named "Summoner's Rift" (see fig. 4.26) ("Summoner's Rift", n.d.). The map consists of three lanes (top, middle, bottom) and is split into half by a river. Furthermore, multiple jungle areas fill up the spaces between the lanes and the river, which adds to the nature and outdoor setting. The gameplay map, however, is not the only setting part of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), as one can also count the locations taken from the lore. Earlier, it was explained how settings from the lore are referenced in the transmedia content, but it was also found that completely new locations were added to it.
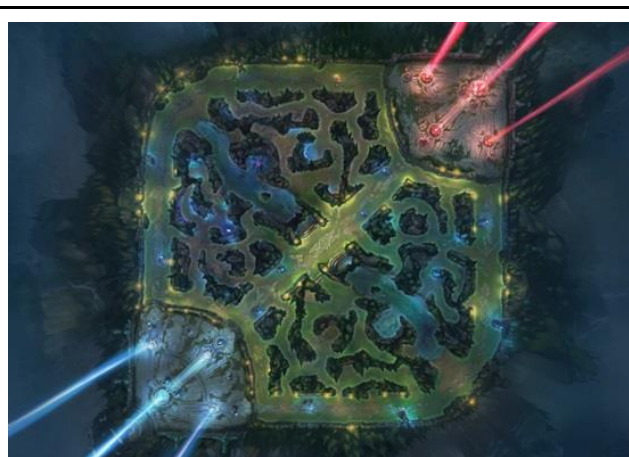

Figure 4.26. Summoner's Rift map. (League of Legends, 2018).

Arcane does a great job at reinforcing the macro story by including familiar locations from the lore, such as Piltover and Zaun. With added characters and storylines, it is natural

that also new settings would be added to the television show. Several examples can be found in *Arcane*, with some of them being in the context of a flashback. Figure 4.27 depicts a flashback scene from episode 6, which shows the past of Viktor. As a curious young boy, he enters a dungeon full of gemstones, which seems to be the home to a man and a lizard or dragon-like being. It is not clear where this setting is or what the man and creature are supposed to signify, but it does add a new setting to the world which remains mysterious. Another example is the Firelight's base of operations, which is a large underground area with a gigantic tree at its core (see fig. 4.28). The Firelights are a rebellious gang with the goal of overthrowing Silco's regime, which previously did not exist in *League of Legends*' (Riot Games, 2009) lore. Subsequently, this new setting also did not exist and acts as another uncharted territory. Overall, these examples can be considered intriguing and surprising for the audience, both for those who are and are not familiar with the game. This offers room for new storylines as it takes characters to places that do not exist within the lore, and it also opens up the world and allows the audience to discover such uncharted territories.
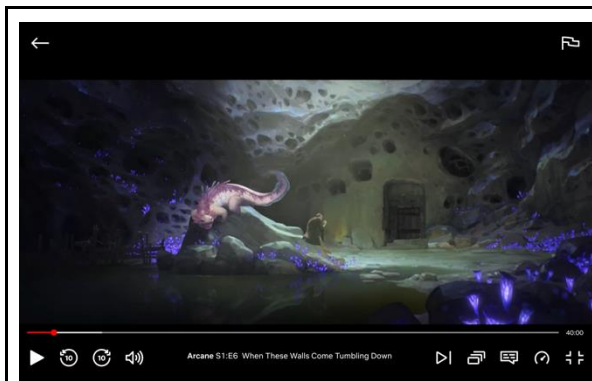

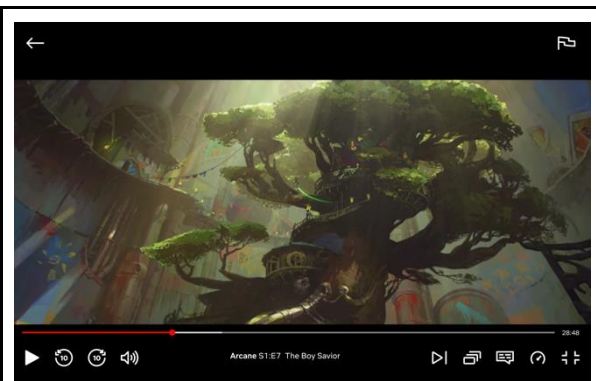|	
Figure 4.27. New dungeon location with young Viktor. (Netflix, 2021).	*Figure 4.28. New Firelight's base of operations location. (Netflix, 2021).*

Aside from the uncharted territories that add new angles to the narrative, it was found that both *K/DA* music videos made use of a modern-style setting and included elements that are contemporary and do not necessarily fit into the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) universe. As seen in figures 4.29 and 4.30, modern vehicles were present in *K/DA* 'POP/STARS' and *K/DA* 'MORE', respectively. Naturally, these are fitting for the skinline and universe that *K/DA* represents but are completely disconnected from the video game itself. Hence, this is an interesting way to detach *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) champions from their original environment and to reimagine and situate them in a modern-style setting that is drastically different.

