

Electronic Arts Public Relations Campaign: Fans First, Compromises Second

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JOMC 386: Public Relations Campaign

Introduction:

Electronic Arts has asked the office of InvisySpeaks for assistance with the branding of the enterprise. To assist Electronic Arts in its PR struggle, the office of InvisySpeaks launched a public relations campaign meant to discover the cause of discomfort within consumers and produce a solution to which both the customers and the organization of Electronic Arts can be satisfied.

Formulative Research:

Who is Electronic Arts?

Electronic Arts (EA) is an American video game company that was founded on May 27, 1982, in San Mateo, California by Trip Hawkins. Although it was created by Hawkins, Hawkins left the company in 1994. EA is currently run by CEO Andrew Wilson, who has been leading the enterprise since 2013. It is the second-largest gaming company in Europe, South America, and North America by market capitalization and revenue. Second, only to Activision Blizzard, the organization is ahead of Ubisoft and Take-Two Interactive. Electronic Arts is headquartered in Redwood City, California.

In the fiscal year 2021, EA posted a GAAP net revenue of \$5.6 billion. EA is recognized for a portfolio of critically acclaimed, high-quality brands such as EA SPORTSTM FIFA, BattlefieldTM, Apex LegendsTM, The SimsTM, Madden NFL, Need for SpeedTM, TitanfallTM, and F1TM. The EA organization has over 20 studios, 6,000 creators globally and with over 340 different games, the company offers games across multiple genres, age demographics, and platforms for its 450⁺ million registered players worldwide to enjoy.

The company has many beliefs, purposes, and commitments. Each belief/purpose is separated into six categories: creativity, pioneering, passion, determination, learning, and teamwork. For creativity, EA believes in striving to bring imagination, original ideas, and excitement to everything it does. As pioneers, the company believes it should act with the curiosity and courage that it takes to experiment, innovate, and lead. For passion, EA believes it is at its best when pursuing what the company's people love and have fun doing what they do. The organization also believes in determination. This is bringing focus, drive, and conviction to

its actions. It means thriving on the journey and being motivated to achieve excellence. As an institution, Electronic Arts believes in learning. For them it is listening, having humility and being open to new ways of thinking, challenging themselves to grow and change as a company. The final purpose/belief is in teamwork. EA is committed to its people, and to the accountability and integrity that it takes to be a successful global team. Electronic Arts has also made certain commitments to positive play, inclusion & diversity, community investment, people and culture, the environment, and pay equity.

Beginning with positive play, which is a positive, fun, fair, and safe space for all. EA has guidelines in place for players to keep the peace as well as giving players the ability to report anyone trying to worsen the gameplay for others. To achieve this positive playing ground, EA focuses on five player needs: safety, fairness, inclusion, connection, and balance. 1) Safety - Players respect each other and play in a safe gaming environment. 2) Fairness - All players can have fun in a level gaming environment. 3) Inclusion - Players can bring their whole, diverse selves to the game and feel welcome; we strive to represent the world in our content. 4) Connection - Players can play with friends or create new, meaningful connections. 5) Balance - Players and the people who support them can obtain data about how they engage.

The next commitment is to inclusion & diversity. Electronic Arts is working to embed diversity, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of its culture for four key reasons. 1) To attract, develop, and retain great talent that can thrive and do their best work. 2) To develop relatable content and games. 3) To enable expansion into new and diverse markets. 4) To bridge to better representation that authentically reflects players around the world. As such, EA has enacted several initiatives around diverse teams, inclusive hiring, and pay equity.

