"You, who can resend life or raise the dead"

A study on rhetorical devices and persuasiveness of games console TV advertising

Bachelor's thesis

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JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Mainonnan, sekä mainonnassa hyödynnettyjen retoristen strategioiden näkyvyys ja suosio tutkimuksessa on nostanut päätään merkittävästi lähivuosina, eikä suotta: Retorisilla keinoilla kuvataan olevan yhä suurempi merkitys vakuuttavien mainosten luomisessa sekä vuorovaikutuksessa yleisön ja markkinoijien välillä. Tämän kandidaatintutkielman tavoitteena oli selvittää, kuinka paljon ja millä tavoin kolme suurinta videopelikonsolivalmistajaa, Playstation, Xbox, ja Nintendo, hyödyntävät televisiomainonnassaan erilaisia retorisia keinoja, sekä vertailla kyseistä kolmea valmistajaa keskenään määrällisen- ja laadullisen sisällönanalyysin sekä retorisen analyysin keinoin. Lisäksi aineistona tutkimuksessa käytettiin online-kyselyä, jolla kartoitettiin erilaisten retoristen keinojen ja mainosten erilaista merkitystä niiden vakuuttavuudelle. Aineisto koostui 14 mainosvideosta, sekä 215 kyselyvastauksesta.

Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että TV-mainonnassa hyödynnetään monipuolisesti retorisia keinoja. Tavallisimpia keinoja olivat rakenteeltaan monimutkaisemmat keinot, kuten metaforat sekä kärjistys, joista valtaosa esiintyi visuaalisessa muodossa. Suurimmat eroavaisuudet retoristen keinojen käytössä identifioitiin Nintendon mainonnassa, joka hyödynsi epäsuoria vetoomuksia yleisön tunteisiin sekä julkisuuden henkilöihin. Kohdeyleisöllä oli hyvin poikkeavia mielipiteitä erilaisten retoristen keinojen käytöstä. Esimerkiksi vaikka kompleksisten retoristen keinojen on todettu lisäävän mainosten vakuuttavuutta, tutkimustuloksista selvisi, että rakenteeltaan liian monimutkaiset keinot vähentävät huomattavasti niiden pidettävyyttä. Lisäksi todettiin, että yleisön tunteisiin vetoaminen koettiin positiivisesti esimerkiksi samaistumisen ansiosta, kun taas julkisuuden henkilöitä hyödyntävät mainokset koettiin sävyltään lavastetuiksi ja epäluonnollisiksi. Jatkotutkimuksissa voitaisiin esimerkiksi käyttää havainnointia kyselytutkimuksen sijaan laajempien tulosten saamiseksi, sekä tutkia, käyttävätkö nämä yritykset samanlaisia keinoja muiden tuotteidensa mainonnassa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Video games, even since the early 1970's, have played a significant role in the entertainment industry, appearing in various formats and locations, such as portable games machine, television-dependent consoles, amusement arcades and so on (Kirriemuir 2002: 2). Several factors, including increases in game complexity and massive sales of different gaming consoles such as the Sony's PlayStation, Microsoft's Xbox, and Nintendo's Game Boy series, have significantly contributed to the fact that the gaming industry has become a significant part of the contemporary world. During the growing significance of games consoles in a contemporary society, they have significantly improved in terms of technological, graphical, and processing complexity and power, the global games console sector being dominated mainly by Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony. (Kirriemuir 2002: 2.) The term *games console* will be used throughout the thesis to make it clearer for the audience rather than shifting between several different terms for the devices.

As the significance of games consoles has increased within years, also the need for games console advertising has increased, as well as the wars between different consoles and their supporters as well as target groups. One of the most significant platforms for gaming console advertising are TV commercials, which are a significant part of the advertising industry today. Many studies have been conducted in the field of video games and their relation to language learning, for example, but few studies have been carried out in terms of games consoles and their advertising which is why there is a need of further research in this specific field.

The aim of the thesis is to provide an understanding of the use of different rhetoric devices in the TV commercials of three competing gaming console manufacturers: Microsoft's Xbox, Sony's PlayStation, and Nintendo, and how different rhetorical devices differently impact the persuasiveness of the chosen ads. The agenda is to compare the TV commercials of these three manufacturers, focusing mainly on the rhetoric figures used in them, since they are crucial in increasing the persuasiveness of an ad, and thus play an important role in the war between different consoles, for example. This is achieved by gathering significant TV commercials from each manufacturer, analyzing them in terms of rhetorical devices, and then discussing how the use of different figures impacts how the commercials of each company are viewed by the audience. The significance of the use of certain rhetorical devices will also be briefly discussed.

1. RHETORIC IN GAMES CONSOLE ADVERTISING

In this chapter, I will introduce some remarkable concepts in my area of research to clarify the theoretical framework of the thesis. First, I will introduce the concept of rhetoric figures occurring in TV advertising and briefly define the concept of rhetorical devices, since they construct the overall frame for the entire thesis. Secondly, I will discuss the past research in the field of games console advertising to make it clearer what kind of research has already been conducted in the area before, as well as their effect on the persuasiveness of the ads.

2.1. TV commercials as a type of advertising

This sub-section will investigate the concept of TV commercials as a type of advertising in more detail. For example, Bhatia (2004) takes a closer look on advertisements and different sections that can be understood as part of advertising. Bhatia (2004: 60) sees advertisements as a genre of their own and points out that it is possible to view these genres, advertisements in this context, at a lower level or generalization and later make more specific notes of the different specific realizations within this genre. Some of the most common examples of the more specific realizations within this genre could include, for instance, print advertisements, TV commercials, radio advertisements, and so on. Although these realizations differ from each other in terms of communicative purposes, they belong to the same genre of advertisements. (Bhatia 2004: 60-61.) Thus, it can be noted that TV commercials belong under the genre of advertisements, and the broader meaning of this section is to provide an understanding of TV commercials as a realization of its own.

TV commercials can be seen as a powerful tool of reaching people and influencing the opinions and thoughts of large groups of people around the world. Vilanilam & Varghese (2004: 118) state that, only within a day, a TV viewer can be exposed to hundreds of different commercials which can, after a year, grow in numbers over tens of thousands. Even though the costs of producing, creating, and airing one can grow significant, television is also one of the most cost-efficient medias, and no other medium allows producers to reach and have an effect on such a large amount of people in such a minimal cost per person. (Vilanilam & Varghese 2004: 118.) What is also noted by Vilanilam & Varghese (2004: 118) is that, because not many people mind television advertising in general, the commercial should rather be a friend rather than intrude. In addition to this, some important factors in relation to the nature of TV advertising are listed: These include, for example, honesty, positivity, persuasiveness, simplicity, and that it builds a personality to the product at the same time as being unexpected. (Vilanilam & Varghese 2004: 119.) Even though the form of television commercials as well as technology has changed during the years, there is one thing that has not changed: To affect the attitude and behavior of people in order to be able to sell a certain

product or service (Vilanilam & Varghese 2004: 119). What is also important to note is that TV commercials are significantly multimodal in nature: They contain not only text and images, but also visuals, music, nonverbal sound, camera angles- and movements, and so on. Surely, they also include written and spoken narrative, but are seemingly more multimodal than traditional print advertisements. (Enschot et al. 2010: 139-140.)

Enschot et al. (2010: 138) emphasize that, in terms of TV advertising, the use of rhetorical devices seems to increase the extent to which the viewers find the advertisement persuasive. Up until the recent studies in the area, research has particularly focused on the study of print advertising. What Enschot et al. (2010: 138) also emphasize is that TV advertising has a greater impact on the audience, and, in addition to this, also includes higher budgets compared to print advertising. In the next sub-section, I will provide more detailed information about the use of rhetorical devices within TV commercials to deepen the understanding of the reader on the aspect crucial in terms of the thesis.

2.2. Rhetorical devices in advertising

Rhetorical terms are often referred to as *figures of speech* as they are used to a large extent in everyday language. Even though rhetorical devices are most commonly used in the discussion of literature, today the use of rhetorical devices is evident in all kinds of cultural investigation. (Kelen 2007: 8.) The term *rhetorical device* is often used since they can be used to create effects with words with a goal to emerge feelings of persuasiveness in the viewer. There are many ways in which different rhetorical devices can be classified, one of the most popular ones being the distinction between the concepts of trope and scheme. Schemes mean modifying the typical ways in which words themselves would normally appear to create meaning, where tropes modify the different meaning of words by modifying the ways in which they create various new meanings (Kelen 2007: 9). As an example, various ways of repetition can be viewed as schemes, since they alter the words and the ways they appear to, for example, emphasize a point, whereas metaphors, to illustrate an example of a trope, modify the meanings of words to transfer various new meanings to the viewer of an ad, for instance. All in all, tropes tend to be more structurally complex than schemes, since they alter and create new meanings, and as they modify the meanings of words, requiring the audience to interpret this new meaning with possibly otherwise familiar concept, where schemes focus more on superficial deviations and exaggerations such as repetition, not requiring as much interpretation.

All in all, rhetorical devices are based on the idea of expressions being transferred in a way that significantly differs from the familiar expectation: This, however, is not considered or rejected as

faulty due to this deviation. (Madupu et al. 2013: 59.) Although all rhetorical figures can appear either in visual or verbal modes, visual rhetoric, especially visual metaphors, have increased their popularity in advertising. What can be noted is that the rhetorical figures applied in print advertising do not significantly differ from the ones applied in TV advertising: This is visible in the comparison of studies in the field, dealing with the appearance of rhetoric in print- and TV advertising. Especially in visual rhetoric, there has been an increasing focus on decreasing the anchoring of rhetorical pictures in advertising, leaving the interpretation of the message open for the viewer. (Madupu et al. 2013: 1-2.) In the next section, the rhetorical devices applied in the commercials analyzed for the thesis will be presented and defined.

Anaphora is a rhetorical figure, belonging to the subgroup of *repetition*, meaning the repetition of words in the beginning of subsequent phrases, such as *"Early treatment. Early cure"*. *Alliteration* stands for the situation where a certain vowel or consonant is repeated three or more times, thus also being a form of repetition. Lastly, for the repetition section, *Epistrophe* refers to the repetition of words at the end of subsequent phrases, hence being close to *Anaphora.* Furthermore, *antithesis* works to establish a contrasting relationship between two concepts either by juxtaposing them or placing them together in a parallel manner. *Epithet* is used to qualify a certain subject, a noun, by naming a certain characteristic of this subject, for example *peaceful dawn.* Lastly, *anecdotes* and *narration* link together scenes, actors and certain events in a chronological order, used to tell a story. In fact, all appeals to observed situations or personal experiences rely on narratives or storytelling.

