

# Exploring a universe with two faces:

A paratextual analysis on the marketing campaign Hunt the Truth of Halo 5: Guardians



Michel Hazen - 6882668

Supervisor: René Glas

Utrecht University

Master New Media & Digital Culture

Chicago Footnotes

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## Abstract

Marketing in the gaming industry over the years has become bigger and more complex at times. The *Hunt the Truth* campaign for the game *Halo 5: Guardians* is such an example. The aim of this research is to investigate such a marketing campaign, using *Hunt the Truth* as a case study, from a dual perspective. Not only can such a campaign be looked at from a paratextual promotional perspective, but also from a transmedia perspective, as the marketing campaign tells a new story within a larger franchise. To get a better understanding how this campaign functions as both a promotional and transmedia narrative object, and how this dual view influences the concept of worldness by Klastrup and Tosca, I performed a paratextual analysis. The paratextual analysis uses the five characteristics proposed by Genette to analyse the paratextual relation, and is supplemented by methodological steps using the definition of worldness. The analysis revealed the paratextual relation between the marketing campaign and the game, and subsequently allowed me to look at the concept of worldness from a promotional perspective. Unveiling the boundaries of a concept like worldness when it is only looked at from a transmedia perspective, an attempt was made to expand its definition by including gaming capital from Consalvo.

Keywords: Videogames, marketing, paratext, promotion, transmedia, transmedia world-building, worldness

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## Introduction

'Hunt the Truth' Ended Up Being The Most Disappointing Aspect Of 'Halo 5' is the title of an article in Forbes.<sup>1</sup> The *Hunt the Truth*, a marketing campaign for the game *Halo 5: Guardians*<sup>2</sup>, was seen as the most disappointing aspect of *Halo 5* by some fans. Not because it was bad, it even won some awards, but because there was a dissonance between what people experienced during the marketing campaign and what they end up playing in the game.<sup>3</sup> With the growing budgets of Triple-A games, the budgets for marketing grow at just the same pace.<sup>4</sup> This results in some of the marketing becoming bigger and more complex. From a political economic perspective, marketing a Triple-A game is often characterised by repetition.<sup>5</sup> Some of the usual suspects in this marketing process are CGI announcement trailers, gameplay trailers closer to release, and being present at huge game shows. Nieborg sees it as a trajectory followed by publishers that include minor and major marketing events.<sup>6</sup> However, the aforementioned *Halo* franchise is known to occasionally break with this general structure. Nearly two decades ago they released the *I Love Bees* campaign for *Halo 2*<sup>7</sup>, an alternate reality game (ARG) that served as both a real-world experience and a viral marketing campaign and a decade and three instalments later, the *Hunt the Truth* campaign was released for *Halo 5: Guardians*. The *Hunt the Truth* campaign was another marketing campaign that was bigger and more complex than the usual suspects.

While these campaigns are in and of itself not unique, they are relevant to use as a case study for a variety of reasons. Depending on the perspective you look at such a campaign, it can be seen as either promotional material that functions as a paratext of the game *Halo 5 Guardians*, or as a transmedia object. The term paratext was first coined by literary theorist Gerard Genette, calling paratexts 'thresholds of interpretation'. It surrounds a primary text and functions as a zone between text and off-text. To present the text in the usual sense of the verb but 'also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its reception and consumption'.<sup>8</sup> The discourse surrounding paratexts often emphasizes the position of a paratext

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Tassi, "'Hunt the Truth' Ended Up Being The Most Disappointing Aspect Of 'Halo 5,'" Last modified on October 30, 2015,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2015/10/30/hunt-the-truth-ended-up-being-the-most-disappointing-aspect-of-halo-5/?sh=e2e94272418a>

<sup>2</sup> 343 Industries, *Halo 5: Guardians*, Video game. (2015; 343 Industries). Xbox One.

<sup>3</sup> Megan Crouse, 'How Hunt the Truth Enriched the Halo Universe'. Last modified on 14 September, 2016, <https://www.denofgeek.com/games/how-hunt-the-truth-enriched-the-halo-universe/>

<sup>4</sup> David Bartzoon Nieborg, "Triple-A: The political economy of the blockbuster video game.", (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Nieborg, "Triple-A", 116.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 115-117.

<sup>7</sup> Bungie, *Halo 2*, Video game. (2004; Bungie). Xbox.

<sup>8</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-2.

as being secondary to the primary text. This creates a certain idea of value, with the paratext just being a mere tool to promote the main text. Subsequently looking at the idea of promotion, which is often seen as a way to sell a product or experience, seems to follow this same hierarchical structure that Genette's understanding of paratext has, where a certain value is created for the main text by a peripheral text. Film scholar Jonathan Gray however advocates for a better understanding of the promotional paradigm from a paratextual perspective within screen studies, moving away from the more hierarchical structure of Genette and revealing the importance of promotion as an object of study.<sup>9</sup> This thesis acknowledges the importance of promotion as an object of study.

But could this campaign only be seen as a mere marketing tool? A way to promote the game and create awareness? I argue that you could also look at the campaign from a different perspective, that it falls within a broader phenomenon of what Dan Hassler-Forest calls transmedia world-building. Oftentimes in these franchises, there is not just a singular coherent narrative, but rather a narrative that is expanded across a diverse set of different media.<sup>10</sup> The *Hunt the Truth* campaign takes place within the story world of *Halo*, offering a different narrative than the game that is considered canon. Where Hassler-Forest talks about the term world-building, Klastrup and Tosca propose the term worldness, a concept that explains the experience of a world across different media.<sup>11</sup> The term worldness itself means the actual shared experience of a transmedia world rather than a specific piece of text. Therefore worldness goes beyond a singular text and looks at the whole as a unified and shared experience. According to them worldness can be defined by three core elements which will be expanded upon later in this thesis; Mythos, Topos and Ethos.<sup>12</sup> While they talk extensively about aspects like a shared experience across different media, the influence of promotion on a concept like worldness is missing. And what is interesting is the fact that you could view the campaign as a separate text, due to its extensive narrative, but as it falls within the promotion material of the game *Halo 5: Guardians*, it is rather seen as a paratext, thus being supplementary to the game. In this paper I recognize and acknowledge that the *Hunt the Truth* campaign is both a promotional and a transmedia narrative object.

Over the years the academic debate surrounding promotional materials has increased. Where it was first often seen as a mere tool to sell a product, scholars have often overlooked the

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show sold separately: Promos, spoilers, and other media paratexts* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Dan Hassler-Forest, *Science Fiction, Fantasy and Politics: Transmedia World-Building beyond Capitalism* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca, 'Transmedial Worlds - Rethinking Cyberworld Design', In *2004 International Conference on Cyberworlds*, 2004, 409

<sup>12</sup> Klastrup and Tosca, "Transmedial Worlds", 409.

role of promotion in pursuit of the main text. This bias has been criticized by different scholars, especially film scholars.<sup>13</sup><sup>14</sup> Promotion has been attracting more attention from researchers as the costs of these marketing budgets keep on rising. Besides an economic importance, some materials have gained a privileged position within the media landscape, like trailers.<sup>15</sup> And while promotion becomes more popular within the academic debate, these types of campaigns are only looked at from a promotional perspective. On the other hand, transmedia world-building has a prominent place within the current academic debate. In the book of Hassler-Forest, he shortly links the importance of paratexts referring to the work of Gray. However, he only associates paratexts with fan-made materials. There is no link to be found with the promotional paradigm, thus oftentimes when these marketing campaigns are analysed, they are either looked at from a promotional perspective or from a transmedia perspective. A great example portraying this is when Daniel Dunne is describing the difference between two modes of paratext introduced by Gray, namely 'entryway' and 'in media res' paratexts. The latter, he describes, has a transmedia argument, and while according to him it can be analysed through some aspects of paratext, he states it fits better within transmedia discussions, because according to him it does not provide an analysis of what structures and influences occur within the text but rather how meaning is conveyed across a range of texts.<sup>16</sup> Although acknowledging the possibility to look at it from both a promotional and transmedia perspective, the focus is shifted towards only one of the perspectives. Jan Švelch also seems to make this link, when referring to transmedia storytelling as a promotional tool. He states that transmedia storytelling can potentially function as an elaborate promotional tool, where one part can convince people to experience the other parts. This transmedia perspective suggests that even texts with a strong paratextual function, like promotion for example, can be considered proper texts, therefore acknowledging the importance of promotion as well.<sup>17</sup>

I like to reiterate that the *Hunt the Truth* campaign as a phenomenon is not unique in and of itself, as the earlier example of the *I Love Bees* campaign of a previous instalment already demonstrated but where also other examples can be found like the *Animatrix* series for the *Matrix* franchise. Rather I use this case study as a prime example to investigate a marketing campaign being both a promotional and transmedia object, a topic underexposed within game studies. In a way this also answers the call of Ed Vulliamy that states that the scholarship

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<sup>13</sup> Keith M Johnston, "Introduction: Still coming soon? Studying promotional materials.", *Frames Cinema Journal*, no.3 (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.