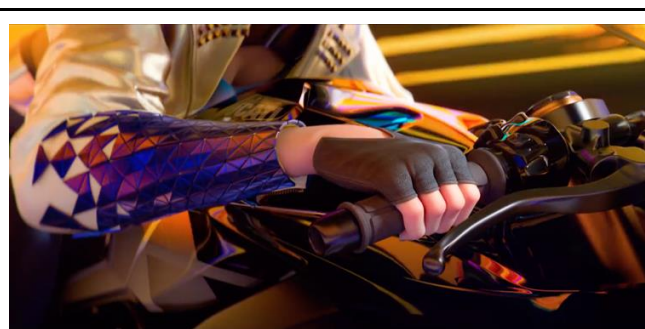| *Figure 4.29. Modern-looking cars in K/DA 'POP/STARS' music video. (YouTube, 2018).* | *Figure 4.30. Modern motorcycle in K/DA 'MORE' music video. (YouTube, 2020).* |

4.3 Implementing dimension and depth

The third and final theme that emerged from the data is the implementation of dimension and depth. During the data analysis procedure, it became clear that certain codes neither fit into reinforcing the macro story nor adding new angles and elements to the narrative. Instead, it was found that they combine aspects of the two themes above and offered new insights by creating depth, but also imposed new dynamics that are built upon the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) universe and brought additional value. The purpose for the implementation of dimension and depth can be considered twofold. Depending on the way this is achieved, it could intertwine multiple stories or ideas and lead to connection strands, or it could also bring attention to certain details that would otherwise not be known. A sub-theme that emerged is for instance gimmicks, which can be understood as easter eggs that have a special appeal to *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) players who have developed a familiarity with the game. However, some can also be understood by non-players, especially those that allude to certain aspects of our everyday lives. Furthermore, narrative techniques were found which refer to different ways in which a story is being told. Naturally, storytelling is a very broad term, and with the right techniques, profundity can be achieved which ultimately impacts the consumption experience. Lastly, character insights were given as some of the characters' backgrounds were developed further, providing additional details for the audience. Hence, this third and final theme explains the implementation of dimension and depth through *gimmicks* (4.3.1), *narrative techniques* (4.3.2), and *character insights* (4.3.3).

4.3.1 Gimmicks

   The first sub-theme under implementing dimension and depth is gimmicks, which refers to any stunt or idea that can bring value to the product and harness attention. Given the rich lore that *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) provides, several gimmicks were found in the transmedia content. However, instead of simply referencing ideas, gimmicks are rather vague and often require the audience to think. Therefore, within *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia narrative, most gimmicks were found to be easter eggs. When talking about easter eggs within media, one usually refers to hidden messages that are embedded within a product and allude to something else (Beal, 2021). Hence, they are not made obvious and are therefore not always detected. However, both in the *K/DA* music videos, as well as *Arcane* television show, easter eggs were included which add another layer of communication with the audience. Hereby, a differentiation is made between easter eggs that allude to something from the game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) itself, and easter eggs that allude to something from our daily lives.