Hyperbole in discourse and thus also in advertising refers to making an exaggerated or an extreme claim, such as *"Laser beams move at the speed of light. Fortunately, our engineers move somewhat faster."* *Rhetorical question* asks a question from the audience to make an assertion, for example, and not expecting a response. *Metaphor* is used in rhetoric to compare two, otherwise dissimilar objects, so that the characteristics of the other object are transferred to the other. Differing from *Simile,* also one of the rhetorical devices used in the analysis, *Metaphors* state that a thing *is* another thing, rather than being *like* another thing, which is what *Similes* do. *Metonymy,* belonging to the group of tropes in addition to the two rhetorical elements described before, is using associated elements to represent the whole. Lastly, *Personification* refers to representing animals or inanimate objects as if they would have human attributes, such as feelings, character, or behavior. In addition to this, certain ideas and abstractions can also be viewed through *Personification.* (McQuarrie & Mick 1996: 430-43; Jeong 2008: 60; Killingsworth 2005: 136 & Harris 2013: 16-42.)

Lastly, I will define some of the rhetorical appeals that appear in the data in addition to other rhetorical devices. First of all, *pathos* or emotional appeals is the nature of speech which is responsible for the emotional responses of the audience, convincing them of something. *Logos* offers arguments of the organization in question, which can include, for instance, outstanding qualities of a product which benefit the discourse. (Xuan Doan 2017: 31.) Appeals to celebrities have received little attention in research, which will be discussed further in the thesis, but it can be said to refer to indirect convincing through celebrity testimonials, where the advertised product is supported and promoted by a well-known person (Fernandez 2013: 7).

2.3. The audience of TV commercials and audience engagement

One of the crucial aspects of the thesis is to define the audience of TV commercials, as well as briefly discuss the ways of audience engagement. A point raised by Briggs (2010: 9) is that television audience should never be seen as a homogenous mass, but rather consider the audience's individual features in addition to other features: People are not only *an audience* but shape their relation to television in relation to social identities, situational locations, and personal experiences, for instance. All of these aspects make people consider television at the same time as a cultural practice, a technology, and a mediator of different meanings. (Briggs, 2010: 9.) An important theme in audience studies is the new technologies, how they expand the audience and the attention the audience is willing to give to individual texts. How this relates to the topic of the thesis is that broadcasters will actively need to think about the ways to capture as well as sustain the attention of the audience of the ads, especially with the growing role and revenue to the Internet. (Briggs, 2010: 14.)

What may be troubling in TV advertising is that, according to a study, 80% of viewers leave the room during commercial breaks or fast-forward through them in prerecorded materials (Giles, 2003: 113). As Giles (2003: 113) describes, the increased sophistication of TV advertising is based on higher entertainment value, and thus higher audience engagement levels. Nevertheless, television advertising can still be seen as more effective in customer engagement and interaction in comparison to the Internet, with full user control, and where one can dismiss ads more easily, hence preventing some persuasive techniques, where ads interrupting shows and films have more time on develop a storyline and characters to interact with the audience, as well as persuade them. (Giles 2003: 113.) Increasingly, the focus of TV advertising is moving away from product-orientation towards consumer-orientation with discursive and narrative features: This has occurred mostly due to the role of television advertising in self-concept and identity construction. (Giles 2003: 114.)

2.4. Previous research: Rhetorical devices in TV commercials

Previous research concerning the use of rhetorical devices in games console TV commercials have not been conducted to a large extent before, which also creates an important research gap in the field answered in my thesis. However, the multimodal use of rhetorical devices in TV commercials in general provides some important previous studies in the field which can be used to fill the need for relevant previous research for the thesis. Most of the previous research conducted in the field of video games focuses mostly on video games themselves and topics such as the connection between video games and gender representations as well as video games and language learning- and teaching, and the study of games consoles has not caught as much of the previous researchers' attention. In the following paragraphs, I will be covering topics such as the significance of the use of rhetoric in TV commercials as well as the role of multimodality, especially visual rhetoric, within this certain field of advertising – also as a way to motivate the analysis of visual rhetoric in my study in the same field of study as well.

All previous studies gathered from the field of rhetoric in TV commercials emphasize the significance of rhetorical devices in advertising. This can be supported, for instance, by looking at the results of the study conducted by Enschot et al. (2010). In their study, Enschot et al. (2010: 142) state that, on average, 95% of the TV commercials analyzed for the study contained at least one rhetorical device whether in verbal, visual or verbo-pictorial modes, tropes appearing most frequently. This study consisted of the analysis of randomly selected Dutch and British TV commercials, including brands from various sections of industry (Enschot et al. 2010: 141). The findings of this particular study are presented in the tables below in order to illustrate them in a simpler manner. The significance of rhetorical devices in TV commercials is also pointed out by Xuan Doan (2017) in their study on rhetoric in TV advertising, and the significance of rhetoric in advertising is also approached from a slightly different point of view: According to Xuan Doan (2017: 34), rhetorical figures in advertising are used to psychologically influence the viewers, and to increase the persuasiveness of an ad. The study by Xuan Doan (2017: 34) also states that the most used rhetorical figures in TV commercials include repetition, hyperbole, metaphor, and comparison, and that these rhetorical figures mostly occur in the form of images, which will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraph.

Table 1. Occurrence of schemes and tropes collapsing over the verbal, visual and verbopictorial mode

	% (n=199)
Scheme(s) only	12.6%
Trope(s) only	59.3%
Scheme(s) and trope(s)	23.1%
Total	95.0%

Table 2. Occurrence of rhetorical figures, as a function of mode (verbal vs. visual vs. verbopictorial)

	Verbal	Visual	Verbopictorial	Total
Total (n=199)				
Scheme	17.1%	17.1%	9.5%	35.7%
Trope	22.6%	51.8%	22.1%	82.4%
Total	39.7%	68.9%	31.6%	95.0%

(Enschot et al. 2010: 141-142)

One of the crucial themes standing up from previous research is the central role of visual rhetoric in advertising, as well as its effect on likeability and effectiveness of the ad. As Madupu et al. (2013: 58) state, the use of visuals in advertising has steadily been growing over the years, and more attention is being given to visual elements in an ad rather than verbal elements. There is declining focus on verbal references to products and leading consumers through the interpretation and message of the ad (Madupu et al. 2013: 58). In addition, in the results of the study of Xuan Doan (2017: 34), including 200 randomly selected advertisements on Vietnamese television related to all kinds of products to all kinds of customers, the most commonly appearing rhetorical figures, already listed in the previous paragraph, occurred mostly in the form of images. It is noted that, to promote product value and leave a strong impression for the viewer, increasing the persuasiveness of an ad in other words, visual rhetoric is a powerful tool. Overall, visual rhetoric is being used to create positive thought to make the audience remember the product. (Xuan Doan 2017: 34.) These positive attitudes and experiences of persuasiveness potentially emerge from the increasing engagement of the audience in advertising messages: As is stated by Briggs (2010: 14), broadcasters actively need to think about the ways to capture as well as sustain the attention of the audience of the ads, especially with the growing role and revenue to the Internet. This means that, increasingly, broadcasters will need to rely on tools and ways to engage the audience more in the message of the ad to capture and hold their attention and interest, referring back to the statement made by Giles (2003: 113) that 80% of the viewers leave the room during commercial breaks. This is where the power of rhetoric comes into play, and why its role is steadily increasing in the context of advertising: As will be discussed in more detail later and what is central in the use of rhetoric is that it invites the viewers to increasingly use their cognitive elaboration to solve the meaning of the ad, which, in the use of rhetoric, is often hidden and not conveyed straightforwardly. (Jeong 2008: 59.) Thus, the use of rhetoric frequently utilizes the types of abstract messages and meanings that engage the audience to actively take part in the ad to investigate these hidden meanings and messages, rather than luring them to buy a product or service by straightforward information and offering ready and set up interpretations.

2.5. Persuasion

The topic of commercial persuasiveness and how it is affected by the use of rhetorical figures is also a topic that is covered in literature and research, also being one of the main interests of the thesis. The findings of previous research on the field indicate that rhetorical figures in advertising correlate with their perceived persuasiveness, producing more positive attitudes towards them (McQuarrie & Mick 2003: 579). Many other studies such as the one by Enschot et al. (2010) have also examined this link between rhetorical figures and commercial likeability.

As Enschot et al. (2010) conducted a research on the topic of rhetorical figures in TV commercials and their persuasiveness by setting up a survey to compare how commercials with non-figuration (no rhetorical devices), those with schemes only (no need for re-interpretation), the ones with tropes only (need to be re-interpreted by the viewer), and finally the commercials with both schemes and tropes differ in likeability. The results from the study are presented below in a table.

Table 3. Commercial likeability (average scores; 1 = like; 5 = dislike), as a function of rhetorical figure category (with SDs).

	Commercial likeability
Nonfiguration	3.02 (0.48) [1,2]
Scheme(s) only	3.15 (0.48) [1]
Trope(s) only	2.67 (0.48) [2]
Scheme(s) and trope(s)	2.92 (0.45) [1]

Note: Different superscripts indicate that the scores differ significantly from one another; equal superscripts indicate that the scores do not differ significantly from one another.

(Enschot et al. 2010: 142)

As can be seen from the table, there is a clear difference between the likeability of commercials with no rhetorical figures, and those with rhetorical figures. In addition, commercials only utilizing tropes, such as metaphors, hyperbole, and metonymy, were liked better than those using schemes only, for example repetition and antithesis, or combination of both schemes and tropes. (Enschot et al. 2010: 143.) Jeong (2008: 59), for example, explains that visual metaphors increase the viewers' cognitive elaboration as they interpret the message the advertiser is aiming to get across, which, in many cases, deviate from the ordinary way of communication, which may lead to higher persuasion levels. Enschot et al. (2010: 143) also point out that the findings from the questionnaire reveal that the commercials with tropes or those with combination of schemes and tropes do not differ in terms of how easy or difficult they are to understand from those that only utilize schemes or non-figuration, and commercials in all categories are stated as being easy to understand by the viewer. Madupu et al. (2013: 61) suggest that consumers experience a sense of pleasure as they interpret the hidden meaning of an ad utilizing tropes, but with the assumption that the ad is not too complex: Where complex rhetorical figures increase processing, too high levels of complexity, called abstract

metaphors, reduce their comprehension and hence their ability to persuade. (Madupu et al. 2013: 62). This is based on the idea of complex rhetorical figures, tropes, demanding increasing consumer processing, but also reducing the comprehension and understanding of the message when the ad reaches too high levels of complexity (Madupu et al. 2013: 62). *(differences in juxtaposition, fusion, and replacement)* In sum, it can be said that, in most cases, the more complex the ad is, the more it is going to be liked, due to the process of elaboration. This has also led to the decreasing levels of verbal rhetoric, especially verbal schemes, in advertising since they focus more on straightforward messages and low levels of consumer interpretation.