Electronic Arts also has committed to invest in the varying communities of players. From the words of EA directly, “Electronic Arts is committed to creating positive impact in the communities in which we live, play and work. We are committed to social justice and racial equity, investing in the future of the next generation of playmakers, and responding to our communities’ essential needs.” Their contributions for the 2021 fiscal year:



EA is also committed to people & culture, the environment, and pay equity. This begins with focusing on the culture of EA. EA promotes curiosity, diversity, learning, and growth. Within the organization, there are multiple events held to promote allyship from discussions, panels, and workshops to individual talks and seven Employee Resource Groups meant to offer a place for each colleague to belong. Another commitment which Electronic Arts has promised is a responsibility to the environment. The three key environmental priority areas are 1) Reducing our carbon footprint in the delivery of games and services, 2) Managing energy and water usage at our global offices and data centers, and 3) Making choices to reduce the environmental footprint of our workplace and supply chain. Through a digital transformation of game production and format, the carbon footprint of game delivery has declined. Due to the five key strategies involved in managing energy and water usage, EA has worked to become more energy

efficient. (The five strategies: 1) Directly manage energy usage for approximately 2,400 Electronic Arts - Owned data centers, through practices designed to increase energy efficiency, continue to consolidate Electronic Arts-Managed data centers to fewer locations to drive utilization efficiency, increase usage of renewable energy, Leverage cloud providers and their commitments to energy efficiency, and lastly, Partner with cloud providers with commitments to renewable energy.) The final commitment made by EA is to pay equity which is tightly intertwined throughout the other five commitments. Two quotes associated with pay equity from EA's website are: "We're proud that, with respect to base pay, we have achieved gender pay equity globally and race/ethnicity pay equity in the United States," and "We're committed to continuing to pay equitably as well as learning, evolving and implementing practices that promote fairness."

What issues has EA run into?

Electronic Arts has had many issues and controversies surrounding how its publics view them. When Electronic Arts is typed into a google search engine, under questions "People also ask," the first question is "Why is Electronic Arts Bad?" The sixth question is, "Why is EA so greedy?" The eighth question is, "Why is EA so evil?" The ninth question is, "Why is EA so cheap?" Further down the list are the questions, "Is EA pay to win," and "Is EA the worst company ever?" Under the (Is EA the worst company ever?) tab is an article that comments on EA being one of the most hated US companies in 2019. Typing this question into a google search engine then leads to a Forbes article from 2013 when EA was voted the worst company in America. This decision comes from how consumers feel about the company. It involves internet presence and EA won with more than three-fourths of the vote as the worst company in 2013. has won this award in 2012, 2013, and 2019. The viewpoint of EA as the worst company is also

apparently held by the founder Trip Hawkins. In an interview cataloging his relationship with EA, he had this to say, “It became kind of a factory...But they really didn’t do much of anything else, did they?” The problem stems from the company’s public perception which as one article puts it, “the epitome of a bland, money-grubbing corporate megalith, divorced from the concerns of gamers.” This is reflected in several google searches and articles. The issue with this perception is that it goes against the various beliefs, purposes, and commitments held by the corporation.

There are a few reasons for this negative perception. The first was in 2013 when a game called SimCity was supposed to launch as an online-only game, but the online servers were not working. Meaning consumers paid for a game that did not work. Many players felt forcing the game to be online was an attempt by EA to force digital rights management (DRM) on players. DRM is a license to play the game on a certain platform, without the platform, the game cannot be accessed. Thus, when consumers bought SimCity and could not access it through EA, there was no other alternative to play the game. This brings us to our second issue with EA, the lack of connection with the players. When EA discovered that it was labeled “worst company in America” for the second time in a row, they gave a semi-apology, but most assumed that it was for several inaccurate reasons such as conservative hate groups being upset over the options to make in-game LGBT characters and denied the presence of DRM in Sim City’s failure. This only angered EA users more because all of the reasons for which EA was voted worst company were for none of the reasons presented by EA’s COO in his apology. This lack of connection with how players actually feel compared to EA’s misconceptions led to more negative opinions about the company. The biggest issue found with EA games was microtransactions. A microtransaction occurs when users can buy items within/for the game in a virtual space using

real money. There are several reasons that players are against microtransactions. First, microtransactions can mean that the purchased game is incomplete. For example, if a player purchases a new game for the average base price of \$60, but they must pay to unlock all of the story modes/access to the different modes of the game, users feel cheated. This is a common way to *sucker* users into paying more than they originally would have. Another reason players tend to dislike microtransactions is because it tips playing fields unevenly. Depending on the game, microtransactions may be linked to player performance or “Pay to Win.” When this happens, gaming arenas often become less about skill because people willing to spend more money than others will win regardless of how much time they put into the game. Pay to Win games tend to counteract the positive play environment to which EA is committed due to toxic attitudes and behaviors.