   To illustrate this with some examples, the former can be seen in figure 4.31, which is taken from the second episode of *Arcane*. One of the main characters, Jinx, is seen at an arcade and is playing at a booth that is inspired by Teemo, one of the most iconic *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) champions. The champion Teemo himself is not present in *Arcane*. Although this easter egg can be hard to detect, the attentive audience that is familiar with the game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) and its champions might notice it. This ties in with Gaskins' (2012) concept of *impact*, as the story impacts the audience in a way that urges them to take action. In this case, the easter eggs could create the sense of a quest, which might make the audience more active by wanting to look for more easter eggs while consuming the product. Another easter egg example that alludes to in-game aspects of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) can be seen in figure 4.33. This example is even less obvious than the one that clearly depicts Teemo at the arcade, as it solely features a tray of pink cupcakes during the first episode. As Vi and her crew trespass the Piltover buildings and jump from one to another, there is a quick shot of that cupcake tray. It is almost certain that non-players of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) would not notice or think any further about the appearance of such treats, however, this easter egg alludes to one of Caitlyn's in-game abilities, Yordle Trap (see fig. 4.34). This easter egg is interesting as Caitlyn develops a strong bond and companionship with Vi throughout the series, which makes it a significant, yet very hidden detail.
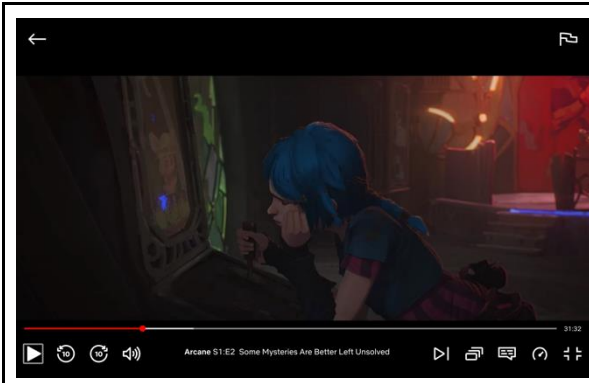
Figure 4.31. Jinx plays on a Teemo-inspired Arcade booth in episode 2 of Arcane. (Netflix, 2021).

Figure 4.32. Teemo's champion splashart. (League of Legends, 2009).
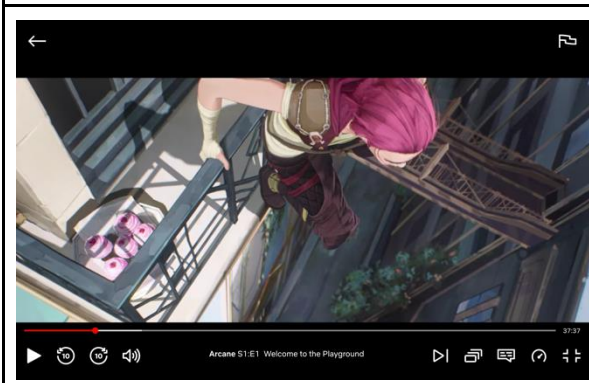

Figure 4.33. Tray with pink cupcakes in first episode of Arcane. Netflix, 2021).
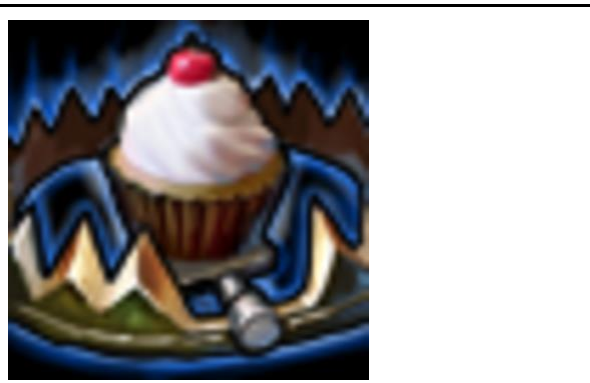

Figure 4.34. Caitlyn's champion ability "Yordle Trap". (League of Legends, 2018).

Besides these easter eggs that send messages based on in-game aspects of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), some examples were also found to be based on real-life. When looking at the *K/DA* 'POP/STARS' music video, there is a scene that alludes to Korean culture. At the beginning of the music video, Korean letters are displayed on a screen during a train scene, which translates into "next stop" or "next station", which is then followed by "K/DA" (see fig. 4.35). This is a direct allusion to the music genre of Korean popular music as well as K-pop bands, which was the main driver that inspired *K/DA* in the first place. Therefore, it makes sense to see the inclusion of Korean culture in the music video, in the form of language for instance. When looking at *K/DA* 'MORE', which is the following music video to 'POP/STARS' that was released two years later, one can also find easter eggs. In figure 4.36, we see the champion Seraphine in her room, a newly added member to *K/DA* in 'MORE', with posters hanging on her wall. Upon taking closer looks, it becomes clear that those posters are from *K/DA* as well as the real-life K-pop girl group (G)I-DLE, who are some of the actual artists behind the virtual girl group's music. This scene in the music video

is from the bridge, sung by Seraphine, and shows Seraphine in her room as she daydreams about what it is like to become a singer, while the posters on her wall also signify that she has been a fan of *K/DA*. A few moments later, she ascends and joins the other four original *K/DA* members.