The topic of emotional appeals as well as celebrity involvement and their impact on persuasion is not a topic that would broadly have been discussed in previous literature and research, but hence also offers a chance for the thesis to fill the gap. As the appeal to celebrities in advertising belongs to a more commonly used category of appealing to authority, acting as a superficial subcategory, it has not received significant attention from previous researchers. As both emotional appeal and appeal to celebrities mainly appear in the commercials by Nintendo, they will be compared with one another based on their persuasiveness levels. They also have one feature in common: Both kinds of commercials appear in the format of narration and anecdotes. However, the study by Fernandez (2013) slightly attends to the discussion about the use of emotional appeals and celebrity endorsement in advertising. According to the findings of the study on 115 print advertisements of beauty products, appeals are often transferred through indirect convincing related to emotional needs of the viewer, hence attempting to establish a personal connection with the audience: Beauty products might, for instance, appeal to the emotional need of confidence and increased self-esteem, relating to the attributes of the product advertised (Fernandez 2013: 4-6.) Another example introduced by Fernandez (2013) is the frequent use of testimonials of famous people in advertising. With this feature, the audience is aimed to be persuaded by building the image for the product through non-market desires, as well as associating the product with the celebrity and to draw links between the brand and wealth, success, or security. (Fernandez 2013: 7-8.) Hence, it can be seen that emotional appeals and appeals to well-known people can impact persuasiveness.

3. PRESENT STUDY

3.1.   Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding on the type of rhetorical figures applied in games console advertising, and how the use of these certain figures differently affects their perceived likeability. Hence, the research questions set up for this study are the following:

1. What is the ratio of different kinds of rhetorical figures in games console commercials and what is their purpose in the context in which they appear?
2. How do the three companies differ in their use of rhetorical devices?
3. How does the use of different kinds of rhetorical devices differ in their ability to persuade the target audience?

The ratio of rhetorical devices in the commercials is first summarized neutrally in tables for each of the three companies, and their significance in the context they appear will be briefly summarized with examples from the data. Afterwards, the companies and their commercials will be compared, and the study summarizes which rhetorical devices are utilized the most across all commercials. Lastly, the study aims to unfold how the use of rhetoric in games console TV advertising differs in their perceived persuasiveness.

3.2. Data

The data of the thesis consists of TV commercials published by three (3) organizations producing games consoles and games console ads for their audience, mostly consisting of gamers or people interested in gaming: Sony's PlayStation, Microsoft's Xbox, and Nintendo. The data consists of 14 commercials altogether, from approximately 0,5 to 1,5 minutes in length. These companies were selected both because they offer the most data, and they are also one of the most remarkable companies within the gaming industry, most likely familiar to everyone interested in the gaming culture. From the 14 commercials, 6 of them belong to PlayStation, 5 to Xbox, and lastly 3 to Nintendo. This is justified as the commercials by PlayStation and Xbox vary significantly in their style and language, where the commercials by Nintendo belong mostly to the same advertising campaign "My Way", thus being very similar in their structure, style, and use of language. Thus, three commercials slightly differing from one another were selected for further analysis. The data is analyzed in forms of videos since the study is interested in doing multimodal analysis and because the data is only available in the form of video commercials. Although the study will mostly be interested in spoken and written language, because of their multimodal nature, visual modes of rhetoric will also be taken into consideration. This is even mandatory as some of the commercials do not include language in spoken or written form at all. The commercials have been selected based on their relevance for the study of rhetorical figures, which will later in the study be modified in the analysis of perceived persuasiveness of some of the advertisements.

The additional data for the study consists of online survey responses, created using a free online survey creation tool Google Forms (https://www.google.com/forms/about/). An online survey was chosen as the data gathering method as it enabled the gathering of comprehensive data from a large
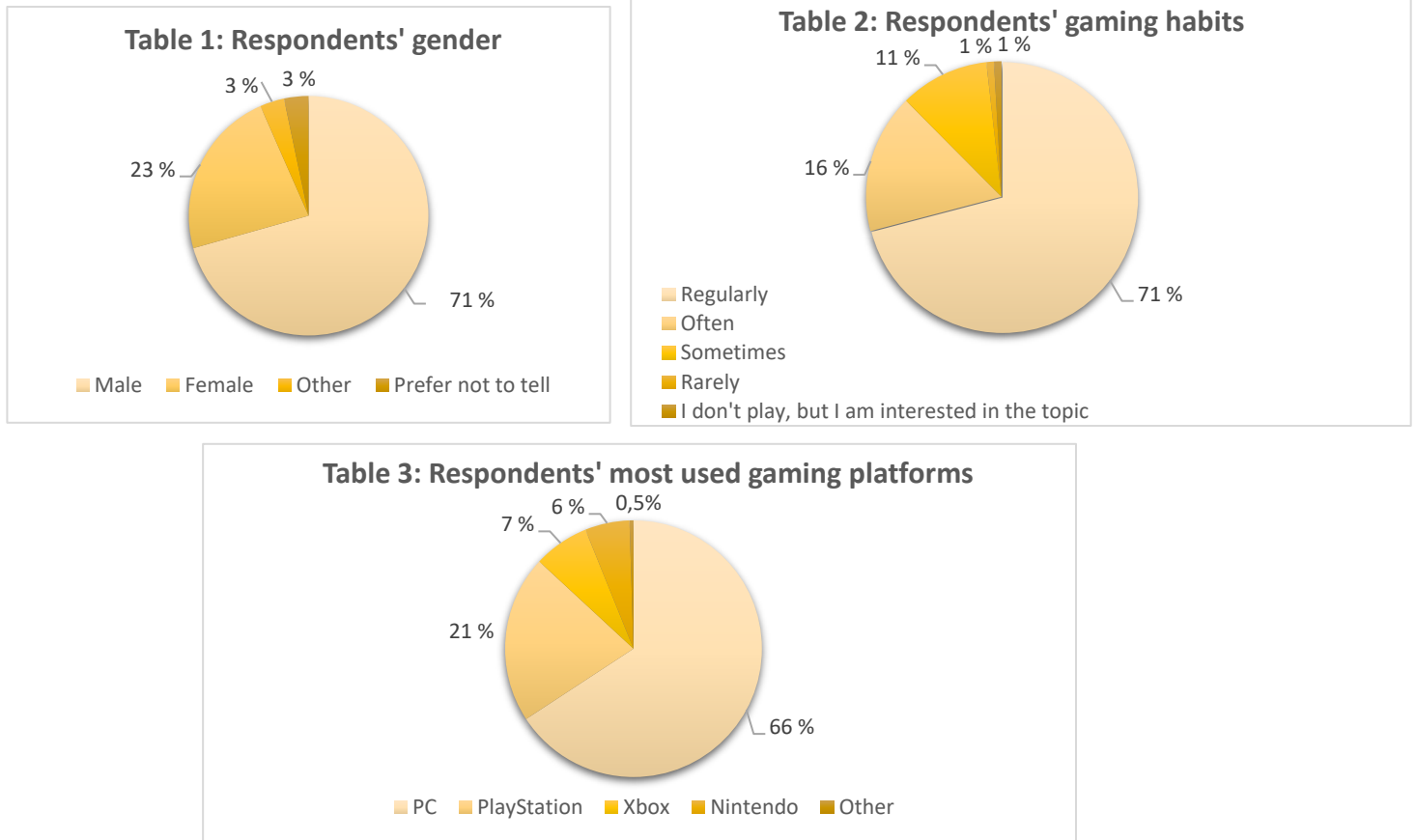
set of participants interested in the gaming culture. To answer the survey, the respondents were either expected to be gamers themselves, or at least somewhat interested in the gaming culture. The link to the survey was shared via several Facebook groups, as well as several communities within Tumblr, Discord, and Reddit, gaining 215 responses, and being available from the 2nd of March to 22nd of March. The most responses were gained from Reddit, where the post resulted in 58 "upvotes" and 153 responses altogether within two days of posting the survey. Before distributing the survey to a larger audience via social media, it was shared personally with some of my acquaintances who had not contributed to the pilot study, and who were interested in taking a part. The survey was also distributed by some of my friends to their acquaintances interested in the gaming culture. In Reddit, the survey even caught the attention of an upper secondary school English teacher and was distributed to some students as well, but it remains unsure how many of them took the survey.

Before an online survey was chosen as the data gathering method, other additional methods of gathering consumer response data were considered. As Denscombe (2014: 167) explains, questionnaires are used when the researcher aims to gather straightforward information and standardized data without face-to-face interaction. In addition, especially online questionnaires can encourage completion in terms of their appealing layout, for example (Denscombe 2014: 179). In comparison, interviews are often used to research more complex issues and go into depth in the respondents' opinions, emotions, and experiences, and earn insights from key players within a certain field of study (Denscombe 2014: 179). As the thesis does not go deeply into the experiences of gamers but is studying them in a more straightforward and simple way and with mostly quantitative methods, and does not require meeting people face-to-face, interviews were not considered as a suitable method. Lastly, participant observation is often used, according to Denscombe (2014: 205) to investigate the lifestyles, beliefs, and cultures of social groups. Direct observation can rely on direct evidence witnessed by the eye rather than what the informants tell the researcher, and fieldwork observes real-life situations, which would have happened even if the researcher was not involved in the situation (Denscombe 2014: 206). Observation would have not produced information for me about the respondents' views and opinions on the commercials I have chosen to analyze, although it could have produced additional interesting insights on the topic. Taking all this into consideration, it was clear that creating and distributing an online survey to gamers or people interested in the gaming industry would be the best alternative.

The survey consisted of 20 questions, which were related to 8 of the commercials applied in the study as well as leading questions, such as the respondents' interest in gaming. The survey was

mostly quantitative, consisting of multiple-choice questions related to how much respondents liked each commercial, and open questions, allowing the respondents to share more of their thoughts about the commercials. At the end of the survey, the respondents were given the opportunity to share free feedback about the survey.

3.3. Respondents of the survey

Table 1: Respondents' gender

3 % 3 %
23 %
71 %

Male Female Other Prefer not to tell

Table 2: Respondents' gaming habits

11 % 1 % 1 %
16 %
71 %

Regularly
Often
Sometimes
Rarely
I don't play, but I am interested in the topic

Table 3: Respondents' most used gaming platforms

6 % 0,5 %
7 %
21 %
66 %

PC PlayStation Xbox Nintendo Other

As can be seen from Table 1, out of all the respondents attending the survey, a significant majority (71%/152) were male compared to the number of female participants (23%/49). This, in fact, might not have anything to do with the stereotypical notion of males playing more video games than females, but issues of identification. What was found by Shaw (2012: 34) in a study about gamer identification was that males tend to identify themselves as gamers more likely than females or other gender labels, and females might underestimate the amount of time they spend on gaming. As the target group of the survey were gamers and people interested in gaming, it might be that females, for instance, did not identify themselves as the target group as easily as males did.