<sup>15</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Dunne, "Paratext: The In-Between of Structure and Play.", In *Contemporary Research on Intertextuality in Video Games*. (Pennsylvania: IGI Global, 2016.), 279.

<sup>17</sup> Jan Švelch, "Paratexts to Non-Linear Media Texts: Paratextuality in Video Games Culture," (PhD Diss., Charles University in Prague, 2017), 12.

surrounding video game marketing or promotion is still lacking.<sup>18</sup> And the importance of marketing in video games is not a new phenomenon. Almost two decades ago, in the book *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing*, Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter introduced the importance of situating the interactive gaming experience as the result of processes of technology, culture and marketing.<sup>19</sup> Where marketing is already a vital part of game studies, I thus argue that from a transmedia perspective promotion is oftentimes lacking. The aim of this thesis is to get a better understanding of the interactive gaming experience by looking at the *Hunt the Truth* campaign from both a promotional and transmedia perspective, in order to get a better understanding of the concept of worldness. All of this leads me to my main research question and sub questions:

*RQ: How does the Hunt the Truth campaign function, from a paratextual perspective, as both a promotional and transmedia object, and how does this help to understand the worldness of the Halo franchise?*

To be able to answer the main question I will first try to answer how the campaign promotes the game *Halo 5: Guardians*, and how we should see this from a paratextual perspective. After getting a better understanding of how the campaign promotes the game, I will shift the focus to uncovering what role the campaign has within the larger whole of the *Halo* franchise from a transmedia perspective. Both these perspectives will provide a dual view and finally the focus will be to answer how this dual view will help to understand the worldness of the *Halo* franchise.

In order to answer the research question this thesis will be performing a paratextual analysis on the *Hunt the Truth* campaign, using paratextual methodological considerations proposed by Genette, which will be supplemented by transmedia analytical elements that will be further elaborated upon in the theoretical framework.<sup>20</sup> The method section will elaborate on what the paratextual analysis will look like, using Genette's five paratextual characteristics to analyse the paratextual message and Klastrup and Tosca's definition of worldness to analyse the worldness of the *Halo* franchise by looking at the *Hunt the Truth* campaign.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ed Vollans, et al, "Introduction: 'It's [not Just] in the Game': the Promotional Context of Video Games." *Kinephanos: Journal of Media Studies and Popular Culture*, 7, no.1 (2017): 1-6.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig De Peuter, *Digital play: The interaction of technology, culture, and marketing*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2003), 54.

<sup>20</sup> Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean, "Introduction to the Paratext." *New literary history*, 22, no.2 (1991): 263-264.

<sup>21</sup> Klastrup and Tosca, "Transmedial Worlds", 409.

# Theoretical Framework

With the rise of budgets for Triple-A franchises the marketing has also seen an enormous growth in terms of budget but also complexity. One of the aims of this thesis is to get a better understanding of the concept worldness by looking at the *Hunt the Truth* campaign from both a promotional and a transmedia perspective. As worldness means the shared experience of a transmedia world, I would argue that promotion also needs to be a part of it. This chapter will start by discussing the concept of paratexts. Not only as a history lesson of where the concept originated but also to make clear that promotion as a paratextual genre is of utmost importance to get a better understanding of the interactive gaming experience and its cultural importance. All of this will lead to the concept of worldness, which will be expanded upon in order to provide methodological steps for the analysis. The goal of this chapter is not to discuss concepts like paratexts, promotion and worldness separately but rather look for connections.

## *The evolution of paratexts*

As aforementioned the concept of paratext was first coined by Genette, calling it a figurative threshold of a text that surrounds it, in order, as he explains it, “to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its “reception” and its consumption.”<sup>22</sup> While the etymology of the word would suggest otherwise, paratextual elements do not necessarily need to be textual or verbal. In his work he defines three other possible types of paratexts; namely iconic, material, and factual.<sup>23</sup> Genette’s focus was mainly on literary work but already suggested that it could be extended to other media.<sup>24</sup> The definition of Genette can therefore be called the ‘original’ definition, where the definitions of for example Consalvo or Gray can be categorized as the ‘expanded’ definition.<sup>25</sup> A big difference between the two definitions according to Švelch, is the question of authorship.

One of Genette’s main arguments that he puts forward is that in order to be constituted as a paratext, there must be some authorial influence. As Genettes puts it, ‘By definition, something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it...’<sup>26</sup> In addition to his idea of authorship, he also states that a paratext always has to be subordinate to the main text, and it should not diverge too much attention from the main text

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<sup>22</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Jan Švelch, "Paratextuality in Game Studies: A Theoretical Review and Citation Analysis." *Game Studies*, 20, no.2 (2020).

<sup>26</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, 9.



towards itself.<sup>27</sup> In case of the *Hunt the Truth* campaign, it would fit Genette's definition in terms of authorship, as it is created by an associate of the makers of the game, called the *Ayzenberg Group*. However, when you would completely follow his definition, you would also acknowledge that the paratext is subordinate to the main text. As the campaign is looked at from both a promotional and transmedia perspective, the paratext is not necessarily subordinate to the game. In addition, when following this notion of subordination, one also dismisses these paratextual elements and their cultural importance at large. While it is important to mention, the idea of authorship will not be a part of the discussion in this thesis, as the campaign follows the traditional concept of Genette, but rather focuses on the relation between paratext and text and its cultural importance within game studies.

The 'expanded' definitions of Consalvo and Gray stir things up a bit when it comes to some of the notions of Genette.<sup>28</sup> Although historically the first mention of paratext within game studies was by Espen Aarseth in 1997, Consalvo in her book on *Cheating: gaining advantage in videogames* introduced the concept of paratext within game studies more extensively.<sup>29</sup> Where Genette's notion of authorship is limited to authors of a text or its associates, Consalvo broadened the concept to accommodate elements that were not created by game producers or associates, like game magazines, player comments or walkthroughs created by fans.<sup>30</sup> And this involvement of fans is an important factor, meaning that for example materials created by fans, in whatever form that may be, could also be seen as a paratext. But according to her it also works the other way around, in a sense that a paratext can create a certain value for the player, a concept that she terms *gaming capital*. What this entails is that it is not only about playing a game, but "being knowledgeable about game releases and secrets, and passing that information on to others".<sup>31</sup> Gaming capital is therefore both expressed in skill and in knowledge that one can obtain not only by playing a game through its mechanics, but also through paratexts. Consalvo therefore not only introduced the concept of paratexts to games but also explained the importance of paratexts from a political economic perspective, by coining the concept of gaming capital.<sup>32</sup>

Consalvo seems to reaffirm the importance of paratextual elements as a form of cultural importance. Her definition is however limited, while introducing it more extensively within game studies, her focus on a specific part of gaming leaves out promotional material. The work of Gray,

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<sup>27</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*.

<sup>28</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*; Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on ergodic literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on ergodic literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> Consalvo, *Cheating*.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>32</sup> The term gaming capital used by Consalvo is derived from Bordieu's cultural capital from his essay "The Forms of Capital".

although written from a film studies perspective, offers a closer look at promotion from a paratextual perspective. He will be discussed a bit more in depth later in this chapter, but his texts can offer a form of substantiality at this point in relation to the concept of paratext. Like Consalvo, Gray offers an expanded definition of the concept of paratext, including different forms of media texts, and also offers a broader view on the topic of authorship. According to Gray a paratext can generate meaning before the 'main' text is consumed.<sup>33</sup> This meaning that can be generated can in turn potentially influence a person's perception of an imaginary world, in this case the world of *Halo 5: Guardians*. While these media texts surrounding a central media text are often neglected, he states that these paratexts can shape the experience and understanding of a media artefact before it is consumed.<sup>34</sup> In a way this connects with the idea of how a paratext can increase one's gaming capital, essentially acknowledging that a paratext holds great value and can subsequently influence the perception or experience of a text.

It is important to correctly frame how the concept of paratext will be used, which I will be showing next. It often seems that the concept of paratext is merely used to categorize a certain object within a larger framework. However, the distinction between a text and a paratext is more than just a way to categorise a text, it functions as an analytical tool. It allows you to focus on the power relation between two texts and how it shapes an understanding of a main text, indicating what value a paratext holds in relation to the main text but also for the one that consumes the texts. In order to be able to analyse the *Hunt the Truth* campaign properly, both the promotional and transmedia perspective needs to be expanded upon within its paratextual function. First the promotional side will be discussed and later the focus will be on the transmedia perspective. While this seemingly goes against what I am trying to do, namely combining the two perspectives instead of viewing them as separate perspectives, it is first required to discuss them separately from each other in order to bring them together in the analysis. As the campaign is seen first and foremost as a promotional object, I will discuss the promotional side first and subsequently delve deeper into the transmedia side.