Figure 4.35. Korean hangul letters in K/DA 'POP/STARS' music video. (YouTube, 2018).	*Figure 4.36. Seraphine's room with posters in K/DA 'MORE' music videos. (YouTube, 2020).*

4.3.2 Narrative techniques

Within television shows like *Arcane* and also the *K/DA* music videos, it was found that narrative techniques play an important role in how a story or idea is being told. Oftentimes, these narrative techniques added additional layers of depth and dimension that made the narrative more complex. Stories are not always told in linearly but through different techniques such as foreshadowing, flashbacks, parallel stories, or time jumps, which can unfold stories even further and offer more insights to the audience. These narrative techniques were used in *K/DA* and *Arcane*, which contributed to its compound narrative and depth, and ultimately led to this sub-theme. To illustrate these various techniques, different examples will be presented.

For starters, the first technique that was found is the use of foreshadowing. What makes foreshadowing a relevant narrative technique is the way it introduces the audience to events that happen at a later time, while also establishing a link to something significant early on. This prepares the audience mentally—if the foreshadowing is caught—for a future event. In the *K/DA* music video 'MORE', Seraphine gets properly introduced during the bridge part of the song, which is only in the second half of the song and music video. However, due to the foreshadowing, Seraphine already makes an appearance towards the beginning of the music video, which can be seen in figure 4.37. It seems like Seraphine is listening to music as she is wearing headphones, and by foreshadowing her early on, a smooth transition is created to her actual appearance during the bridge part of the music video.

Figure 4.37. Shots of Seraphine in K/DA 'MORE' music video. (YouTube, 2020).

The second finding of a narrative technique that implements dimension and depth is the inclusion of flashbacks. Flashbacks reveal information that would otherwise not be known when only the present story is being shown. Several *Arcane* episodes start with a flashback sequence at the very beginning, showcasing different scenes that let the audience understand later events. Therefore, instead of creating a connection to a future event through foreshadowing, flashbacks are actually very important for the understanding of the plot. Figure 4.38 depicts a scene that has already been brought up in a previous section, which is the opening sequence of episode one. The scene is one full of brutality as it shows how the parents of Vi and Jinx are being murdered. However, it also sets the rather dark tone for the rest of the series and is also very important in understanding the initial situation of the two main characters Vi and Jinx. Another example taken from the beginning of episode 5 shows young Caitlyn in figure 4.39, after a sharpshooting competition. This flashback scene fulfills the purpose of introducing the audience to another main character that plays a central role for the second half of the show. The audience learns about Caitlyn's past as she grows up in Piltover and enlists as an enforcer, which offers a direct contrast to the lives of Jinx and Vi in the underground city Zaun. The third example of the flashback narrative technique is seen in figure 4.40, which is taken from episode 8. It depicts young Mel as she faces her mother Ambessa and it is revealed that Mel was abandoned by her cold and ruthless mother when she was young, which explains some of Mel's cold character traits as she has never felt motherly love before. All these examples of flashback scenes show that they are background stories of characters. The scenes all play a pivotal role in disclosing information that are important for understanding certain characters' motives, as well as future events relating to that.
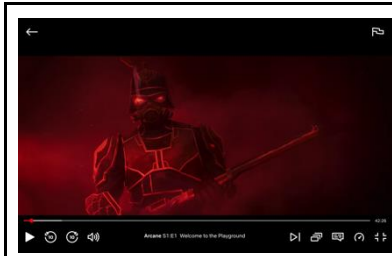
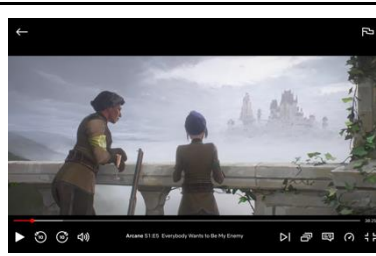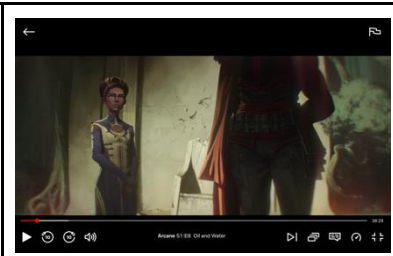| *Figure 4.38. Flash back scene from episode 1. (Netflix, 2021).* | *Figure 4.39. Flash back scene from episode 5. (Netflix, 2021).* | *Figure 4.40. Flash back scene from episode 8. (Netflix, 2021).* |