As expected, most of the respondents were regular gamers (71%/153), 16%/36 of the respondents chose the option that they play often, then sometimes (11%/23), and only 2% (3) respondents stated that they only play rarely or do not play at all but are interested in the gaming culture. Hence, it can be stated that most of the people interested in completing the survey were people who play on a

regular basis. Lastly, most of the respondents were PC gamers (66%/140), 45 people tended to play mostly on PlayStation, and only 28 (13,5%) respondents mostly used Xbox, Nintendo, or another platform (Commodore 64) as their gaming platform.

3.4.   Methods of analysis

The method of this study will follow quantitative content analysis, combined with rhetorical analysis. Quantitative content analysis, i.e., measuring the extent to which different rhetorical appeals appear in the commercials and presenting them in tables was found the most useful for the thesis, since it will be the clearest way to illustrate their ratio. Doing this, it will also be easier to link the ratio of the devices with the survey results, to be able to state if the use of certain kinds of devices affects persuasiveness and ad likeability more than others. However, qualitative content analysis will also slightly be used in the analysis to interpret and explain the findings in more detail. In addition, the survey responses will be illustrated in charts, since the survey both included closed Likert-scale questions from 1 to 5 *(1=dislike, 5=like*), and open-ended questions for free comments. The charts for the presentation of the data were chosen as they allow a more efficient and clear analysis of the findings, as well as presents the differences and trends in the data more clearly. The findings presented in the charts refer to the questions on the extent to which the respondents found each commercial likeable and persuasive in a scale from 1 to 5. The open-ended questions will be used to draw conclusions as well as to illustrate the reasons behind the emerging opinions or attitudes towards certain rhetorical devices, which will also be connected to previous research.

 Furthermore, the thesis will follow the principles of inductive content analysis. As Krippendorff (2019: 36) illustrates in his paper, the nature of content analysis is inferential, and appear in the interpretations of the statistical findings within the researcher's work. Where deductive analysis relies on premises, proceeding from generalizations to particulars, inductive content analysis and its inferences proceed from particulars to generalizations (Krippendorff 2019: 36). The rhetorical devices applied in the analysis of the commercials were picked based on which ones came up in the analysis rather than basing them on previous studies in a similar field. However, it was noted afterwards that many of these rhetorical figures have also been found relevant in previous rhetorical analyses of advertising.

According to Krippendorff (2019: 18), content analysis as a research method is used to make replicable and valid inferences from different texts or other meaningful matters. Content analysis raises new insights from the texts analyzed and increases the researcher's own understanding on a certain topic. The aim of the thesis is precisely to provide new insights from the commercials: To provide a deeper understanding on a topic that has not before been used to analyze this kind of data.

Krippendorff (2019: 19) also states that while content analysis is addressed as the analysis of different texts, other figures such as images, maps, signs, symbols, sounds and so on can also be used as data. This supports the multimodal nature of my analysis, and the suitability of content analysis for such multimodal studies, since, in addition to spoken and written texts, elements such as sound, images, and so on are also crucial in the analysis.

What needs to be noted is that the frame of the study follows the method previously applied in an earlier study conducted by Enschot et al. (2010). In their study, Enschot et al. (2010) picked a sample of 100 Dutch and 99 British commercials and executed a quantitative content analysis during which they aimed to identify the rhetorical devices applied in the commercials. Afterwards, the content analysis data was linked with consumer responses, collected with an online survey. (Enschot et al. 2010: 142.) Because the frame of the study was found suitable for the aim of my thesis and it led to useful and interesting findings, it needs to be acknowledged that the method chosen follows the framework of an appendix.

3.5. Ethical considerations

The data that has been used for this thesis includes material that has been publicly published, and available for everyone interested. The commercial analysis does not handle any personal information about the participants. Some celebrities involved in the commercials might be mentioned by their name, but any other personal information is not being analyzed, but the study focuses mainly on the rhetorical content of the commercials.

For conducting the survey, some ethical arrangements had to be completed. For setting up the survey, the ethical guidelines provided by the University of Jyväskylä were followed, and the respondents were provided with the research notification, privacy notice, as well as asking for their consent to confirm the participation in the study at the end of the participant agreement. All information from the survey has been anonymized, and no individuals can be identified from the final thesis. The data will be destroyed after the thesis has been finished.

3.6. Pilot study

The pilot study was conducted by choosing a couple of commercials to analyze in terms of their rhetorical figures, to ensure that they would both offer enough data, and data that would be useful for conducting a rhetorical analysis. In addition, it was tested how much time it would take to analyze each commercial, so that it could be decided how many commercials are used for the final thesis, based on the time available for the analysis. A pilot survey was carried out to test if the questions set were understandable, and that the survey would deliver useful data for the thesis. Two

participants attended the pilot survey, and a comment box for additional comments on the commercials was added to the survey based on the feedback received.

4. RHETORICAL DEVICES IN GAMES CONSOLE ADVERTISING

4.1. Rhetorical devices in the advertising of the three companies

In this section, the raw data of the ratio of rhetorical devices in the commercials of the three manufacturers will be presented separately, as the thesis aims to unfold how the three companies differ in their use of these devices. The significance of the most utilized devices will be briefly illustrated with examples from the data. The analysis will, for the most part, be focusing on the devices appearing most frequently in the analyzed commercials. The first section of the analysis is focusing on answering the first two research questions on the ratio of rhetorical devices, after which their correlation to consumer likeability and persuasiveness will be unfolded. The commercials of each company will be presented in a certain order in the tables below, and each commercial has been attached in the right order to the beginning of the references of the thesis.

Table 1: The raw data of rhetorical devices in PlayStation commercials and their average ratios in total

Rhetorical device	P1 (N)	P2 (N)	P3 (N)	P4 (N)	P5 (N)	P6 (N)	Total (N)	% of total
Alliteration	1	1	-	-	1	-	3	6 %
Anaphora	7	2	2	-		-	11	23 %
Antithesis	4	-	-	-	2	-	6	13 %
Epistrophe	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2 %
Epithet	4	-	-	-		-	4	9 %
Hyperbole	5	1	-	1	1	-	8	17 %
Evidence (Logos)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2 %
Metaphor	-	-	1	2	-	1	4	9 %
Metonymy	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	2 %
Personification	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	2 %
Rhetorical question	6	-	-	-	-	-	6	13 %
Simile	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	2 %
Total devices	29	5	3	3	5	1	47	100 %

4.1.1. The use of rhetoric in PlayStation's advertising

From the chosen six commercials for PlayStation, a total of 46 rhetorical devices were found. As can be seen from Table 1, when counting the average ratio of the frequency of rhetorical devices out of all the 48 devices that were found, the most utilized devices were repetition (combined ratio of alliteration, anaphora, and epistrophe 15/31%), hyperbole (8/17%) and comparison (combined ratio of antithesis and simile 7/15%). Interestingly, the results turned out to be in line with those of Xuan

Doan (2017), finding repetition, hyperbole, and comparison to be the most apparent rhetorical devices in the 200 commercials analyzed.

According to the findings by Xuan Doan (2017: 32), repetition in advertising is often used to repeat a key message related to the advertised product to impress its viewers.

Excerpt 1

"Who are you not to be great? You, with the imagination of a brilliant child and the powers of an ancient god. Who are you to be ordinary? You, who can resend life or raise the dead."

Excerpt 1 has been gathered from the commercial *PlayStation | Greatness Awaits* (P1, see Table 1). Here the narrator is aiming to connect to the audience with the repeated expressions "who are you" and "you". Through this excerpt of repetition, the narrator is not only aiming to come closer to the viewer, but also to impress the viewers of the powers and control of a single individual in play and engage them more in the message rather than purely repeating a message related to the product itself. This is emphasized even more clearly through visual means, as the narrator keeps gazing right at the audience throughout the commercial, and even points their finger straightly at the viewer from time to time. In fact, this acts as a remarkable way to interact with the audience, as it keeps addressing a specific individual and their qualities. With the attached rhetorical questions, such as "Who are you to be ordinary?", the narrator is aiming to make the audience question why they should be ordinary, when they can reach unforeseen powers, such as raising the dead in the PlayStation gaming world. As typical for rhetorical questions not to expect a response but to make an assertion, for instance (McQuarrie & Mick 1996: 430-431), the narrator does not expect the viewer to respond, but rather aims to make them turn their backs to being ordinary in order to achieve greatness in play.

The second most applied rhetorical strategy in the data turned out to be hyperbole, defined by McQuarrie & Mick (1996: 430-431) as making an exaggerated or extreme claim about a product.

Excerpt 2

"Play has no limits."

Excerpt 2 has been gathered from a commercial in which an over-exaggerated claim about the PlayStation console has been transferred to the viewer both through visual and verbal forms. The commercial conveys an extreme idea of play on PlayStation having absolutely no limits. The hyperbole is conveyed additionally through a visual feature where several vessels sail through the edge of the world to space. These hyperboles are used for contrast and to emphasize the

limitlessness of the possibilities of play on PlayStation, as well as to catch the attention of the audience. In fact, the use of hyperbole is also evident in Excerpt 1, as the narrator is making over-exaggerated claims on the powers of a single individual, only possible in the gaming world: "You, who can resend life or raise the dead". It seems almost as the narrator is addressing these qualities as something the viewer already holds, but which can be brought to life in play.

Table 2: The raw data of the ratio of rhetorical devices in the chosen Xbox commercials and their average ratios

Rhetorical device	X1 (N)	X2 (N)	X3 (N)	X4 (N)	X5 (N)	Total (N)	% of total
Alliteration	1	-		-	-	1	3 %
Anaphora	-		1	-	-	1	3 %
Celebrities	-	1	1	1	-	3	9 %
Epistrophe	-	-		1	2	3	9 %
Hyperbole	-	4	2	-	2	8	23 %
Evidence (Logos)	1					1	3 %
Metaphor	-	2	2	-	-	4	11 %
Metonymy	-	-	-	6	-	6	18 %
Pathos (Emotions)	-	-	-	5	1	6	18 %
Rhetorical question	-	1	-	-	-	1	3 %
Total devices	2	8	6	13	5	34	100 %

4.1.2. The use of rhetoric in Xbox's advertising

What comes to the commercials released by Microsoft's Xbox, a total of 34 rhetorical devices from the five (5) chosen commercials were identified. When having a look at the average ratio of devices in the commercials, the most frequently used rhetorical devices seem to be combined metaphor and metonymy (10/29%), hyperbole (7/23%), and lastly emotional appeals, belonging to the categories of *pathos*. What follows is the presentation of examples from the data to illustrate the use of two of the most utilized rhetorical devices.