Summary

Customers want solutions, not excuses. EA is a great company from an inside viewpoint, but fans, unfortunately, do not share the same perception because of how often EA backtracks or lies about its practices in an attempt to save face. For example, EA once said that they wanted to include microtransactions in *all* games regardless of the initial price. The company later backtracked that statement to say only *mobile* games, only to put microtransactions in upcoming console games anyway. The plan of action for EA is to change the opinion of people towards the company. This negative perception is rooted in their game dealings around Digital Rights Management and microtransactions. The communications team of InvisySpeaks may not be able to tackle each situation immediately, so this campaign will focus on the public perception regarding microtransactions.

Strategy

Despite the negative opinion held by many consumers about Electronic Arts, customers still play these games. Throughout the initial research phase of this campaign, InvisySpeaks has asked several players how they felt about EA. Many said they dislike the “scummy” practices of EA, but these same consumers are active players in various EA games. This makes sense as EA still makes money despite the negative public opinion, approximately \$5.63 billion in 2021. We, at InvisySpeaks, believe that this indicates that EA is doing something right, so all that is left to do is to enhance the consumer opinion of the organization.

A good way to determine exactly what brings players back to EA games, and what EA can do to improve their reputation among players is to ask them. For this reason, we recommend using a four-step reactive strategy. As the damage has already been done, a reactive strategy should be implemented to offset the damage and rectify consumer issues with EA. The steps to rebuilding the public perception can be categorized under these action steps: investigation, corrective action, restitution, and repentance. First, we suggest making a survey that will ask for user input and comments. This survey will include Likert scales and comment sections. The goal of the investigation phase is to address and identify what EA practices cause distress for players. Therefore, directly asking consumers what they have issues with is the best call. As has been proven by EA winning the “worst company” in America award multiple times, an award decided by internet presence, we also recommend promoting the survey on social media and within in-game stores. EA consumers have already proven that they are willing to share their opinion about EA, so filling this survey with responses should not be difficult. Since players typically sign up for gaming accounts using their email addresses, the survey should be sent in emails along with a personalized promo code that will activate once users complete the survey. It is also the

recommendation of InvisySpeaks that EA present players with an incentive to take the survey such as 100 coins, new character skins, etc. This will complete the first step in reactive strategy: investigation. The next step is corrective action. This comes from evaluating the responses given in the survey. We advise that EA listens to its customers' feedback and implement changes based on what is said. Within the time it takes to add changes, EA must stay in constant contact with its public. It would help to present numerical evidence to the public about what they said, and how those correlate to the new changes created. It would also help if the company representative explained how changes may take time to fully integrate into the system. Once changes have been made, restitution can begin. With the new updates, EA will make to various old games and upcoming games, another sale or some type of reward should be given to players. In addition to a reward, the EA C.E.O should release a statement apologizing for the company's past behavior. Within this apology, EA should present survey response examples and the corresponding changes made to address these consumer issues.

Tactics

Overview

This section of the campaign focuses on the actual application of the tactical plan enacted to fix this negative viewpoint based on our strategic research. This section will outline the survey itself, key components, and the strategy surrounding it. EA created a survey with eight-to-ten questions including Likert scales and different comment sections. The survey was no more than five minutes, for convenience, and proposed to our customers through social media posts, custom generated links sent to emails and an anonymous link/QR code within the different in-game stores of our videogames. The survey can be taken on computers or phones.

Interest will be generated through a sale on all games. This drove players to the stores, and a special gift was offered to those who completed the survey as an incentive to take the survey. After a 14-day period, the results of the survey were compiled. The data from the survey was then shared with consumers to keep them informed. This shows that EA is indeed listening to its players and planning to make a difference. This is important because one of EA's beliefs is in learning which they describe as, listening, having humility and being open to new ways of thinking, challenging themselves to grow and change as a company.

Distribution

The anonymous link will be attached to the EA website, social media posts, and the in-game store along with the QR Code.