Another narrative technique that adds an additional layer of dimension to the story is the implementation of parallel stories. This directly ties in with Scolari's (2009) concept of parallel stories, referring to stories that unfold at the same time as the macro story. Not only do parallel stories offer a different view and insights from another perspective, but they also open up the world in a sense by implementing more depth. A prominent example for parallel stories can be found in episode 8, where Mel meets her mother once again, but this time in the present (see fig. 4.41). Mel's mother Ambessa wants to warn Mel about a war, which Mel completely shrugs off. Meanwhile, as this parallel story unfolds, Jayce, the Head of the Council from Piltover, wants to declare war on Zaun. Parallel stories show that they can grant multiple viewpoints on the same context, which enrich the plot and increase its complexity.
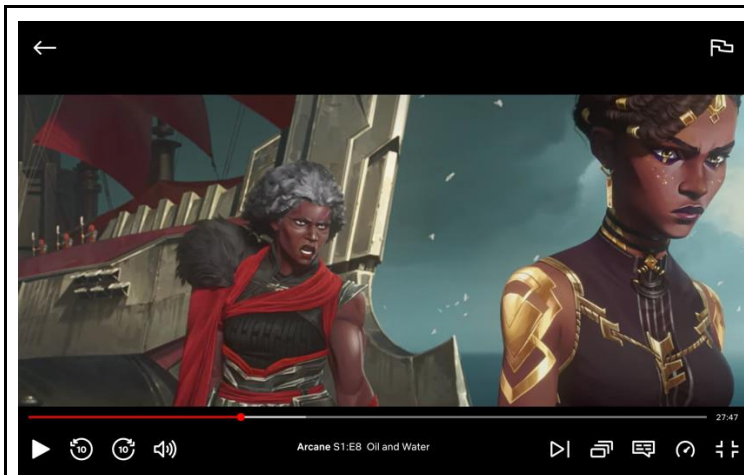

Figure 4.41. Mel meets her mother Ambessa in episode 8. (Netflix, 2021).

The last technique that was found as part of the sub-theme narrative techniques focuses on time jumps. Time jumps refer to a change in time within episodes (through flashbacks) but can also refer to an overall change in time within the entire series. Hence, in

this case, the focus will be on the latter. After episode 3, which ends with a climax after a battle in which the sisters Vi and Jinx get separated, an overall time jump for the entire series is in place. Although the exact amount of time changed has not been confirmed, episode 4 fast forwards to several years later. Before that, Vi and Jinx were still a teenager and a child, respectively, whereas episode 4 shows them as new adults. One might assume that a lot of information is lost given the time jump, however, it was a crucial time frame for Jinx's character development. From an innocent, insecure child, she turns into a manic young woman that becomes barely recognizable. The time jump makes the change in her character more realistic as the changes that Jinx has undergone would not have happened from one day to another. Therefore, the time jump was necessary to move the plot forward and continue the story several years later.

4.3.3 Character insights

The third and final sub-theme of implementing dimension and depth relates to character insights. It becomes clear that every theme contains a sub-theme that relates to the characters, which supports the argument that characters are one of the most valuable assets to *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), as well as its transmedia narrative. Besides reinforcing existing characters in *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) or adding new angles and elements to characters, it was found that character insights were provided, which grant additional depth and contribute to the understanding of characters. For instance, it was necessary to move beyond the surface of showcasing characters in their present state when wanting to portray characters in a complex and multifaceted way. Hence, it was seen that television shows like *Arcane* can help with that by simply bringing characters "to life". Since the show is based on an online game like *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), it became a crucial task to transform video game characters into TV show characters. Video game characters all have a limited set of programmed animations, voice lines, and motions. However, by featuring them in *Arcane*, it was possible to create further animations and make the characters feel more vivid. Characters become actual personas, which makes them arguably easier to connect with. The transmedia content helps to bring more life to the characters, and the audience gets to learn and see more about the characters which can normally only be met in the video game itself.

Moreover, it became clear that *Arcane* allows for the portrayal of younger versions of characters which is another aspect that adds to character insights. As mentioned before in other sections, *Arcane's* story is not always told in a linear way and with the inclusion of time

jumps and flashbacks, it was found that the show portrays younger versions of the characters. This implements dimension and depth as the audience gets to learn about a character's past and background, which would otherwise not have been possible, just by playing the video game for example. Many of the main characters in *Arcane* are portrayed as their younger selves, including Vi, Jinx, Caitlyn, Viktor, and Mel.