The metaphors and metonymies occurring in the commercials appear entirely in visual forms. This supports both the statement by Madupu et al. (2013: 58) on the use of visuals in advertising increasingly overriding the use of verbal elements, as well as the findings by Enschot et al. (2010), finding that 51,8% of the tropes occurring in the 199 commercials appeared in a visual form. An interesting example of a metaphor is applied in the commercial *Xbox Series X|S – Us Dreamers – Power Your Dreams* (X2, see Table 2), where a player enters a new dimension, obtaining supernatural powers as they start playing on Xbox. In this case, the audience is invited to interpret

the message behind the metaphor, being the representation of the Xbox gaming world as a dimension where there are no limits, and one might fulfill all their dreams.

An interesting note from the data is that hyperbole consisted a significant majority of the rhetorical devices applied in both PlayStation's and Xbox's commercials. In addition to PlayStation, Xbox keeps capturing their audiences' attention and interest through over-exaggerated claims. For instance, the commercial *Xbox One: Immersive Gaming* (X5, see Table 2) portrays a player who, as their character becomes scarred during the gameplay, also becomes scarred and feels the pain in the real life. The commercial ends with a statement "If it was any more real, it would be real". This clearly demonstrates how the audience is aimed to be persuaded through an over-exaggerated setting, where the gaming world and real world become merged together to illustrate the realistic feeling of gameplay on Xbox One. The high appearance of hyperboles and metaphors does not come as a surprise, as video games become increasingly realistic in their style, which PlayStation and Xbox also seem to emphasize and illustrate in their commercials through the use of these rhetorical strategies.

Table 3: The raw data of rhetorical devices in Nintendo's advertising and their average ratios

Rhetorical device	N1 (N)	N2 (N)	N3 (N)	Total (N)	% of total
Anecdote	-	-	1	1	17 %
Celebrities	-	-	1	1	17 %
Narration	1	1	-	2	33 %
Emotions (Pathos)	1	1	-	2	33 %
Total devices	2	2	2	6	100 %

4.1.3. The use of rhetoric in Nintendo's advertising

Lastly, from the chosen three commercials from Nintendo to be analyzed in this thesis, a total of 6 rhetorical devices were identified. Even though the number of rhetorical devices identified might seem relatively small, they, as they occurred, constructed the entire message of the commercial in which they appeared. The most utilized rhetorical strategies in Nintendo's commercials are narration (2/33%) and appeal to emotions, belonging to the category of pathos (2/33%). However, their amount does not significantly differ from the frequency of anecdotes (1/17%) and appeal to celebrities (1/17%), also playing a remarkable role in Nintendo's advertising.

The way the commercials by Nintendo are structured and the way they convey information clearly rely on rhetorical appeals, and the themes are extremely visible in the commercials analyzed. As Fernandez (2013: 6) explains, the crucial role of emotional appeals relies on establishing a personal

connection with the audience through their emotional needs. This is clearly demonstrated in the commercial *"Take your friends along for the ride with Animal Crossing: New Horizons"* (N1, see Table 3), viewing a teenager crying when moving to a new place with their family, forced to leave their friends behind. However, the commercial ends with the friends being able to connect and have fun together by playing Animal Crossing together on Nintendo Switch. This can be interpreted as Nintendo establishing a connection with especially their younger audience and their emotional need to stay connected with their friends wherever they are; In addition, it could be interpreted that through this message Nintendo is aiming to contribute to the COVID-19 discussion, encouraging people to stay at home and connect with their acquaintances remotely by playing together, as the commercial has been published in October 2020.

The commercial *"Brie Larson plays her favorite Nintendo Switch games"* (N3, see Table 3) illustrates an example of an appeal to well-known people in advertising. The commercial views the actor Brie Larson playing several games on Nintendo Switch, as well as sharing personal anecdotes about her memories on Animal Crossing from her childhood. This, as also found by Fernandez (2013: 7-8), persuades the audience by connecting the brand by non-market characters and features, hence drawing a link with the brand and success and security. It can be interpreted as particularly reaching parents, who might wonder if these games are secure for their children, for instance, and an appeal to well-known people makes them believe in the security of the brand and their products. It might also impress viewers adoring this particular celebrity, as they link Nintendo with Brie Larson, a famous actress seen in, for instance, the movies by the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which might persuade them to purchase the product.

Rhetorical devices	PlayStation	Xbox	Nintendo
Alliteration	6 %	3 %	-
Anaphora	23 %	3 %	-
Anecdote	-	-	17 %
Antithesis	13 %	-	-
Appeal to celebrities	-	9 %	17 %
Emotional appeal (Pathos)	-	18 %	33 %
Epistrophe	2 %	9 %	-
Epithet	9 %	-	-
Evidence (Logos)	2 %	3 %	-
Hyperbole	17 %	23 %	-
Metaphor	9 %	11 %	-
Metonymy	2 %	18 %	-
Narration	-	-	33 %
Personification	2 %	-	-

Rhetorical question	13 %	3 %	-
Simile	2 %	-	-
Total devices	**46**	**34**	**6**

Table 4: A summary of the ratio of rhetorical devices in the three companies' commercials

4.2.   Summary and comparison

The most frequent rhetorical devices applied in the TV advertising of the three companies were hyperbole (ratio of 17% and 23% in the 11 analyzed commercials for PlayStation and Xbox), emotional appeal, belonging to the category of pathos (18% and 33% in the chosen 8 commercials in total for Xbox and Nintendo) and metaphors, appearing most in the form of visual rhetoric (from 9 to 12% in PlayStation's and Xbox's advertising). As expected, a majority of the most utilized rhetorical strategies both in the commercials of individual companies and the ratio of the applied rhetorical devices in total belong to the category of tropes. This supports the findings by Enschot et al. (2010), finding that a majority of the commercials analyzed in their study belong to the category of tropes. The reason for this high utilization of tropes might be that, as also found by Madupu et al. (2013: 61), more structurally complex rhetorical figures, tropes, may lead to increased consumer processing and persuasion levels due to their remarkable audience engagement. This finding is supported by Enschot et al. (2010), showing in their questionnaire results that commercials utilizing only tropes were liked more than those using schemes only or combinations of schemes and tropes. In the last section of the thesis, the likeability of the chosen commercials for these three companies will be compared with the findings of those of Enschot et al. (2010). Looking at the individual rhetorical devices applied in the commercials, it would seem that in addition to engaging the audience through complex rhetoric such as metaphors, PlayStation and Xbox want to impress the viewers with their ability to gain tremendous possibilities and powers as they enter the gaming world through visual and verbal hyperboles. Furthermore, it would also seem that these companies also offer more traditional commercials relying on evidence and facts on the new qualities of their products. Although these qualities are crucial what comes to games consoles, their use appears as relatively small compared to other, more complex rhetorical strategies.

The most significant differences in the data appear, for instance, in the heavy utilization of repetition, especially alliteration and anaphora in PlayStation's advertising, where Xbox did not utilize them nearly as much, and Nintendo not at all. In addition, PlayStation was the only company applying epithet, personification, or simile in their commercials, although they did not play a significant role in PlayStation's advertising either (ratio between 2% and 9%). Other significant

differences were found comparing Nintendo's commercials to the commercials of the other two companies. Rhetorically, Nintendo aims to persuade their audience more through narration or storytelling and personal anecdotes, as well as appeals to emotions and well-known people. Although emotional appeals were prominent in Xbox's advertising as well, other rhetorical devices played a more remarkable role. Based on these differences, it can be interpreted that where PlayStation and Xbox engage their audience more psychologically through cognitive elaboration of the structurally more complex advertising messages, with the presumption of this leading to higher levels of persuasion as the audience plays an active role, Nintendo, as also stated by Fernandez (2013: 4-8) attempts to establish a connection with their audience by indirect convincing related to emotional appeals and linking the company with celebrities. Hence, their methods used to persuade differ significantly from one another.

4.2. The impact of rhetorical devices on commercial persuasiveness

The following, and the last section of the thesis is aiming to answer the third research question set for the study about the rhetoric applied in games console advertising and differences in their perceived likeability and persuasiveness by the target audience. This section will follow a similar structure as the previous one identifying the rhetorical strategies from the data. A brief summary of the respondents of the survey conducted for this section has been given above in the present study section.

4.2.1. The perceived likeability of the chosen PlayStation commercials

Three commercials were chosen to measure the persuasiveness of PlayStation's advertising in the eyes of the target audience. These commercials were *PlayStation | Greatness Awaits* (P1, see Table 1), reaching high ratio in the use of verbal rhetoric such as repetition, hyperbole, and rhetorical questions, *Feel the Power of PlayStation* (P6, see Table 1), consisting of visual tropes only, the entire commercial being built around a visual metaphor, and *New DUALSHOCK 4 | More Ways to Play | PS4* (P5, see Table 1), differing significantly from the other commercials in its structure and rhetoric, appealing to the audience by evidence and facts rather than more complex rhetorical strategies such as metaphors and hyperboles. The differences on the likeability of each of the three commercials is be presented in the figure below.
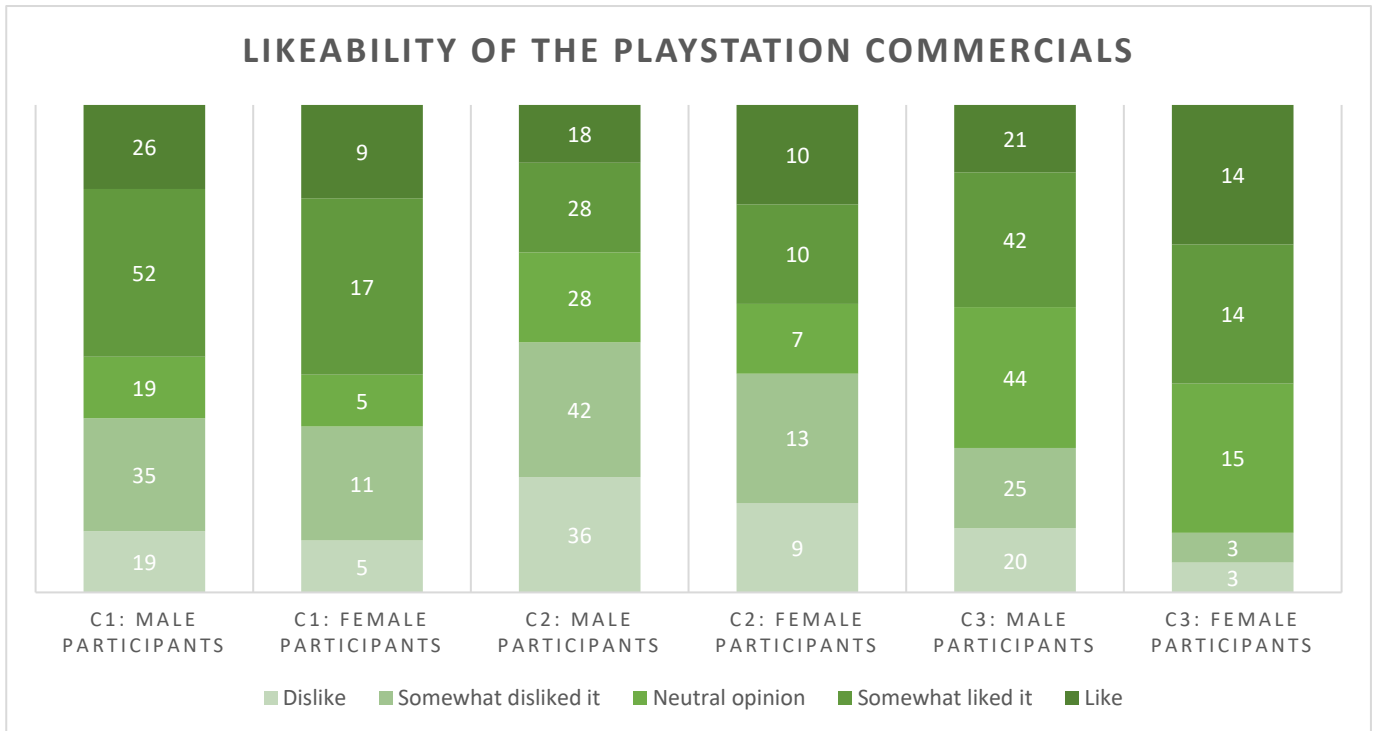
Figure 1: Distribution of responses on the likeability of each commercial