Link: https://ncat.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0VTCPojYyplMBT0.



QR Code:

Survey Breakdown

The survey begins with an introduction to the survey thanking them for their participation and a disclaimer. “Thanks for taking the Electronic Arts (EA) Microtransactions Survey! To get started, read the disclaimer below. When you're ready to go, click onto the next page. Thank you so much for taking the time to participate! Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Once you are taking part in the study, you can terminate your participation at any time. Your name will not be input anywhere on the survey, therefore, there is no way that identifying information about you would be included. We are bound by professional confidentiality agreements. Please answer truthfully. Happy surveying!”

Then the next page is a pre-question meant to disqualify certain survey takers. “Have you ever played an EA game?” If the respondent answers anything other than yes, they are taken to the end of the survey. This survey is specifically for people who might be willing to participate in the “worst company” in America polls, or rather people who would know if they have played an EA game. Next, a definition of microtransactions is given, then customers are asked, “How do you feel about Microtransactions?” If they answer negatively, they will see this open-ended question: “What made you respond negatively to the previous question?” Otherwise, they will be sent to the page asking three questions about microtransactions and EA games. “Would you pay for micro-transactions in a game?,” “Would you be more willing to accept microtransactions if the base game price is lower than \$60?,” and “Would knowing a game has microtransactions before buying the game price lessen any frustrations that you have about micro-purchases?” The

next page has two questions: “What could be done to balance out any negative feelings which you may have about microtransactions?” and “Do you have any negative feelings towards Electronic Arts (EA)?” If consumers responded negatively to the latter question, they would see this open-ended question: “If you answered that you have negative feelings towards EA, Why?” on the next page in addition to “Is there something EA games could have to make you, the consumer, feel content with playing a game that includes microtransactions?”. Otherwise, they will only see the question about EA games and microtransactions. The final survey question is: “Overall, how satisfied are you with your most recent interaction with EA?” Then the survey ends with this message: “Congratulations! You finished the survey! Thank you so much! We look forward to making Electronic Arts better for you, our players. Have An Awesome Day!”

Survey Computer Images: Introduction



Thanks for taking the Electronic Arts (EA) Microtransactions Survey! To get started, read the disclaimer below. When you're ready to go, click onto the next page. Thank you so much for taking the time to participate!

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Once you are taking part in the study, you can terminate your participation at any time. Your name will not be input anywhere on the survey, therefore, there is no way that identifying information about you would be included. We are bound by professional confidentiality agreements.

Please answer truthfully. Happy surveying!



Have you ever played an EA game?



Survey Computer Images: Microtransactions Definition



A microtransaction or micro-purchase is when users can buy items for a game within a virtual space using real money. (For example, buying skins at the in-game store using a credit card.)

How do you feel about Microtransactions?

I love them

I like them

I don't care

I don't like them

I hate them

What made you respond negatively to the previous question?



Survey Computer Images: Microtransactions willingness



Would you pay for micro-transactions in a game?

Yes

Maybe

No

Would you be more willing to accept microtransactions if the base game price is lower than \$60?

Definitely would

Probably would

Would you be more willing to accept microtransactions if the base game price is lower than \$60?

Definitely would

Probably would

Not sure

Probably would not

Definitely would not

Would knowing a game has microtransactions before buying the game lessen any frustrations that you have about micro-purchases?

Definitely would

Probably would

Not sure

Probably would not

Definitely would not



Survey Computer Images: Negative Opinions Section



What could be done to balance out any negative feelings which you may have about microtransactions?

Do you have any negative feelings towards Electronic Arts (EA)?

Definitely yes

Probably yes

Might or might not

Probably not

Definitely not



Survey Computer Images: Potential Fourth Page Options

Is there something EA games could have to make you, the consumer, feel content with playing a game that includes microtransactions?

←→

If you answered that you have negative feelings towards EA, Why?

Is there something EA games could have to make you, the consumer, feel content with playing a game that includes microtransactions?

←→

Survey Computer Images: EA Satisfaction

Overall, how satisfied are you with your most recent interaction with EA?