### Promotion as a Paratextual Genre

If you would divide the concept of paratext in different genres, promotion and advertising would be a genre in itself. The practice of promotion and advertising seems to usually focus on selling a particular product or even an experience. Promotion seems to follow the same hierarchical structure that Genette's understanding of paratext has, where a certain value is created for the main text by a peripheral text. According to Švelch this is to create a *consumable identity*, a term

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<sup>33</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.

<sup>34</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.

introduced by film scholar Barbara Klinger.<sup>35</sup> The notion of *consumable identity* means that a promotional text like for example a trailer for a film, creates a *consumable identity* for that film. While it is not a term used in this thesis, it does serve as an example to show how promotion is oftentimes viewed, and because it is just often seen as a way to sell a product, the role of promotion is often overlooked by scholars and thus they often only focus on the main text.<sup>36</sup> With the production costs rising of promotional materials, the interest in them also starts to rise, especially in the film industry.<sup>37</sup> Besides being important from an economic perspective, some have become a popular cultural form within the media landscape, like trailers for example.<sup>38</sup>

The interpretative frame of the figurative threshold of paratextuality is oftentimes downplayed within the promotional paradigm in order to favour wide distribution and accessibility. In 1989 Klinger already pointed this out by stating that “the goal of promotion is to produce multiple avenues of access to the text that will make the film resonate as extensively as possible in the social sphere in order to maximize its audience.”<sup>39</sup> It therefore seems that promotion in general moves away from a more single authorial vision, and instead focuses on multiple different readings to attract a larger audience. While this approach may not fall within the paratextual framework proposed by Genette, it is not incompatible within the framework proposed by Gray in his book where promotion fits within his call for *off-screen studies*, a field that focuses on texts outside of films, and reiterates the importance of promotional material as an object of cultural value and importance, where authorship does not play an important role.<sup>40</sup>

Where often the importance of promotional material for a media text is downplayed, Gray argues that these promotional materials “give us the resources with which we will both interpret and discuss that world.”<sup>41</sup> As discussed earlier already, promotional material can generate meaning before the main text is consumed. In his book he challenges the centrality of the film within screen studies, and by focusing on ancillary texts like hype, promos, trailers and merchandising, Gray aims to address the uncharted spaces between the three traditional spaces; texts, producers and audiences.<sup>42</sup> This phenomenon is also acknowledged within game studies, where the worlds of video games are expanded through promotional material like tie-in novels,

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<sup>35</sup> Barbara Klinger, “Digressions at the Cinema: Reception and Mass Culture.” *Cinema Journal*, 28, no.4 (1989): 10, quoted by Švelch, “Paratexts to Non-Linear Media Texts”, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Švelch, “Paratexts to Non-Linear Media Texts”, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.

<sup>38</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*; Keith M Johnston, Ed Vollans, and Fred L. Greene, “Watching the Trailer: Researching the Film Trailer Audience.” *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 13, no.2 (2016): 56–85

<sup>39</sup> Klinger, “Digressions at the Cinema”, 10.

<sup>40</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

trailers of website presentations, and ground the text in a historical condition and subsequently establish a conversation between text, the producers and the audience.<sup>43</sup> This thesis will also focus on the conversation happening between the text, the producers and the audience.

Gray separates the concept of paratext, introducing the terms 'entryway' paratexts and 'in media res' paratexts.<sup>44</sup> The former means a paratext that introduces an audience to a certain text, whereas the latter means those paratexts that inflect or redirect the text after initial interaction. The *Hunt the Truth* campaign seems to function as both. In one way it serves as promotional material, introducing a certain audience, both fans and newcomers, to the world but also to what the game can potentially be, and on the other hand serves as a 'in media res' paratext that introduces the argument of transmedia and how meaning is conveyed across multiple texts. Depending on how you look at the campaign, it can be categorized as both. It serves as an entryway text for the game *Halo 5: Guardians*, but if you place it within the entire *Halo* franchise, it is an 'in media res' paratext as it takes place after the fourth *Halo* game. The fact that it can be both also supports the claim and relevance to analyse such a marketing campaign as both a promotional and transmedia object. This serves not only as a categorisation of the text, but also emphasizes the fact that a paratext can have a different value and can convey different meanings depending on how you look at such a text. Finally, Gray also offers some methodological considerations when analysing paratexts that I will take into account. He states that it would be a trap to only focus on what a paratext means to a close viewer or fan. In case of the casual viewers, paratextual frames are likely to rise in importance, as there is less countervailing textuality available from a film or television program.<sup>45</sup> The reason to take this into account is that it possibly has implications for the worldness of a franchise. As worldness talks about the experience of a world across different media, being a fan or being a potential new fan can have implications on how the worldness is experienced.

### *From Transmedia Storytelling to Worldness*

Worldness as aforementioned means the actual shared experience of a transmedial world rather than a single text. Before delving deeper into the concept of worldness it is important to explain where the term transmedia comes from and what it means. The concept of transmedia was popularised by Henry Jenkins in his book *Convergence Culture*. A transmedia story is a story that according to him unfolds 'across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a

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<sup>43</sup> Jan Švelch, "'Footage not representative': redefining paratextuality for the analysis of official communication in the video game industry." In *Contemporary Research on Intertextuality in Video Games*. (Pennsylvania: IGI Global, 2016.), 298.

<sup>44</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 35 & 79.

<sup>45</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 79.

distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole.’<sup>46</sup> An important aspect of this definition is that in order to constitute as a transmedia object, a text must add to the existing story world in some form. This means that rehashing existing content within a different medium does not count as transmedia. According to Jenkins each franchise entry needs to be self-contained, meaning that every story can be experienced without having experienced another story in the franchise. He does however mention, that in order to understand the whole franchise, there is not one text to turn to in transmedia storytelling.<sup>47</sup> Following this definition, the *Hunt the Truth* campaign would be constituted as a transmedia object, as the campaign offers a standalone story, therefore making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole story world.

Jenkins offers seven principles of transmedia storytelling to provide insights into the dynamics of these texts. The first principle he calls Spreadability vs Drillability. Spreadability refers to the capacity of the public to engage actively in the circulation of media content through social media networks. This in turn adds to the economic and cultural value of the text.<sup>48</sup> Drillability on the other hand was a counter argument by Jason Mittell that states that drillable media encourage “a mode of forensic fandom that encourages viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its telling.”<sup>49</sup> The second principle proposed by Jenkins is Continuity vs Multiplicity. Continuity refers to the more traditional thinking of transmedia, where every story in a transmedia world needs to contribute something new, whereas Multiplicity allows a story to be retold in different ways, for examples in different genres or different media.<sup>50</sup> The latter moves a bit away from the more traditional way of thinking. The third principle continues with Immersion vs Extrability. The first one describes the feeling someone can have of being part of a story world, whereas the latter describes what someone can take with them into the real world from the transmedia world.<sup>51</sup>

The remaining four principles are all singular principles. Seriality, the fourth principle, refers to the fact that certain media is created to be consumed in a certain order. Maybe one needs to first read the comics before watching the movie or the other way around.<sup>52</sup> The Subjectivity

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<sup>46</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 95-96.

<sup>47</sup> Henry, Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling 101,” Last modified on March 21, 2007, [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia\\_storytelling\\_101.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html)

<sup>48</sup> Henry Jenkins, ‘The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling (Well, Two Actually. Five More on Friday)’, Last modified on 12 December, 2009, [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/the\\_revenge\\_of\\_the\\_origami\\_uni.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/the_revenge_of_the_origami_uni.html)

<sup>49</sup> Jenkins, “The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn.”

<sup>50</sup> Jenkins, “The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn.”

<sup>51</sup> Henry Jenkins, ‘The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: The Remaining Four Principles of Transmedia Storytelling’, Last modified on 12 December, 2009, [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/revenge\\_of\\_the\\_origami\\_unicorn.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/revenge_of_the_origami_unicorn.html)

<sup>52</sup> Jenkins, “The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn.”

principle focuses on the expansion of the world through transmedia by focusing on secondary characters, therefore revealing the multitude of subjective experiences of a certain world.<sup>53</sup> The sixth principle proposed by Jenkins is called Performance. This principle refers to the fans and producers actively performing their relationship to each other and to the text.<sup>54</sup> The last principle is called Worldbuilding. Worldbuilding essentially means the desire of an audience to learn and know as much as possible about a certain world. It represents a way for consumers to engage more directly with worlds represented in the narratives.<sup>55</sup>

An important part of transmedia storytelling according to Jenkins is Worldbuilding, which is underlined by Dan Hassler-Forest introducing the concept of transmedia world-building. This term emerged from a set of layered and interlinked cultural, social and industry practices, where it is important for the transmedia experience to experience a world across different media.<sup>56</sup> World-building focuses on the entirety of a franchise across different media. In terms of paratextual importance, Gray's book privileges paratextual texts that add to the development of an authoritative and explicitly *narrative* story world. For example fan-created materials that add something to the narrative story world are privileged by Gray over the paratextual existence of what he calls 'mere marketing tools'.<sup>57</sup> Therefore the further a paratext is removed from a form of narrative coherence and thematic consistency, the less it is valued as a paratextual expansion of a story world.<sup>58</sup> While it can be categorised as a marketing tool, the *Hunt the Truth* campaign seems to fall under the privileged texts supported by Gray.

