

Chapter 14

Mobile Gaming Strategic Communication and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) in Fan Culture: A Case Study of *Final Fantasy Brave Exvius*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines a case study of the messages and strategies used in mobile game marketing and communication specifically of fans at the Final Fantasy Brave Exvius Fan Festa in December 2018. Through a lens of fear of missing out (FoMO) theory and understanding of fan communities, user-generated content, and public relations pseudo-events, this chapter seeks to understand the impressions of the fan community associated with the game. Through interviews and observations at the event as well as analysis of the online messages shared with individuals who played the games, the study seeks to explain the way players interact with the organization and its promotional materials. A discourse-analysis of the statements creates a window into the gameplay practices of these fans as well as an explanation of their relationship with in-game marketing and communication practices.

In the morning I'll turn on a TV show and will play the game while watching. During breaks from work I'll play some more," said one player of the mobile game Final Fantasy Brave Exvius at the Final Fantasy Brave Exvius Fan Festa in December 2018. Then when I get home I really play--that's when I do the hard content. But at work, I just try to burn energy. -Participant 6, interviewed at the Final Fantasy Brave Exvius Fan Festa in December 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Mobile games are saturating the market and the daily lives of those who engage in them. A recent study conducted at the Final Fantasy Brave Exvius Fan Festa examined the interactions of mobile game players with the game and its marketing strategies on social media. Final Fantasy Brave Exvius is a mobile role-playing game, which uses characters from the Final Fantasy genre. In this study, 21 fans who play the game were interviewed. Each interviewee/participant was given a number for research purposes. This study draws on those interviews. Participant 6, quoted above, was interviewed at the event and spoke of experiences not uncommon for those playing mobile games.

As the relationship with mobile gaming and mobile devices is becoming more mainstream so is the routine of playing these games. With the development of 4G and 5G powered smartphones, the ability to play online is now a 24/7 phenomenon which mimics the arrival of cable news in the 1990s. Time and place are no longer necessary to develop a social relationship or for strategic marketers to develop relationships with their audiences.

The prominence of video game fandom has saturated the entertainment world. A 2019 Forbes article stated that 2.4 billion people play mobile video games (Carpenter, 2019). While the number of people playing games continues to rise, the conversation around gaming and the social interactions of gamers are not new. Entertainment media companies have the challenge of reaching their publics and customers in a way that builds a long-term relationship and ensures loyalty to the game as well as related products. They seek to establish ties to keep the player logging in and playing the game. The goal is to create a relationship with the game. Video game companies use cross branding to establish familiarity with their product and then re-establish the ties their fans have to the brand, as well as provide routine to return players. Social media makes relational marketing easy because the technology provides a platform for interaction in real time and around common interests.

Fan-centered marketing events like the *Final Fantasy Brave Exvius* Fan Festa draw attendees from around the world who have played associated games for years, as well as more recent players. These events create substantial user-generated content on social media and allow a physical connection for online communities. At the 2018 Fan Festa in Long Beach, California, hundreds of fans came to participate in a public relations event centered around the revealing of new content in the online game *Final Fantasy Brave Exvius*, which was preparing to celebrate its third year. The fans who attended the event discussed what they appreciated and disliked about how the game developer GUMI interacts with game players.

Prior research has established some troubling practices associated with certain mobile games (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2018; Billieux, Maurage, Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2015; Elhai, Dvorak, Levine, & Hall, 2017). Habits include checking one's phone frequently, in order to seek reassurance from friends and other relations or the "reassurance behavior" which drives loneliness, depression and anxiety (Billieux et al., 2015, p. 5). These factors have all been connected to Fear of Missing Out or FoMO. FoMO, which we will dive into in the literature review, has also been connected with social media, mobile gaming and other applications (Morford, 2010, August 4). It also has been a component of overuse of technology like social media (Alt, 2015; Przybylski et al., 2013), and smartphones (Clayton et al., 2015). While there are problems with social media and mobile phone use, many strategic communicators are using these same problematic habits and problems to market to and appeal to audiences.

This chapter seeks to build on research concerning mobile games and technologies by examining how strategic communicators (advertising and public relations professionals) for mobile games leverage

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