Extremely satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Somewhat dissatisfied

Extremely dissatisfied



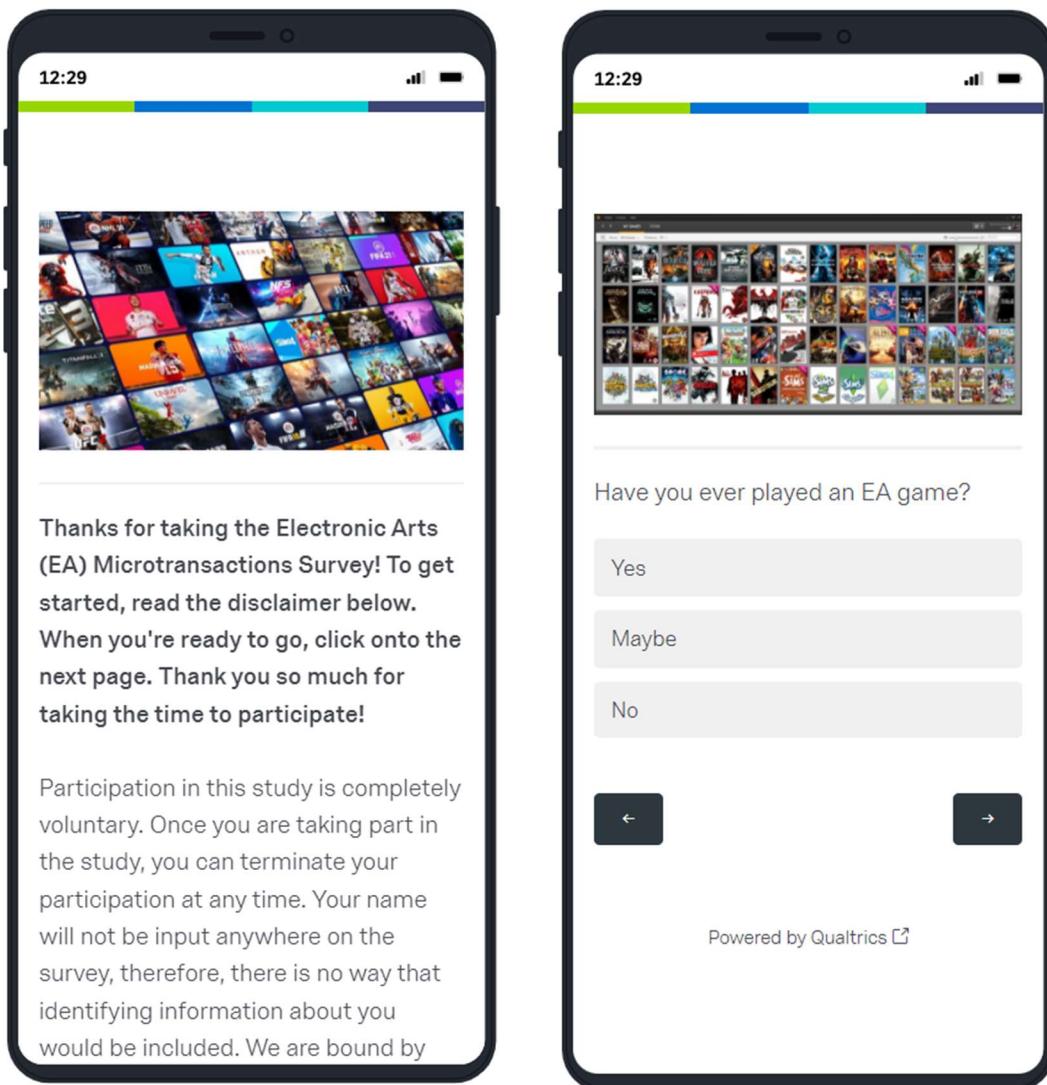
Survey Computer Images: Completed Survey

Congratulations! You finished the survey!