What comes forward when discussing transmedia worldbuilding, is that it is all about the experience of a world across different media. Klastrup and Tosca coined the term worldness to describe this phenomenon. The worldness of a transmedia world means the actual shared experience of a transmedia world rather than a specific piece of text.<sup>59</sup> An example they give is that the world of Tolkien's Middle Earth which is more than just a specific book trilogy called *The Lord of The Rings*<sup>60</sup>, it also includes all the films, games, fan fiction or landscapes designed by graphic artists.<sup>61</sup> According to them, every transmedia text has three core features that determine the worldness of that text; Mythos, Topos and Ethos. Mythos means the establishing conflicts and battles of the world, which also present the characters of the world. This includes stories of or rumours of certain lore items and creatures which are unique to the story. Mythos essentially is

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Hassler-Forest, *Science Fiction*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 156 & 209-10.

<sup>58</sup> Hassler-Forest, *Science Fiction*, 177.

<sup>59</sup> Klastrup and Tosca, "Transmedial Worlds", 409.

<sup>60</sup> New Line Cinema, *Lord of The Rings*, Movie. (2001: New Line Cinema).

<sup>61</sup> Klastrup and Tosca, "Transmedial Worlds", 409.

the “backstory of all backstories – the central knowledge one needs to have in order to interact with or interpret events in the world successfully.”<sup>62</sup> Topos on the other hand involves the setting of the world in a specific historical period and detailed geography. For example, in case of *The Hunt the Truth* campaign, it is set in a futuristic science fiction world, with many different planets including alien planets. Within the topos of this world is therefore normal that space travel is possible. Klastrup and Tosca state that knowing the topos of the world is “knowing what is to be expected from the physics of and navigation in the world.”<sup>63</sup> Finally the Ethos is the implicit and explicit ethics of a world. A (moral) codex of behaviour that characters in the world have to follow. How does the good and the bad behave for example and what behaviour can be accepted as ‘in character’ or rejected as ‘out of character’. Ethos is the “form of knowledge required in order to know how to behave in the world.”<sup>64</sup>

The aim of this framework was to bring all the concepts together. It has become clear that the concept of paratexts has evolved throughout the years. Using Genettes depiction of paratext as a starting point, and expanded by Consalvo and Gray I have tried to explain the importance of paratexts, in particular promotional paratexts, as an object of cultural value. By claiming that promotion is more than just a way to sell a product, a term like worldness can provide new insights. Currently the concept of worldness, although extensive in its transmedia perspective, lacks promotional insights. Throughout this thesis the claim has been that texts like the *Hunt the Truth* campaign have either been analysed from a promotional perspective or a transmedia perspective. The goal is to incorporate a dual view, using the *Hunt the Truth* campaign as a text that is often primarily seen as a promotional object, and the concept of worldness that has a strong transmedia perspective but lacks in promotion. The aim is therefore to analyse the *Hunt the Truth* campaign as something that is more than just a promotional object, and on the other side include promotion in the concept of worldness.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 412.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

## A Paratextual Analysis

In order to substantiate this dual view I will be performing a paratextual analysis. As Fernandez-Vara points out, in order to analyse the meaning of games we can do a textual analysis.<sup>65</sup> In her work she primarily focuses on the games themselves, however I am looking for meaning in the relationship between paratext and text, therefore I will be performing a paratextual analysis. Thus, I will not only look at the game but at both the marketing campaign and the game. Genette offers some analytical characteristics that will be supplemented on the transmedial side by analytic elements introduced by Klastrup and Tosca with their concept of worldness. The characteristics of Genette through which one can analyse a paratextual relation are; spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional characteristics.<sup>66</sup>

By using the characteristics proposed by Genette to analyse the paratextual message, which will be elaborated upon in a bit, I will be able to make a connection between the promotional perspective and the transmedia perspective. To put these characteristics in a more concrete way, its spatiality concerns its location (the question *where?*). Genette even offers two categories to define the spatial characteristic, namely *peritext* and *epitext*. The former category described paratexts situated inside the text itself, and the latter describing paratexts that are around the text at a more respectful distance.<sup>67</sup> The temporal characteristic focuses on the date of appearance in relation to the text, or if applicable its disappearance (the question of *when?*).<sup>68</sup> Substantiality described its mode of existence, whether this be verbal or something else (the question of *how?*).<sup>69</sup> Pragmatics, which are the characteristics of its communicating instance, addresser and addressee (*from whom? to whom?*). Some of these pragmatic characteristics can be the nature of the addresser, of the addressee, and degree of authority.<sup>70</sup> Finally the functional characteristic which looks at the functions that give the message purpose (*what is it good for?*).<sup>71</sup>

Analysing the paratextual relation first allows me to incorporate this when analysing worldness. To understand the worldness of a franchise you need to analyse the life of a transmedial world from a transsystemic view by studying the three core elements that seem to define worldness, Mythos, Topos and Ethos, that have been extensively discussed in the previous chapter. When analysing the paratextual relation you, as the terms suggests, analyse relations between paratext and text. Worldness as a concept does the same, looking at the creation of

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<sup>65</sup> Clara Fernández-Vara, *Introduction to game analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>66</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 8-11.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 12.



knowledge spread across multiple media forms. Both thus look at relations, but are often discussed separately. Using the characteristics of Genette I am also able to make connections in the different elements of worldness, therefore including a promotional perspective. Klastrup and Tosca say that the analysis starts at the textual level and continues by looking at the medium through which the world is filtered as this serves as an interface of how users perceive a world.<sup>72</sup> Thus I will not only be looking at the campaign and game from a textual level, but also how the world is filtered, not necessarily through the medium itself but how it is filtered through a promotional lens. During the analysis of the corpus, which you can find in *Appendix A*, I used these concepts as pointers to create mental notes while experiencing the campaign. For example, while listening to the audio drama I paid close attention to how characters were portrayed and how this came forward in relation to the game. This allowed me to analyse the worldness of the franchise. For the paratextual relation I used the different characteristics as steps to analyse it.

It is important to acknowledge that I have played the *Halo* franchise extensively. This means that I not only played *Halo 5: Guardians* multiple times but throughout the years played the *Halo* games in chronological order when they came out. I have also read several books and watched multiple series. While I am aware this can possibly give me a bias by being a fan, it also grants me the ability to make substantial links and assumptions based on the knowledge I have about the franchise. Something that would potentially not be possible if I only played *Halo 5: Guardians*, making it difficult to make substantial claims from a transmedia perspective. I have also deliberately chosen not to include marketing material outside the *Hunt the Truth* campaign, such as gameplay trailers, as they are not relevant for this particular research topic. In addition, while being included in the corpus, there are two outliers in the *Hunt the Truth* campaign, namely the *Hunt the Signal* and *Hunt the Master Chief*. Both required a physical presence to experience that part of the campaign, making it impossible to be carefully analysed. They are included however to acknowledge their existence, but will not be a substantial part of the analysis. By combining both concepts the goal is to uncover findings that would not have been made when only one perspective would have been used.

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<sup>72</sup> Klastrup and Tosca, “Transmedial Worlds”, 409.

## Exploration of a universe with two faces

First the paratextual relation of the campaign will be analysed using the characteristics proposed by Genette. These will subsequently be used to analyse the worldness of part of the *Halo* franchise, looking at both the campaign and the game.

### The paratextual relation of the *Hunt the Truth* campaign

In order to understand the paratextual relation of the *Hunt the Truth* campaign, Genette offers a few characteristics as previously discussed. When analysing the paratextual relation of a text you often start with the spatiality of the text, meaning the ‘location’ of the text.<sup>73</sup> This location is not a physical location but refers to where the paratext is situated in relation to the ‘main’ text, in this case the game *Halo 5: Guardians*. Genette coined the terms *peritext* and *epitext*, to offer a way to categorize the spatiality of a text. In this particular case, the entire *Hunt the Truth* campaign can be categorized as an *epitext*. This means that the paratexts can be found outside the main text on a respectful distance. To be more specific, the audio drama itself is released on platforms like Soundcloud, iTunes, and Tumblr, whereas most of the trailers can be found on YouTube. The campaign consisted of two competitions, one that was completely held online via YouTube named *Hunt the Truth Voice*. While most locations of the paratexts were not physical, the location of the competition *Hunt the Master Chief* was in Italy and the ARG campaign *Hunt the Signal*, while mostly using online and digital locations also required the participant to be present at a physical location when for example an advertisement was shown in the cinemas.