From the quantitative results above, it can be noted that different commercials utilizing different kinds of rhetorical devices vary in the way they were liked by the respondents and the target audience. When linking the rhetoric used in the commercials with their perceived likeability, a few distinctive notes can be made from the results, which will be discussed next, as well as interpreted and discussed in the light of previous research on the field.

Surprisingly, when analyzing the results of the survey, it was found that commercial C2, building its message around a visual trope, a metaphor, received the most negative attitudes by both male and female participants, 51% of the 152 male respondents and 45% of the 49 female respondents agreeing that they either disliked the commercial, or somewhat disliked it. This goes against the initial hypothesis of tropes leading to higher persuasion levels compared to other rhetorical devices, as several previous studies in the field, such as the one conducted by Enschot et al. (2010) suggest. From the survey conducted by Enschot et al. (2010: 143), it was found that commercials entirely consisting of tropes were found more persuasive than those utilizing schemes, such as repetition. The answers to the open questions for this specific commercial revealed some reasons for these negative experiences. For instance, 49 of the 132 respondents leaving additional comments described their opinions as not being able to unfold the message behind the metaphor or finding it overly creepy or gross. One respondent illustrated their opinion like this:

(1) "I didn't like this one all that much. Maybe it's because an exposed beating heart makes me somewhat uncomfortable, or maybe it's because I don't know what this means."

Overall, 37% of the respondents' negative experiences were affected by either not being able to interpret the message behind the metaphor, or the tone of the commercial. This is in line with the statement by Madupu et al. (2013: 62), suggesting that while complex rhetorical figures increase consumer processing and lead to higher persuasion levels, too high levels of complexity reduce understanding and comprehension and hence the commercial's ability to persuade. Hence, it can be interpreted that, in this case, while tropes may increase likeability in most cases, in the cases where they become too complex to interpret and leave the audience with mostly negative emotions such as confusion, their impact on likeability scores is the opposite.

The commercials resulting in the most positive attitudes by both gender groups were commercial C1 with combinations of verbal schemes and verbal tropes, and the one using logos to appeal to the audience by facts and evidence. This could suggest that, even though it might often be the case, the increasing complexity of advertising does not lead to higher persuasion in the case of PlayStation. Where the mean value of the likeability of the commercial with only tropes was 2,5 in average, the mean scores of the two other commercials were over 3,2. For example, for the commercial C3, 54 of the 122 respondents pointed out positive attitudes towards the informativeness as well as simplicity of the commercial:

(2) "This one was just basic showcase of the new features, but I don't think it needs to be much more. This one doesn't rely on feelings, but facts and I think it's a good thing."

According to this finding, it can be interpreted that in order to be liked, commercials do not, in every case, need to rely on heavy and complex rhetorical strategies. In fact, based on the survey and this particular comment, it might even be safer, in some cases, to rely on a simpler structure and rationality than psychologically influencing the audience through complex or over-exaggerated settings and leaving the interpretation of the message to the viewer. On the other hand, this finding might also indicate that some of the respondents interested in gaming tend to appreciate the showcase of the new features and qualities of the new console or spinoff more than those which refer more on impressing the viewer by other more engaging and impressing strategies.

4.2.2. The perceived likeability of the chosen Xbox commercials

In the following figure, the perceived likeability of the chosen three (3) Xbox commercials has been presented. Before discussing the persuasiveness of each commercial utilizing different rhetorical strategies, each commercial chosen for the survey will be briefly introduced. Firstly, the commercial appearing first, *Xbox Series X|S Launch Trailer – Us Dreamers - Power Your Dreams*, consists entirely of visual tropes, metaphors and hyperboles, with a single rhetorical question appearing in the end. Secondly, the commercial C2, *Xbox One: Immersive Gaming* also consists, close to entirely, of tropes, but when compared to the other commercials utilizing tropes and mostly metaphors only in them, this particular commercial consists entirely of visual hyperboles. Hence, its message has been built upon an over-exaggerated setting, already been discussed in the first section of the analysis. Lastly, the commercial C3, *Xbox One S,* coming structurally the closest to the commercial C3 by PlayStation, consists nearly fully of facts and evidence, belonging to *logos*.
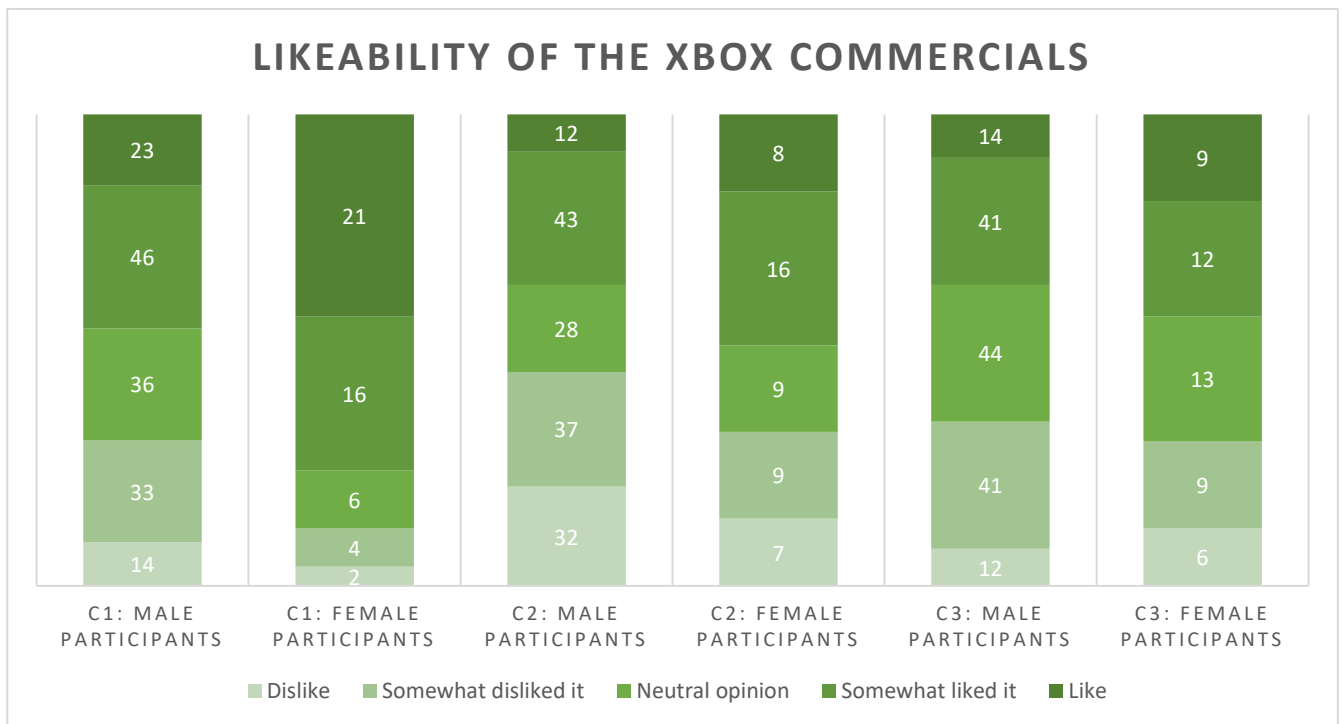
Figure 1: Distribution of responses on the likeability of each commercial

In the case of Xbox as well, the types of rhetorical strategies utilized in the commercials seem to correlate with their likeability and persuasiveness slightly differently. Although the findings have been distributed based on the company having been produced them, some links will be drawn to the earlier findings of the questionnaire, as the aim is also to provide an understanding on the extent to which different rhetorical strategies are found persuasive in addition to comparing the results of the

three different companies. In addition, by doing this, the structure of the results will become more coherent.

In the case of both male and female participants, the least liked commercial seems to be the commercial C2, consisting barely any other rhetorical devices than visual hyperboles. Surprisingly, it seems that the commercial receiving the lowest scores in likeability both in the cases of PlayStation and Xbox belong to the category of tropes, the initial hypothesis being that those utilizing less complex rhetorical strategies would score the lowest. This hypothesis raises from the fact that less complex verbal rhetorical strategies are applied less in the analyzed commercials, potentially due to their inability to lead to required cognitive processing of the message, as the message is conveyed more or less straightforwardly, and the common understanding of the link between increased processing and persuasiveness levels. In the context of PlayStation, 37% of the respondents found the commercial utilizing complex visual metaphors unpersuasive due to its overly complex transmission of the message or finding it disturbing. In the case of Xbox, the low scores in likeability seem to have been affected by the same qualities. The following extract from the open-ended questions is used to illustrate the comments 32 of the 112 respondents left for this particular commercial consisting of visual hyperboles:

> (3) "It was very confusing. I didn't get the message until the very end of it. There's not a problem with the concept, but the execution is irritating. At one point, I swore there was nothing to this but weird slashes on the dude's face disappearing and reappearing."