5. Conclusion

During dynamic times, in which the video game industry is experiencing continuous growth in recent years, there is no doubt that entertainment and media products become more interconnected which further upholds the value of transmedia storytelling and marketing. The online video game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) in particular has proven to be at the forefront when it comes to the usage of transmedia storytelling in its transmedia marketing strategies by creating transmedia narratives across different platforms. To investigate how this is being used to the game's benefit, the following research question was studied: *How is transmedia storytelling used in League of Legends' transmedia marketing strategies?* Through an extensive theoretical framework, as well as an explorative case study called forth by the methodology, results were achieved by means of a thematic analysis. Hereby, the thematic analysis resulted in three comprehensive themes, which serve as the answer to the research question.

Firstly, transmedia storytelling is used in *League of Legends'* (Rito Games, 2009) transmedia marketing strategies by *reinforcing the macro story* through different kinds of references in which connections between transmedia content and the online game are achieved. This reinforcement of the macro story can be realized by referencing the character and lore, but also by reflecting *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) gameplay mechanics within the transmedia narrative. In addition to that, *adding new angles and elements to the narrative* is another way in which transmedia storytelling is utilized. This does not only enlarge the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) universe through new additions and unprecedented events, but also offers the audience something that will retain their interest and bring excitement, which could be the addition of external elements, expanding characters, or expanding settings. Lastly, by *implementing dimension and depth*, transmedia storytelling can be used to complement the existing narrative and build upon it. Through a combination of bringing something new, yet something that is still closely related to the existing macro story; gimmicks, narrative techniques, and character insights are ways to expand the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) universe in a complementing and informative way.

On the basis of these three comprehensive themes, an answer to the research question of this study is given. Through the combination of the themes, transmedia storytelling is used in the game's transmedia marketing strategies by adding new ideas, as well as expanding, connecting, and strengthening existing ones, which ultimately results in the value of transmedia storytelling and marketing. This concluding chapter of the study will be

completed with a discussion of its theoretical implications (5.1), practical implications for the video game industry in specific (5.2), as well as the study's limitations and suggestions for future research (5.3).

5.1 Theoretical implications

When reflecting upon the theoretical implications of this study, it becomes clear that several observations can be made based on the findings. This master's thesis set out to explore how the concept of transmedia storytelling is strategically used to market online games, based on a case study of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009). While the study of transmedia storytelling is not necessarily a novel one, it is worth pointing out that little to no research has been conducted on this topic with an online game at its core. Hence, this study borrows theories from a wide range of sources that have dealt with this topic from different angles.

First of all, the findings suggest that media convergence is indeed a relevant concept that contributes to the field of transmedia storytelling. Jenkins (2004) argued that media convergence has led to the interconnectedness of media, in which industry-specific firms branch out and start producing all kinds of media products. Through the analysis of *Arcane* and *K/DA*, it is shown that despite being different mediums such as television shows and music videos, they establish connections to the original product, which is an online game. Hence, given the fact that these media products are all produced by the same company, which was previously only a game studio, media convergence is significant and timely, while also allowing transmedia storytelling to flourish further. However, when looking at Granitz and Forman's (2015) five are pointers listed as part of convergence culture, not all can be confirmed by the findings. While the transmedia products tick the pointers of being 1) different stories, 2) on different platforms, and 3) different entry points, they are not necessarily for 4) different users, and have 5) different ways to be consumed. Considering the first theme that reinforces the macro story, it can be argued that the same kind of users is targeted for all products while having the same ways to consume the transmedia products. Although new audiences will be gained through new products, it cannot be said that each product is made for different types of users.