The temporal characteristic asks the question of *when*? It focuses on the date of appearance in relation to the text, or if applicable its disappearance.<sup>74</sup> As the *Hunt the Truth* campaign consists out of several marketing beats, a timeline has been created to provide a clearer overview of when what was released in relation to the game. The timeline, which can be seen in [Figure 1](#), focuses solely on the marketing campaign *Hunt the Truth* in relation to the game. The main pillar of the campaign, the audio drama, was divided into two seasons containing a total of 20 episodes. As you can see in the timeline the episodes were released in a weekly cadence with a three-month gap between the end of the first season and the start of the second season. The last episode of the second season was released on the same day the game *Halo 5: Guardians* was released. The first season was accompanied by a “Bullet” Trailer and the second episode of the season with two live-action trailers called “All Hail” and “The Cost”. The first competition was held during the middle of the first season before episode six was released. The ARG campaign

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<sup>73</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, 4-5

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

*Hunt the Signal* took up almost a whole month and the *Hunt the Master Chief* competition held in Italy was at the end of the first season. Finally, the “A Hero Falls” live-action trailer was released between episodes 1 and 2 of season 2 and the “The Hunt Begins” live-action trailer was released between episode 2 and 3 of season 2. The way the campaign is structured has a lot in common with what Jenkins calls seriality.<sup>75</sup> In order to have the best experience one must consume the campaign in a certain order. What becomes clear is that in order to experience the entire campaign, a large time investment is needed and reveals also the complexity of such a campaign. A gameplay trailer can exist on its own and only requires little time to be consumed by the audience. This campaign, which has elements of a transmedia product like seriality, is much more than one single trailer, as it cannot exist on its own and needs to be carefully experienced in order to have the best effect. In addition, this not only requires time, but also a commitment.

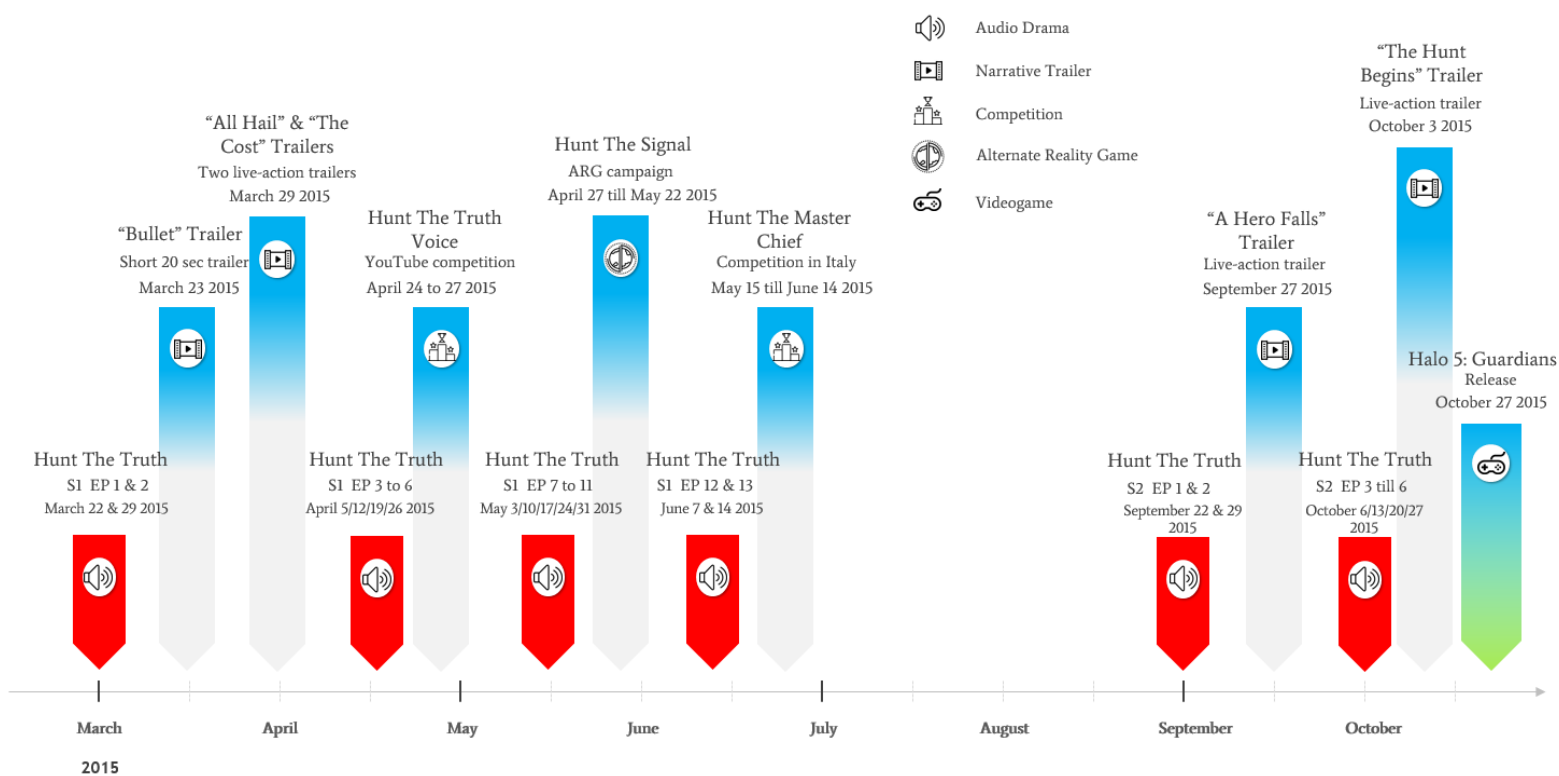


Figure 1: Timeline of the *Hunt the Truth* Campaign in relation to the game *Halo 5: Guardians*

The substantiality of the campaign describes its mode of existence, whether this is verbal or something else.<sup>76</sup> The audio drama is, as the term already suggests, purely focused on the use of audio to tell the story. The first season of the audio drama consisted of 14 episodes. It follows the main protagonist Benjamin Giraud, played by Keegan Michael-Key. The 14 episodes are

<sup>75</sup> Jenkins, "The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn".

<sup>76</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, 6-7

structured as individual podcast episodes that are recorded by Giraud, collectively telling the story of the first season. As a journalist Giraud is contracted by the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) to write a story on the main hero/protagonist of the Halo franchise, John 117, better known as the Master Chief. As he is writing the story, he is provided with what he initially thinks are reliable sources from ONI. These sources paint an elaborate picture on the history of the Master Chief, even providing information on who he was before he became the hero of the galaxy. When delving deeper into the sources and even using sources that were not provided by ONI, Giraud uncovers a variety of secrets. The claims made by ONI sources seem to be made up, information and data is missing or incomplete and the Master Chief does not seem to be the hero everyone thinks he is. Instead of writing the story for ONI, Giraud decides to uncover the truth and creates the podcast episodes that you as a consumer are listening to in the campaign.

During the season Giraud, with the help of FER0, human analyst Ray Kurzbig, freelance war journalist Petra Janecek and conspiracy theorist and hacker Mshak Moradi, finds out what the Spartan II program actually entails. This program that created the Master Chief, was the first Spartan program that instead of using fully grown humans to augment, abducted young children and replaced them with identical clones that would die within years due to an undiagnosable disease. They also uncover the truth behind a video that was released, which implied the Master Chief to shoot up a peace treaty on a planet, killing innocent civilians and politicians. When Giraud finally tries to expose ONI for all their lies, it is revealed that ONI was one step ahead and managed to destroy his credibility. The second season takes place after Giraud is imprisoned by ONI and follows the story of rebel leader FER0. FER0 who helped Giraud to expose ONI is revealed to be an undercover agent of ONI named Maya Sankar, whose goal was to trick Giraud by providing false evidence. Morally challenged, Sankar is tasked to infiltrate a group of insurgents on a planet that has been partly destroyed by an anomaly. Like the first season, Sankar uncovers many secrets that have been kept hidden by ONI and slowly she starts to deviate from that organisation.

Even between the two seasons the mode of existence is a bit different. The first season follows the same structure as a true crime podcast. Benjamin Giraud ‘records’ the episodes and while the episodes also go beyond the podcast and ‘show’ what happens in the world in real time, the episodes are narrated through the podcast. These podcast episodes of Giraud that we listen to are also released in the world of *Halo*. Not only has the world of *Halo* entered our real world, but also the other way around we in a way have entered the world of *Halo*. The second season is narrated by FER0 but moves away from the true crime structure and uses a more traditional narrative structure. Most of the season you follow FER0 and her comrades in ‘real time’. It follows the story in a more chronological order whereas in the first season the story is often told through

‘flashbacks.’ The supplemented trailers on the other hand have a different mode of existence. The “Bullet” trailer is the only animated trailer, whereas the four other trailers are all ‘live-action’. This means that it is not animated or created by using in-game images, but instead actors and ‘real’ sets are used to create the trailers. Where the audio drama focuses mainly on the usage of audio, the trailers also use visual conventions to portray its message. The ‘seriousness’ of the audio drama is a big difference with the ‘playful’ character of the games. Due to the paratextual relation, the ‘seriousness’ of the marketing campaign is something that fans can take with them when they start playing the game. This can result in a potential dissonance due to the different mode of existence. While mostly descriptive at this point, the implications of substantially on worldness will be expanded upon later in this chapter.