Based on this comment and other similar comments, it can be said that in the case of PlayStation and Xbox, where the audience is aimed to be actively engaged and psychologically persuaded through complex rhetoric, it often fails in its agenda due to building messages too complex to be understood or causing other negative emotions, which seem to correlate with low likeability. This is contradictory to the statement by Enschot et al. (2010: 143) that commercials with tropes or those with combinations of tropes and other rhetorical figures do not differ in understandability from other rhetorical categories. In this case, it is indeed due to this fact that the commercials with tropes are not found as persuasive. Although some of the respondents seemed to be able to unfold the message by the end of the commercial based on their comments, their Likert-scale answers made it clear that their mostly negative opinions about the commercial still remained the same. This is potentially due to the fact that the commercials were still found rather confusing, irritating or disturbing in other ways.

However, what can be seen from the results is that commercials only utilizing tropes do not, in every case, lead to low likeability scores but might in the cases where the messages are successfully interpreted by the audience, even lead to higher scores compared to other rhetorical strategies. The commercial C1, consisting for the most part of visual tropes such as metaphors and hyperboles, reached the mean likeability value of 3,5, where the other commercials by both companies scored mean values between 2,8 and 3,2. This clearly demonstrates the concept of especially tropes engaging the audience more in the message, which, in the cases where there are no other impacting factors, capture and sustain the attention of the audience better, and lead to higher likeability. For example, 31 of the 120 respondents leaving additional comments described their positive experiences in relation to interpreting the message behind the visual hyperboles and metaphor, such as the representation of the gaming world as a world of endless possibilities and experiences. Hence, it can be concluded that tropes may, in the cases where the message is not built too complex, score higher in likeability compared to other rhetorical devices due to their ability to engage the audience more than, for instance, schemes or appeals to evidence and facts. Nevertheless, perhaps due to the nature of games console purchasing decisions relying heavily on their specs and technical qualities, many respondents also seemed to appreciate simple commercials focusing on the new features and qualities of the console or other equipment that come with them.

4.2.3. Perceived likeability of the chosen Nintendo commercials

The final section of this part of the thesis, aiming to answer the third research question on the different ways different rhetorical devices affect the likeability of the companies' commercials, focuses on the two different commercials produced by Nintendo and chosen for the survey. Again, the results will be connected with the two other companies as well to make the interpretations and analysis more coherent. The two commercials picked are *Take Your Friends Along for the Ride with Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (N1, see Table 3), consisting of a narrative and appealing indirectly to the emotions of the audience, and *Brie Larson Plays Her Favorite Nintendo Switch Games* (N3, see Table 3), also appealing to the audience indirectly, but this time with an appeal to celebrities. The aim in this section is to compare these two different appeals to one another in terms of their persuasiveness.
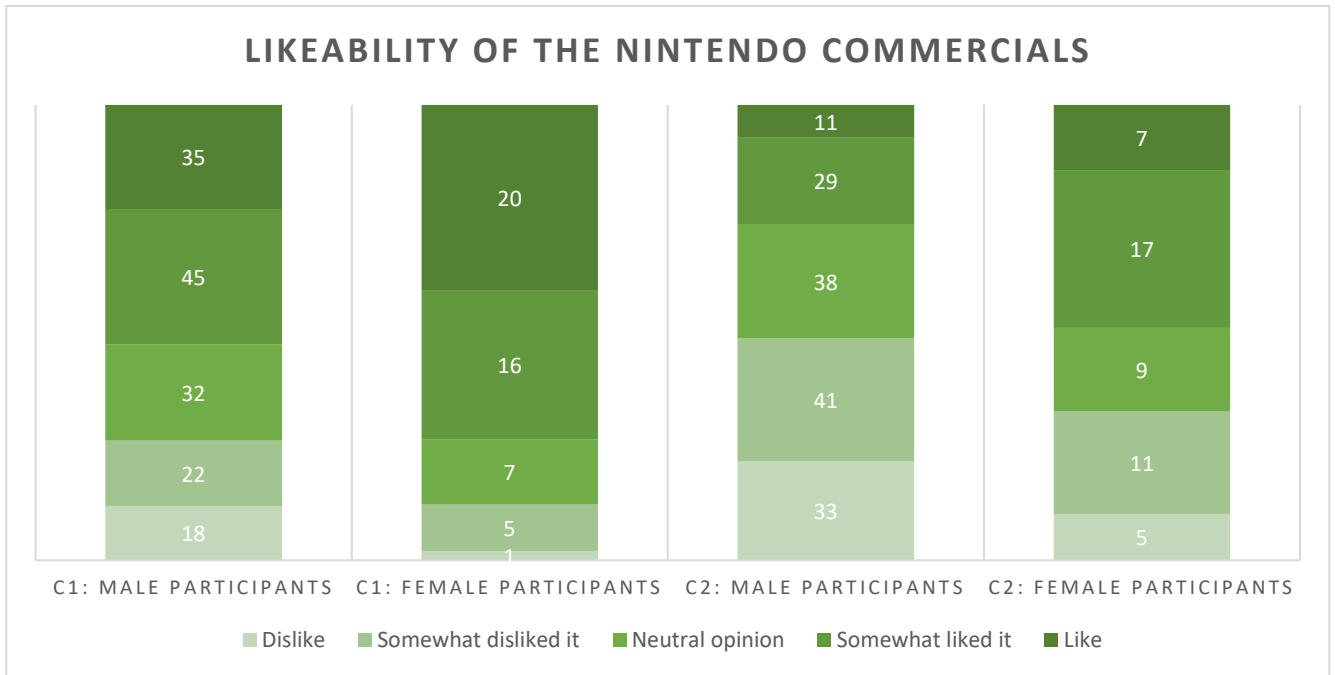
Figure 3: Distribution of responses on the likeability of both commercials

When looking at the figure presenting the perceived likeability of the two different indirect appeals, a slight difference between them can be noted. Furthermore, the results show that the respondents show slightly more positive attitudes towards the commercial appealing to their emotions and emotional needs compared to the one aiming to persuade the audience through an appeal to a well-known individual – a celebrity in this specific case. Although Fernandez (2013: 8) suggests that the reason behind the success of commercials with appeals to an image, a well-known person, lies in the deep-marketed desires of the consumer, associating a celebrity with the product and its qualities, giving the audience psychic benefit, these featured did not seem to emerge more positive attitudes in the respondents.

Overall, in the case of the commercials appealing to the audience's emotions, 53% of the male participants and 73% of the female respondents either liked the commercial, or somewhat liked it. In the case of the commercial appealing to the non-market desires of the audience through a celebrity, these scores with either liking or somewhat liking the commercial were 26% and 49%. Hence, there is a significant difference between the likeability of the two appeals. Next, some examples will be drawn from the open-ended answers to unfold the possible reasons behind these differing attitudes.

Even though some of the respondents mentioned that the celebrity appearing in the commercial can, for instance, help parents to connect the product with security as they wonder if Nintendo Switch is secure for their children, as well as personalize the celebrity into a real human-being, and some

respondents mentioned their positive attitudes to emerge from liking Brie Larson in general, the most common themes in the open-ended questions related to finding the commercial forced or fake. For instance, 45 respondents pointed out that the celebrity endorsement made the commercial feel unnatural or staged, or that the commercial failed to persuade them because they do not know who Brie Larson is. This finding proves that, even though commercials appealing to an image of a well-known person might succeed in some cases, it can also lead to people finding the commercial rather staged and fake, which overruns other positive attitudes and opinions they might develop. It is also interesting to note that in the commercials of other companies as well, the ones where celebrities appear but they do not consist a main part of the commercial, they were noticed by some of the respondents, and mostly received negative opinions towards them. This clearly demonstrates that while the companies aim to use celebrities to better connect with the audience, they are often viewed in a negative light, and other factors are found more appealing, authentic, and persuasive.

However, the commercial with emotional appeals seems to appear as particularly successful compared to the one with an indirect appeals to the non-market desires of the consumers. As the insights of Fernandez (2013: 6) suggest, the indirect appeals to emotions in the case of certain products often succeed as they appeal to the audience personally through their emotions and emotional needs. Particularly during the time of COVID-19, Nintendo is aiming to appeal to the need of people to connect with their friends remotely, and also to the overall need of young people to stay connected with their friends. In their responses, the participants actively referred to missing their friends due to the pandemic, and Nintendo successfully transferring the idea that the audience can always keep in touch with their friends through play. It succeeded in creating a personal connection with the audience, as 13 respondents noted that they were able to relate with the commercial and found themselves with positive attitudes towards the ad due to this fact. The overall impression is that Nintendo has succeeded in creating an emotional connection with a wide number of respondents, which even resulted in this particular commercial receiving the highest likeability score of 3,6 out of all the commercials applied in the questionnaire.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the use of rhetorical devices in the TV commercials of three biggest companies in the games console industry: Sony's PlayStation, Microsoft's Xbox, and Nintendo, and compare them in their use of different kinds of rhetorical devices to find similarities and differences in the use of rhetoric in games console TV advertising. The second part of the thesis aimed to connect the use of various kinds of rhetorical strategies with the way they are found persuasive in the eyes of consumers and the target audience.

The results and the analysis to the relation of the first research question provided different interesting results on the use of rhetoric in games console advertising, and also the various strategies the companies use to persuade their audience. It can be noted that the use of rhetoric plays a significant part in all the companies' TV advertising, since all of the 15 commercials analyzed included at least a single rhetorical device, most of them appearing in a visual form. This finding is in line with several studies referred to in this thesis, such as the one of Xuan Doan (2017) on Vietnamese TV advertising, finding that 99% of the 200 analyzed commercials benefited from the use of rhetorical devices. In addition, it shows similarities to previous research, which increasingly focus on the use of visual rhetoric in advertising, as its use is constantly on the rise (Madupu et al. 2013: 58). Hence, it does not come as a surprise that most of the rhetorical figures, especially tropes, examined in the thesis appear in the form of visuals. As expected, the most frequent rhetorical devices in the data seem to appear in the form of tropes, hyperboles, metaphors and metonymies playing a dominant role in PlayStation's and Xbox's commercials. Hence, the commercials by these two companies are significantly complex in nature, as they do not utilize as many schemes, which are more superficial in nature, hence not requiring as much interpretation as commercials with tropes (Enschot et al. 2010: 140). This would suggest that rather than focusing purely on selling a product to the audience, these three commercials are moving towards the direction where they sell ideas and experiences to the audience by engaging and psychologically influencing them. The findings also suggest that the commercials are somewhat uniform with the rhetorical devices used in TV advertising despite the product advertised, the only exception being the commercials by Nintendo, appealing to celebrities or emotional needs of the audience through *pathos* not having received much attention in previous studies. This is in line with the statement by Giles (2003: 113) as well, who stated that TV advertising is often effective in customer engagement and interaction and is moving towards consumer-orientation instead of the main focus on the product itself.