Another theoretical implication that can be accounted for is the way in which Jenkins' (2014) definition of transmedia storytelling is confirmed. Indeed, the findings suggest that products like *Arcane* and *K/DA* are pieces of a greater narrative, which are then dispersed through multiple platforms, such as the streaming service Netflix and video-sharing platform

YouTube. Hence, this rejects Philips' (2012) idea of transmedia storytelling being a concept that spans one single narrative across platforms. While this idea does not apply to the findings of this study, it is important to remember that it might be valid in other cases. Moreover, several strategies of transmedia marketing were found in the results, which were previously defined by Scolari (2009). The *K/DA* music videos can be considered *peripheral stories* as they are loosely connected to the macro story. They borrow characters and their aspects from *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), but reimagine them in a new universe through a skinline. *Parallel stories* (Scolari, 2009) were found in *Arcane* as multiple storylines unfold simultaneously. However, in this case, not all strategies were identified which might be due to the nature of this case. Similarly, some of Gaskins' (2012) theories were found to be applicable, whereas others were not. For instance, *interactivity* is not something that can be directly achieved given the medium of the selected sample. Nevertheless, *integration* shows that a cohesiveness of the story is partly in place as references were made to the source of origin, although sometimes with new additions and revisions. *Impact*, on the other hand, was found through the gimmicks as viewers would become more engaged and actively look for hidden messages. In addition to these theories, Schröter's (2015) idea of *game logic* can be observed in the findings as well, which deals with a narrative continuity. This becomes prevalent through the first theme of reinforcing the macro story, in which aspects like characters and settings are addressed within *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) transmedia narrative.

5.2 Practical implications

Transmedia storytelling and transmedia marketing have been prevalent strategies within entertainment culture and offer great ways to provide more value for fans as they can engage with new content on multiple platforms. However, transmedia storytelling that is set forth from online games is rather new and still an uncommon practice. Given the steady growth of the video game industry due to various external factors in recent years, as well as the rising number of video game players worldwide, it is unlikely that video games will decline in popularity any time soon. Coupled with the rise of media convergence, it can be expected that more video game studios will branch out to other mediums and utilize transmedia storytelling to their advantage. Not only does it allow video game developers to create further products and benefit from their existing player base by bringing more value to them, but it also grants consumers new content based on something they already enjoy.

For industry professionals, this master's thesis demonstrates several ways in which transmedia storytelling is used from the perspective of a successful example, which is *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009). Ratings and viewer counts prove the power of transmedia storytelling and marketing used for video games, which validates the potential even further. Since an answer is given to the research question, other industry professionals can directly learn and understand how transmedia storytelling can be used and that different ways exist on how to approach this. Whether it is stepping into the music industry, television industry, or perhaps something else, game developers can benefit from seeing a successful example based on this case study, that might inspire them to follow similar paths with their own products.

Lastly, consumers of online games or their transmedia products can also gain more understanding of transmedia storytelling and transmedia marketing from this research. It can be argued that many consumers are active on different media platforms, but might not realize how interconnected different products are, how links are purposefully established, or how adjustments are purposefully made. Hence, this study can grant more insights into that aspect and enlighten them on the ways they consume entertainment.

5.3 Limitations and future research

This closing section will reflect on the study's limitations and provide recommendations for future research. Firstly, one limitation of this study lies in its interpretative nature given the qualitative research method that was chosen for this master's thesis. With most qualitative studies, the results primarily underlie the interpretation of a single researcher, which is inherently subjective. In order to uphold a high quality of the research and reduce the negative impact on the validity and reliability of the study, attention was given to the theoretical foundation as well as a systematic approach to thematic analysis through the six-step guide by Braun and Clarke (2006). Another aspect that poses a limitation, lies in the nature of the case study. Granted, case studies are not comprehensive as they focus on the deep comprehension of one single subject, which in this case, was the online game *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009). Despite the fact that *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) served as a suitable and relevant case for this study and yielded valuable results for the field of transmedia storytelling and marketing in video games, it should be pointed out that the results could vary to a certain degree if this study was replicated with a different case. Hence, by reproducing this study with another online game that makes use of transmedia storytelling, more insights could be provided as to how transmedia storytelling is used, given its broad and versatile essence.

Future studies could therefore explore this study's topic from the perspective of a different online game and potentially unravel other themes and results. Due to the scope limitations of this master's thesis, it would also be interesting to conduct a cross-comparison between multiple online games or brands and identify the similarities and differences in the way they utilize transmedia storytelling and marketing. Furthermore, this research could not investigate the audience and consumer side more in-depth, therefore, it could be an interesting direction for future research. For that, in-depth interviews could be conducted with video game players who also consume a game's transmedia content, or with those who started playing a game because its transmedia content, diving deeper into their motivations and experiences.