The next part that describes the paratextual message of a text is called the pragmatics, better known as the characteristics of the communicating instance, addresser and addressee.<sup>77</sup> The way Genette often talks about the addresser is in the way of an authoritative figure. When describing the author of the *Hunt the Truth* campaign there are a few pitfalls. A straightforward way to describe the author of the campaign is by naming the organisation that created the campaign. In this particular case the addresser would be *Ayzenberg Group*, an advertising agency responsible for the marketing campaign. From an authorial point of view, this would essentially mean that an external party who is not the creator of the game could be contributed as the sole authorial figure of the campaign. In an article it becomes clear who the faces are behind the campaign, namely lead creative director Noah Eichen, Andrew Volpe, Ian Tornay, and additional writers of the *Ayzenberg Group*.<sup>78</sup> This reveals that the creative force behind the campaign was part of an external group working for Xbox. While it is mentioned that the *Ayzenberg Group* partnered up with *343 Industries*, creators of *Halo 5: Guardians*, other than the permission to work on the franchise and potentially greenlighting the campaign, it seems that the creators of the game were not involved in the content of the marketing campaign *Hunt the Truth*.<sup>79</sup> The addressees of the campaign were, according to the *Ayzenberg Group* the brand loyalists but also the new fans. After a rocky launch of the *Halo: The Master Chief Collection*<sup>80</sup>, a game released prior to *Halo 5: Guardians*, the *Ayzenberg Group* was tasked to reach both the existing fans as well as the potential new fans.<sup>81</sup> While this is a lot of information, it does provide valuable implications. From a transmedia perspective, Jenkins states that because transmedia storytelling

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<sup>77</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, 8-11

<sup>78</sup> Crouse, “How Hunt the Truth”,

<https://www.denofgeek.com/games/how-hunt-the-truth-enriched-the-halo-universe/>

<sup>79</sup> “Hunt The Truth Audio Series,” Shortyawards, accessed April 13, 2021,

<https://shortyawards.com/8th/hunt-the-truth-audio-series-2>.

<sup>80</sup> 343 Industries, *Halo: The Master Chief Collection*, Video game. (2014; 343 Industries). Xbox One.

<sup>81</sup> “Hunt The Truth Audio Series.”

requires a high degree of coordination, it often works best if it's centrally organised or by careful collaboration between different parties.<sup>82</sup> In this particular case it is not centrally organised and although it is implied there was a collaboration, it seems that the *Ayzenberg Group* created the entire campaign. Within the game industry it is not always centrally organised, it is a bit more muddier. On one side you have the developer that already started creating the game years ago, then you have the publisher which in this case is Xbox, and you have the third party that creates the marketing campaign. Oftentimes when these marketing campaigns are created, the game is already in an advanced stage of development. These developers are able to create marketing beats like gameplay trailers, but a full-fledged marketing campaign that lasts for 8 months is not in their abilities. The publisher in this case steps in and hires a third party like *Ayzenberg Group*, who are not developers but have to create a compelling campaign. While the temporal relation revealed how complex such a campaign can be, this reveals the complexity of the gaming industry.

Finally, you can look at the functional characteristics of a paratext.<sup>83</sup> The audio drama has different functions based on the perspective you look at it. When discussing paratexts, Gray offered two modes of paratext; the entryway paratext and the 'in media res' paratext.<sup>84</sup> If you would look at the audio drama merely as a promotional tool for the game *Halo 5: Guardians*, you can analyse it as an entryway paratext. It establishes a perimeter around the game, serving as a first port of entry for newcomers within the *Halo* franchise, allowing newcomers to acclimatize to the text.<sup>85</sup> It does this by carefully introducing all the characters and throughout the different episodes it explains the origins of the Master Chief. A big part of the first season of the audio drama focuses on the truth behind the Spartan-II program, the first official Spartan program where the Master Chief originated from. It is revealed that young children were abducted and replaced by identical clones, and reveals this in a way that does not assume that the viewer knows this already. As a newcomer you learn this information for the first time, but if you are a fan of the franchise you could have known this already by playing *Halo 4*<sup>86</sup> or if you have read the book *Halo: The Fall of Reach*.<sup>87</sup> It would then be a transmedial extension of that part of the story, by providing a different perspective through the eyes of Giraud and by using different sources of information. Following the definition of Gray, this could be categorized as an 'in media res' paratext.<sup>88</sup> By looking at the campaign not only as a paratext to *Halo 5: Guardians*, but as a text that is experienced between other games in the franchise and even books, you can see a shift in

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<sup>82</sup> Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101."

<sup>83</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, 12

<sup>84</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 35 & 79.

<sup>85</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 205.

<sup>86</sup> 343 Industries, *Halo 4*, Video game. (2012; 343 Industries). Xbox 360.

<sup>87</sup> Eric Nylund, *Halo: The Fall of Reach*, Roman. (2001, Eric Nylund).

<sup>88</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 79.

paratextual function and pragmatics happening. Stating the two different modes of paratext is more than just a way of categorisation. It shows the relation of the campaign with the game from a promotional and a transmedia perspective. By acknowledging that the campaign is also an ‘in media res’ paratext, you can argue that it could be impossible for a fan that has experienced multiple stories in this franchise, to only view this marketing campaign as a paratext to the game. This can potentially also have implications for the worldness of such a franchise.

Uncovering the paratextual relation required careful examination of the different characteristics. With some characteristics being more descriptive at this point, they can still prove useful when analysing the worldness. The temporality of the campaign revealed a clear transmedial characteristic, namely seriality, and it also revealed that in order to experience this campaign the audience needs to invest a good amount of time in it and be committed to experience it the whole way through. The difference in substantiality can create a dissonance, due it having a paratextual connection with the game, and the pragmatics showed the complexity of the gaming industry. Finally the different functionalities of the campaign, it being two modes of paratext, I argued that for a fan that has experienced multiple stories in the franchise, it would be impossible to view it as an ‘entryway’ paratext. This difference in mode of paratext can also have implications for the experience of worldness.

### *The worldness of the Halo franchise*

From the mythos perspective, The *Hunt the Truth* campaign introduces a set of new characters that make their debut within the *Halo* franchise. There is a clear shift in focus when it comes to the main protagonist, where the games focus mainly on the Spartans (genetically enhanced super soldiers) as the heroes, the audio drama uses the perspective of the normal man as a way to tell the story. The Master Chief, the hero you mostly play as in the *Halo* franchise is not the main protagonist but rather a narrative object used in the background to propel the story forward. The substantiality of the campaign as previously discussed, with it being an audio drama instead of an interactive video game, allows the author to focus on a different perspective without disappointing the die-hard fan. However, although the protagonist is different than in the games, the hero of the game the Master Chief is still used to promote the audio drama and also to connect the audio drama with the game. At the same time, the first season started of the audio drama, the “Bullet” trailer was also released. The short 20 second trailer showed a sniper, something people that played the games could recognise, shooting a bullet that hit the visor of the helmet of the Master Chief, resulting in the helmet exploding in pieces. When you would slow down the trailer, it was revealed that the bullet contained multiple words such as ‘abductee’, ‘savior’ and ‘traitor as you can see in *Figure 2*. This short trailer serves as a paratextual element of



the audio drama, creating suspense and hype to convince people to listen to the audio drama. At the same time, it challenges the knowledge people already have by playing the games, therefore challenging the mythos of the franchise, as the trailer insinuates that the Master Chief will potentially die and the words on the bullet suggest that he is a potential traitor, whereas in the games you play as him thinking he is a hero.