When previous studies in the field mostly suggest that the more complex a commercial is the more it is going to persuade, the responses to the survey revealed that when the complexity of an ad reaches too high levels and affects how they are understood, it starts to reduce their likeability and may result in negative attitudes such as irritation towards the ad in the case of games console advertising in the cases where the message is not successfully re-interpreted. On the other hand, in the cases where the message is perhaps clearer and correctly interpreted, it seemed to correlate with more positive attitudes compared to other commercials. Hence, the results of this study are both contradictory to those of Enschot et al. (2010), for instance, finding that commercials with tropes

only overrun any other rhetorical categories in terms of likeability, and also to their statement that commercials in all rhetorical figure categories were found rather easy to understand. Although this is the case with the commercials utilizing only less complex tropes, it cannot be concluded that tropes automatically lead to higher persuasion in the case of games console advertising. In fact, it was found that in the case of PlayStation, commercials focusing on the new features of a product overran other more complex commercials in likeability: Of course, this is only the case with one commercial, but it should not be overlooked, nevertheless.

Based on the findings on the likeability of emotional appeals and celebrity endorsement, it can be concluded that where indirect appeals to the emotional needs and other emotional aspects of the audience lead to high likeability scores, appeals to celebrities score significantly lower. As there is not much previous research on the topic, the finding provided some interesting insights. It can be concluded that especially in the cases where the celebrity is not familiar to the viewer or not related to the product advertised, the tone is seen as rather staged and unnatural, and does not make the audience convinced. However, in the appeals to emotional needs, the audience can often relate to the message of the commercial, and especially in the times of the pandemic, it was found significantly persuasive emphasizing the importance and need to connect with relatives and friends remotely. Hence, it seems that Nintendo succeeded in its message in the way it took the prevalent situation into account in the message.

One of the most significant strengths of this study was investigating a field that has not received much attention before, even though video games have been considered in previous research from other points of view. It provided new insights behind the use of rhetoric by games console companies and how customers particularly interested in gaming view them. It is also a study that can be used as a base of future research in a similar field. Lastly, one of the strengths of the study was the large number of participants (215) attending the survey. Some of the cons of the study include the use of an online survey as a data gathering method. Since everyone interested could attend, the results cannot be considered as completely reliable. In addition, conducting a test for statistical significance could have made the study more reliable. What was found when analyzing the answers to the open-ended questions was that some responses concentrated more on the use of other elements than language in the commercials, so it might be that the responses are not completely reliable because of this either. In addition, what comes to the analysis of the rhetorical devices appearing in the commercials, although the commercials were played several times before coding the rhetorical devices and the results were made as objective as possible, it might be that

other researchers might notice and code the rhetorical devices slightly differently, which needs to be kept in mind looking at the results of the rhetorical analysis.

The suggestions for further research lie mostly in the methods that could be applied. Although the questionnaire allowed the respondents to leave additional comments and feedback, the responses remained quite superficial, and the immediate reactions and attitudes of the participants on the commercials presented to them were not available. To develop the study in the future, additional methodologies such as observation could be added to expand further insights on the topic. As Denscombe (2014: 206) states, direct observation of the target group relies on evidence gathered by the eye rather than written or spoken information delivered from the participants to the researcher. Hence, as the survey conducted in this thesis relied on what the participants chose to tell concerning the commercials and their opinions towards them, an interesting method would be to rely on direct observation instead, emerging interesting and different insights and results on a similar topic. This could be conducted, for instance, in a classroom if one of the focus groups were students rather than coincidental participants online.

Another opportunity for further research could be to shift the focus from games console commercials to commercials for other products produced by Sony or Microsoft to see if the same rhetorical devices are a part of their whole marketing strategy, as it was already revealed that the results of the content analysis of the commercials seem to be in line with previous research on the use of rhetoric in TV advertising in general. Lastly, the effect of background variables on the distribution of likeability scores could be considered: What was noted by some respondents was the impact of their most utilized gaming platform on how they viewed the commercials, but because of the scale of the study this aspect was not considered. Other background variables and their correlations with the likeability scores that could be investigated include variables such as how actively do the respondents play video games, or the age group they belong to.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The survey

<u>Participant agreement</u>

Welcome to take a part in a survey conducted to gather data for my bachelor's thesis!

Please note that answering the survey requires basic skills in English, since some of the commercials require the participant to be able to understand English (even though some of them concentrate more on visuals and not so much on spoken or written language!). First, you will be asked to confirm your participation in the survey and given the opportunity to read through the participant agreement and the privacy notice, after which you will be taken to the second section to answer the questions I have prepared. The survey should not take more than 15-20 minutes to complete. If needed, my contact information can be found from the participant agreement information below.

! Please also note that you must be somehow interested in gaming to answer this survey. In addition, please do not send your response if you have not paid attention on completing the survey or if you decide you are not interested in completing it anymore. You can close the survey without any of your responses saving.

Participant Agreement: Please read the following information and agree to participate below

* Please note that you will not be able to withdraw your response later after submitting it, but you will remain completely anonymous.

(Attached research notification, privacy notice, and consent form)

1. * I have been asked to take part in a study regarding the persuasiveness of games console TV commercials. I have read the research notification and obtained sufficient information about the study and the processing of my personal data, and I have received sufficient responses to all my questions about the study. I understand that participating in this study is voluntary. I have the right, at any time during the study and without giving any reasons, to cancel my participation in the study. Cancelling my participation will not result in any negative consequences for me. By signing this consent form, I accept that my data will be used in the study described in the research notification. By signing this consent form, I confirm that I will participate in the study, that I am a voluntary research subject and give my consent to the aforementioned.

☐ Yes

☐ No

The survey questions

This is the second and the final section of the survey.

The survey consists of 8 video commercials (between 0,5 - 1,5 min in length), 10 required questions, and 9 voluntary, open questions. You do not need to think about the videos a lot after watching them, just answer based on your immediate and uppermost opinion and thoughts about each one! If/when possible, avoid neutral (3) answers. If English is not your first language, it is possible to turn the English subtitles on from the videos if needed.

1. * What is your gender?
    ☐ Female

    ☐ Male

    ☐ Other

    ☐ Prefer not to tell

2. * How often do you play video games?
    ☐ Regularly

    ☐ Often

    ☐ Sometimes

    ☐ Rarely

    ☐ I don't play, but I am interested in the topic

3. If you play, which gaming platform do you use the most?
    ☐ PC

    ☐ PlayStation

    ☐ Xbox

    ☐ Nintendo

    ☐ Other: _____

PlayStation | Greatness Awaits (2013) (attached video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_B8PK-eg2QY)

4. * How much did you like the commercial?

☐ 5 | Like/I liked it a lot

☐ 4 | I somewhat liked it

☐ 3 | Neutral opinion

☐ 2 | I somewhat disliked it

☐ 1 | Dislike/I didn't like it at all

5. Here you can, if you want, share more of your thoughts about the commercial: What/which elements influenced your opinion? What made you like/dislike it? (You can also answer in Finnish)

_____

PlayStation | Feel the Power of PlayStation (2020) (attached video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s44MO3i6qD0)

6. * How much did you like the commercial?

☐ 5 | Like/I liked it a lot

☐ 4 | I somewhat liked it

☐ 3 | Neutral opinion

☐ 2 | I somewhat disliked it

☐ 1 | Dislike/I didn't like it at all

7. Here you can, if you want, share more of your thoughts about the commercial: What/which elements influenced your opinion? What made you like/dislike it? (You can also answer in Finnish)

_____

Xbox Series X|S Launch Trailer – Us Dreamers – Power Your Dreams (2020) (attached video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIMAujZpry0)

8. * How much did you like the commercial?

☐ 5 | Like/I liked it a lot

☐ 4 | I somewhat liked it

☐ 3 | Neutral opinion

☐ 2 | I somewhat disliked it

☐ 1 | Dislike/I didn't like it at all

9. Here you can, if you want, share more of your thoughts about the commercial: What/which elements influenced your opinion? What made you like/dislike it? (You can also answer in Finnish)

_____

Nintendo | Take your Friends Along for the Ride with Animal Crossing: New Horizons (2020) (attached video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxbUogjiaJo)

10. * How much did you like the commercial?

☐ 5 | Like/I liked it a lot

☐ 4 | I somewhat liked it

☐ 3 | Neutral opinion

☐ 2 | I somewhat disliked it

☐ 1 | Dislike/I didn't like it at all

11. Here you can, if you want, share more of your thoughts about the commercial: What/which elements influenced your opinion? What made you like/dislike it? (You can also answer in Finnish)

_____

PlayStation | New DUALSHOCK 4 | More Ways to Play | PS4 (2017) (attached video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgRVycZvGiw)

12. * How much did you like the commercial?

☐ 5 | Like/I liked it a lot

☐ 4 | I somewhat liked it

☐ 3 | Neutral opinion

☐ 2 | I somewhat disliked it

☐ 1 | Dislike/I didn't like it at all

13. Here you can, if you want, share more of your thoughts about the commercial: What/which elements influenced your opinion? What made you like/dislike it? (You can also answer in Finnish)

_____

Nintendo | Brie Larson Plays her Favorite Nintendo Switch Games (2020) (attached video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bffQDMHXiM)

14. * How much did you like the commercial?

☐ 5 | Like/I liked it a lot

☐ 4 | I somewhat liked it

☐ 3 | Neutral opinion

☐ 2 | I somewhat disliked it

☐ 1 | Dislike/I didn't like it at all

15. Here you can, if you want, share more of your thoughts about the commercial: What/which elements influenced your opinion? What made you like/dislike it? (You can also answer in Finnish)

_____

Xbox | Xbox One S (2016) (attached video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuTwtOo88r8)

16. * How much did you like the commercial?

☐ 5 | Like/I liked it a lot

☐ 4 | I somewhat liked it

☐ 3 | Neutral opinion

☐ 2 | I somewhat disliked it

☐ 1 | Dislike/I didn't like it at all

17. Here you can, if you want, share more of your thoughts about the commercial: What/which elements influenced your opinion? What made you like/dislike it? (You can also answer in Finnish)

_____

Xbox | Xbox One – Immersive Gaming (2014) (attached video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sv9bQ-siFKg)

18. * How much did you like the commercial?
    ☐ 5 | Like/I liked it a lot
    ☐ 4 | I somewhat liked it
    ☐ 3 | Neutral opinion
    ☐ 2 | I somewhat disliked it
    ☐ 1 | Dislike/I didn't like it at all

19. Here you can, if you want, share more of your thoughts about the commercial: What/which elements influenced your opinion? What made you like/dislike it? (You can also answer in Finnish)

_____

20. Lastly, feel free to give any feedback about the survey (either in English or in Finnish)! What did you like, what could be improved?

_____