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Appendix A: Coding Book

Code	Description	Example
Character identity	Mirrored identity from the macro story	Dragon design on Akali's jacket, reflecting her dragon theme as a *League of Legends* champion.
Character attribute	Mirrored trait from the macro story	Vi in *Arcane* kicks a door open instead of waiting for Mylo to unlock it, which reflects her violent personality and quote "Vi stands for violence".
Lyrical reflection of character	Lyrics in music video fit the character's narrative	Kai'Sa singing "I've got different DNA", reflecting on her background as a mutant in *K/DA* 'MORE'.
Worldbuilding	Representation of League of Legends worldbuilding from the lore	Zaun and Piltover, the two main locations in *Arcane* are directly taken from *League of Legends'* lore as cities of the world Runeterra.
Relationships	Representation of League of Legends relationships from the lore	In *League of Legends*, it is hinted that Vi and Jinx are sisters but it was never reinforced, until Arcane was released. This confirms their sisterhood.
Champion ability	Depiction of abilities from League of Legends characters	Kai'Sa uses her in-game Q ability 'Icathian Rain' in the *K/DA* 'POP/STARS' music video.
In-game spell	Depiction of in-game spells from League of Legends (summoner's spell)	In the beginning of *Arcane* episode 2, an unknown person uses teleport, which is a summoner's spell in League of Legends.
Visual trademark	Piece of visual information that refers to a different product/name	Riot Games' logo at the start of *K/DA* 'POP/STARS' music video.
Musical element	Addition of music that aligns with the product	Introduction song of *Arcane* 'Enemy' by Imagine Dragons featuring JID, played at the beginning of each episode.
Addition of new characters	New characters who are not present in League of Legends, are introduced	The main characters Mel, Silco, Vander in *Arcane*.
Revision of character looks	Characters have a different look from their original appearance	All characters wear new outfits, representing a different lore.
Revision of relationships	Relationships are depicted differently from the macro story	Viktor and Jayce have a brotherly relationship in *Arcane*, whereas in the *League of Legends* lore, they

		are only colleagues who work together.
Skins	Cosmetic items that change the look of characters	All characters in the *K/DA* music videos are representing a new skinline.
Uncharted territory	Addition of new and unexplored setting	Flashback in the beginning of episode 2 of *Arcane*, an unknown desert setting.
Modern-style setting	Present-day environment that contrasts League of Legends' fantasy world	Modern cars, motorcycles and high-speed trains in *K/DA* music videos.
Easter egg (in-game)	Hidden message that is often addressed at fans (Seekers), in-game	Poster containing Teemo, one of League of Legends' most recognizable champions, is hanging on a wall in episode 1 of Arcane.
Easter egg (real-life)	Hidden message that is often addressed at fans (Seekers) real-life	*K/DA* posters hanging in Seraphine's room in *K/DA* 'MORE', which implies that Seraphine is a fan of the *K/DA* group
Foreshadowing	Future event is hinted beforehand	Appearance of new *K/DA* member Seraphine is hinted at the beginning and revealed later during the bridge of the song 'MORE'.
Flashback	Depicting a scene from the past	Various *Arcane* episodes (1, 3) offer background information by showing a sequence from the past to help the viewer understand the present events.
Parallel story	Story that happens at the same time as another story	While tensions rise in Piltover, the story of Ambessa Merdarda in Noxus is told simultaneously.
Time jump	Same story at a different time	In episode 4 of *Arcane*, 10 years have passed since episode 3.
Character in motion	Characters come to live, instead of being static	*League of Legends* champions who are featured in *Arcane* can be seen as animated personas, instead of programmed and static game characters.
Younger self	Portrayal of characters' younger selves	Given the time jumps that exist within *Arcane*, younger versions of characters are being portrayed beforehand.

Appendix B: Coding Tree

Themes	Sub-Themes	Initial Codes
Reinforcing the macro story (League of Legends)	Referencing the character	Character identity
		Character attribute
		Lyrical reflection of character
	Referencing the lore	Worldbuilding
		Relationships
	Referencing gameplay mechanics	Champion ability
		In-game spell
Adding new angles and elements to the narrative	Addition through external elements	Visual trademark
		Musical element
	Expanding characters	Addition of new characters
		Revision of character looks
		Revision of relationships
		Skins
	Expanding settings	Uncharted territory
		Modern-style setting
Implementing dimension and depth	Gimmicks	Easter egg (in-game)
		Easter egg (real-life)

	Narrative techniques	Foreshadowing
		Flashback
		Parallel story
		Time jump
	Character insight	Character in motion
		Younger self