*Figure 2: A graphic showing the successive frames of the Halo 5 "Bullet" teaser*

Another way to understand the mythos of a world is by looking at stories or rumours about certain lore items or characters.<sup>89</sup> The two seasons of the audio drama are structured differently. The first season focuses on Giraud as the main protagonist, whereas the second season focuses on FER0. Besides the different protagonist the story is also structured differently. However, in both seasons the main hero of the games, the Master Chief, is present not as an active part of the story but used in the background. Normally you play as the Master Chief and as a player immediately experience what he is experiencing. The shift in perspective forces the viewer in a position where they do not know what the Master Chief is experiencing. In the eight-episode first season called 'Drip, Drip, Drip', it is implied that the Master Chief shot up a peace treaty and that due to the unethical Spartan-II program he has lost control over his 'powers'. While this implication is later rectified in the first season, the second season implies that the Master Chief is dead. At the same time this was mentioned in the particular episode, a live-action trailer called "A Hero Falls" was released that showed the Master Chief lying under rubble, presumably dead. However, a week later a new live-action trailer was released called "The Hunt Begins", showing the same clip however this time the Master Chief is helped by fellow Spartans and continues the fight. It also becomes clear he is hunted by Agent Locke, something that was implied in the

<sup>89</sup> Klasttrup and Tosca, "Transmedial Worlds", 409.



live-action trailer “All Hail” months prior. From a promotional perspective, the paratextual function of this is to create a certain hype for the game. In order to find out what really happened with the Master Chief you are required to play the game. Another aspect that strengthens the promotional perspective in this particular case, is the temporal characteristic of the live-action trailers. By releasing the live-action trailer just a few days after the second episode of season two called ‘From Fire To Blood’, as you can see in the timeline, in which it is implied that the Master Chief died, the goal is that people experience both of these things. Without the visible image in the live-action trailer the implication in the episode remains an implication. In addition, the second live-action trailer that was released a week after showed that the Master Chief was not actually dead but hunted. This trailer was needed in order for people to realise that you would still play as the Master Chief in *Halo 5: Guardians*. The campaign challenges the mythos in a few different ways. The way the Master Chief is portrayed in the marketing campaign challenges his motives. Where the games portray him as a hero, the campaign results in the fact that you as an audience can start to question the existing mythos of the world. Although you do not have to necessarily accept that the Master Chief is not a hero, it becomes clear that the mythos and therefore the worldness is not a static concept. The knowledge one has about the characters can constantly change, but if someone does not experience this campaign their worldness would not be affected by this. In addition, through the use of the extra live-action trailers, the audience can attain extra vital information about the upcoming game. With the implication of the death of Master Chief, people could question what his role would be in the game. The live-action trailer as I mentioned in a way reassures people that he is still alive. The mythos of the marketing campaign, due to its paratextual connection, is in a way also connected with the mythos of the game.

The topos of a franchise is knowing what is to be expected from the physics of and navigation in the world, by knowing the setting in a specific historical setting and detailed geography.<sup>90</sup> In order to portray the setting of the world, especially if it is a setting that does not exist, it is often easier to show with pictures or video. The substantiality of the audio drama, solely relying on audio, makes it a bit more difficult to enhance the topos of a franchise as you need to use different conventions in this medium.<sup>91</sup> According to Klastrup and Tosca media genres like novels or other narrative texts, which the audio drama falls under, is a genre that foregrounds time, whereas films and games foregrounds space.<sup>92</sup> If you are a fan of the *Halo* franchise you already have knowledge about the topos of the world. It becomes easier to place the story within a

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<sup>90</sup> Klastrup and Tosca, “Transmedial Worlds”, 409.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

certain setting and easier to recognize certain locations. The audio drama makes sure to create a topos for a listener, even if you have not experienced the franchise before. The actual date the story takes place is revealed in the beginning, letting the listener know that the story takes place in the future and that the setting is science fiction. The protagonist also talks about 'outer colonies' and about 'earth' as if it is not the only habitable planet in that story world. While missing the ability to explore the world, something you can do in games, the topos of the franchise is enhanced by these aforementioned conventions, although the genre itself foregrounds time. The live-action trailers that were released throughout the two seasons of the audio drama enhance the topos by foregrounding space, not replacing the conventions used in the audio drama, but instead giving the listener a useful reference guide in how the world looks like, especially for newcomers. The topos in the end remains fairly the same in comparison with the games. The science fiction world becomes clear, and is a little bit enriched by focusing on organisations like ONI that remain more in the background during the games.

The ethos of a world is the form of knowledge required in order to know how to behave in the fictional world, in this particular case in the *Halo* universe.<sup>93</sup> From a transmedia perspective the *Hunt the Truth* campaign does several things. If you view the campaign as a paratext within the whole franchise, up until this point there have been numerous games released where you play as the Master Chief. A fight between good and evil, between the Master Chief and the Covenant, has taken place in these games. As you have played as the hero, you expect the Master Chief to be righteous. Especially as he has saved the galaxy from extinction in the previous games. His mere existence, both in his actions and how he came to be seems to fit the codex of behaviour and ethics of the story world.<sup>94</sup> The audio drama challenges this idea, by revealing how the Master Chief was a result of an unethical program that genetically enhanced young children and also by raising questions whether the Master Chief is the hero we all think he is. While the story about the Spartan-II program is not unique to this audio drama, as it was also told in *Halo 4* and *Halo: The Fall of Reach*, the perspective is different. In both the game and book, you experience it from afar, but in the audio drama you experience it as a normal citizen, in this case Benjamin Giraud. The shift in pragmatics of the paratext challenges the established ethos of the world.<sup>95</sup>

Up until this point I have been mostly talking about the concept of worldness through the use of the three elements mythos, topos and ethos. Throughout this analysis I have found that the worldness of the *Halo* universe has in some way or form been enhanced, adapted, challenged, or created in every element by the campaign. From a transmedia standpoint, I would argue that this

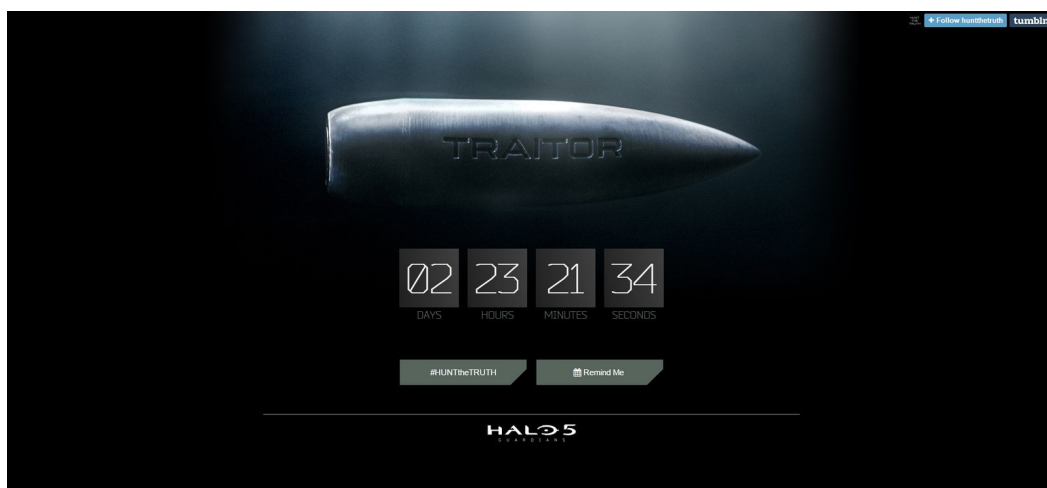
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<sup>93</sup> Klastrup and Tosca, "Transmedial Worlds", 409.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, 4.

campaign more likely attracts the heavily engaged fans rather than the new potential fans, as this campaign fits within a large transmedia franchise that already exists for almost 20 years.<sup>96</sup> It would be safe to say that the main focus of the campaign was to attract the die-hard fans, without of course forgetting about potential new fans. A way to attain this goal is by incorporating what Gray calls a dual address.<sup>97</sup> This means that the main text, in this case the game, can be experienced without experiencing the paratext, in this case the marketing campaign. This allows for example the lesser-engaged fan to skip the marketing campaign and still enjoy the game, and provide the heavily engaged fan to experience a broader textual universe. According to Gray this can be reached if the paratext is what he calls an 'articulated' text. This means that in the right circumstance a link can be made between the paratext and the text. If you are a fan of the franchise, you could potentially have made this link, if you are unfamiliar with the franchise however, you could have missed it, and hence the aforementioned example of the two types of fans. Before the audio drama started, a website with #HuntTheTruth was released with a countdown timer. If a dual address was incorporated, the author would rely on the fans to make the connection between the campaign and the *Halo* series. However beneath the timer was also the logo of *Halo 5: Guardians* as you can see in *Figure 3*. Instead of allowing the fan to find the link between the campaign and the upcoming *Halo* game, they created the connection themselves. I would argue that by being both a promotional as well as a transmedia object, relying solely on the knowledge about the worldness of the *Halo* franchise was not an option, and the promotional goal of creating awareness for the game was needed. I would therefore suggest that the concept of worldness needs to be adapted when taking promotional material into account.



*Figure 3: The countdown to the Hunt the Truth reveal*

<sup>96</sup> The beginning of the *Halo* franchise started in March 2002, when the first game *Halo: Combat Evolved* was released for the original Xbox.

<sup>97</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 204.

This dual functionality that has been the focus of this thesis is interesting for another reason. Therefore, I would like to expand the argument I made at the end of the previous section. As I have observed already, the campaign is structured in a way that somebody can experience the story without having pre-existing knowledge about the franchise. However, being a fan of the franchise gives you a different experience. You already know the truth behind the Spartan-II program, you can retrace certain locations or events back to previous instalments or you can recognize a character like Agent Locke who is only present in the live-action trailers by having watched the *Nightfall* series that connects the events of *Halo 4* with *Halo 5*. As a fan you are rewarded for having that knowledge but it also, as Gray calls it, can broaden your textual experience. This is what Consalvo calls *gaming capital*.<sup>98</sup> To retrace it back to the dual functionality of the campaign, the goal is not only to create a transmedial extension of the world and subsequently creating or enhancing a sense of worldness for fans, from a promotional perspective it also creates value and therefore gaming capital, thus adding a political economic argument. I would argue that by having a dualistic view, the concept of gaming capital could be linked to the concept of worldness, both build on the idea of knowledge but from a different angle.

In the introduction of this thesis I have stated that there was a certain dissonance between what fans experienced in the marketing campaign and what they experienced by playing the game. Not because they disliked the *Hunt the Truth* campaign, but because the campaign ‘promised’ certain things that were not part of the game, which caused the dissonance. People who experienced the marketing campaign had certain expectations about what the game would be, and these expectations were not met. If I would have purely looked at the campaign from a transmedia perspective, this would not be an argument. Within transmedia-worldbuilding a world does not have to be a singular coherent story but must be experienced across different mediums. In addition, the fans were positive about the *Hunt the Truth* campaign and it also won a variety of prizes, therefore it is safe to assume that the audience have ‘accepted’ the extension of the world and recognized the worldness. But despite all this there is still a dissonance. I would argue that by looking at it from a promotional perspective it all makes more sense. As the campaign was brought into the world as a promotional campaign for *Halo 5: Guardians*, a paratextual connection was made. You could not only view it as a separate transmedia extension of the *Halo* universe, but as a paratext that surrounded the game. As discussed earlier in the thesis the concept of paratext is not to categorize a certain text in relation to another but also reveals power relations between texts and also for the one that consumes the text. I would argue that the

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<sup>98</sup> Consalvo, *Cheating*.

marketing campaign, through being a promotional object, linked itself to the game, causing the idea of the worldness that was enhanced or changed by the campaign to also transfer to the game. In addition to this, I would even propose to extend the concept of worldness, by including the term gaming capital that I briefly mentioned in the previous section. Because what happened is that through the paratextual connection between the marketing campaign and the game, not only worldness was created or enhanced, but a form of gaming capital as well. This gaming capital that was created was not redeemed when playing the game, creating a dissonance. As if the gaming capital you collected, was all of a sudden worth nothing. This means that the time investment and commitment you made was not rewarded. This goes further than being disappointed about the fact a promise was not fulfilled. Just like gaming, paratexts hold great cultural value and audiences spend a lot of time with their favourite franchises. When they are not rewarded and their gaming capital cannot be redeemed, this not only can result in a disappointing experience, but can have long term effects on their will to invest time in a franchise.

## Conclusion

While promotion in the early days was often seen as a secondary mode of text, throughout the years the call for its cultural value has become more prevalent. The goal of this thesis was to investigate promotion, using *Hunt the Truth* as a case study, incorporating not only a promotional perspective but a transmedia perspective as well. To understand the paratextual relation between the campaign and the game, I used the five characteristics proposed by Genette.

The spatiality of the campaign could be categorized as an *epitext*, meaning that the 'location' of the campaign was outside of the main text on a respectful distance. While the spatiality does not have any interesting implications, the temporal characteristics of the campaign become more interesting. By creating a timeline, I tried to visualise when something was released, revealing that the entirety of the campaign took place within eight months before the release of the game. The timeline revealed a clear seriality, a transmedia characteristic that means that the text needed to be consumed in a certain order. This required a large time investment and commitment of the audience. It also revealed the complexity of such a campaign, as it needs to be experienced in its entirety to get the best experience.

The substantiality of the campaign has multiple layers. The audio drama, especially the first season, follows the structure of a true crime podcast. The interesting thing is that these podcast episodes of Giraud that we listen to are also released in the world of *Halo*. Not only has the world of *Halo* entered our real world, but also the other way around, we in a way have entered the world of *Halo*. By having a different substantiality than an interactive game, it provides the audience with a totally different experience and at the same time allows the author to use different perspectives. The visual conventions of the live-action trailer enhance the audio drama, allowing listeners to get a better idea of what they are experiencing.

Of the last two characteristics, the pragmatics of the campaign reveal who the author really is. Although it is often difficult to pinpoint 'an author' in an enormous franchise like *Halo*, I found that for this particular campaign an external party called the *Ayzenberg Group* was responsible for the campaign. What was especially interesting was that although it is mentioned that it is in partnership with the creators of the game *343 Industries*, it was essentially created by the external party. In addition, while new fans were taken into consideration, the main goal was to reach the die-hard fans. Where in an ideal state transmedia storytelling is centrally organised, this revealed that for this campaign this was not the case. Although it is suggested they collaborated with the developers, it seems that the entire campaign was created by the third party. When these campaigns are created the game is often in an advanced stage of development, and on top of that

the developers mostly do not have the time to create such an extensive marketing campaign. This shows how complex the gaming industry can be.

Finally the functionality of the campaign depended on the perspective you would look at it. Following the definitions of Gray, the campaign could both be seen as an entryway paratext from a promotional perspective, and from a 'in media res' paratext from a transmedia perspective. Essentially serving different purposes and promoting the game in a different way. The live-action trailers served as a paratext to the audio drama, enhancing the story through visual conventions, and also served as paratexts to the game, by introducing characters that were not in the marketing campaign but were present in the game. The different functionalities of the campaign, it being two modes of paratext, I argue that for a fan that has experienced multiple stories in the franchise, it is impossible to view it as an 'entryway' paratext.

To understand the worldness of a transmedia world, you must look at different elements called mythos, topos and ethos. Through its paratextual properties, the marketing campaign in a way enhanced, changed, enriched or created a sense of worldness. The different substantiality of the campaign in relation to the game allowed it to tell a story from a different perspective and through a different narrative structure. This allowed some aspects of worldness, such as the mythos to be enriched with new information, and other aspects such as the ethos to be challenged by for example the implication that the Master Chief was dead or that he was not the hero we all thought he was.

Looking at the campaign from both a promotional and transmedia perspective, I argued that the campaign did not have a dual address incorporated into the campaign. A dual address allows the heavily engaged fan to experience such a campaign to broaden their textual experience, and the lesser engaged fan to skip the marketing campaign and only enjoy the game. To ensure a dual address the paratext must not be directly linked with the text. However I noted that the *Hunt the Truth* campaign linked itself immediately with the game *Halo 5: Guardians*. I argued that by being both a promotional as well as a transmedia object, relying solely on the knowledge about the worldness of the *Halo* franchise was not an option, and the promotional goal of creating awareness for the game was needed. Therefore I suggest that the concept of worldness needs to be adapted when taking promotional material into account, by proposing to add the term gaming capital. In the introduction I stated that there was a dissonance when fans played the game after experiencing the marketing campaign. By being a promotional object a paratextual relation was created with the game, causing the worldness that was created or enhanced by the campaign to be transferred to the game. I argued that a form of gaming capital was also created by experiencing the game, but was not redeemed when playing the game, causing a dissonance. By

adding gaming capital I have tried to expand the concept of worldness, revealing the boundaries of the concept when you would only look at it from a transmedia perspective.

The main focus of this thesis was applying a dualistic view of two different perspectives on a particular case to enrich the current debate. The paratextual analysis allowed me to analyse the paratextual relation of the marketing campaign with the game. By incorporating a dualistic view I revealed the boundaries of the concept worldness and made an attempt to expand its definition. Although an attempt has been made, the debate surrounding promotion and worldness often emphasizes the importance of fans. The inclusion of gaming capital and how this affects fans has been touched upon briefly in this thesis, however lacks a fan studies perspective that limits me to go more in-depth. Future research could adopt the dualistic view while going more in depth into the importance of fans by incorporating a fan studies angle. This goes against the consideration of Gray who calls for a focus not only on die-hard fans but also potential new fans. However while analysing it becomes clear that these types of marketing campaigns often focus on pleasing die-hard fans, whereas reaching new fans is more secondary in nature.



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## Appendix

### Appendix A: Corpus

Material	Content	Release Date
Hunt the Truth campaign	20 episodes across 2 seasons	March 23 till October 27, 2015
Bullet Trailer	20 second trailer	March 23, 2015
All Hail and The Cost	Two live-action trailers	March 29, 2015
Hunt the Truth Voice	YouTube competition to record your own voice for the Hunt The Truth campaign	April 24 till April 27, 2015
Hunt the Signal	ARG-campaign related to Hunt The Truth	April 27 till May 22, 2015
Hunt the Master Chief	Competition held in Italy	May 15 till June 14, 2015
A Hero Falls	A minute long live-action trailer	September 27, 2015
The Hunt Begins	A minute and a half long live-action trailer	October 3, 2015