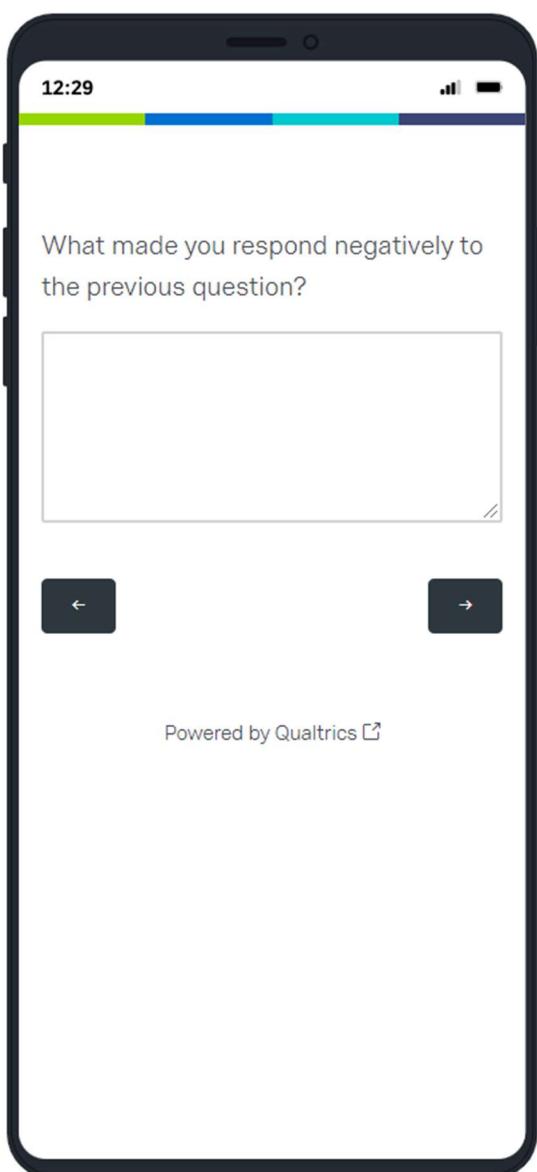
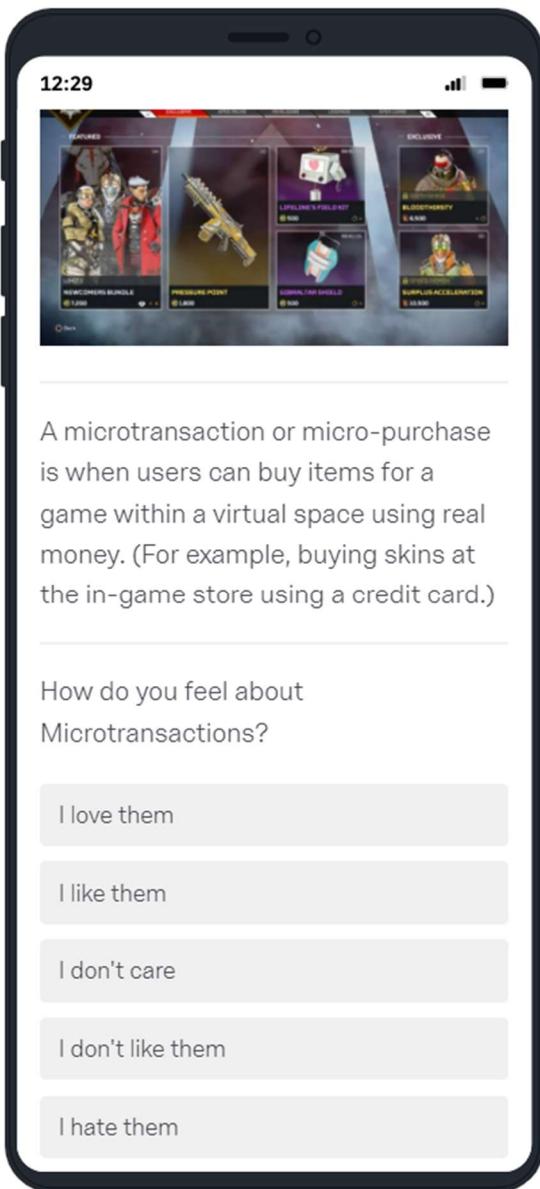
Thank you so much! We look forward to making Electronic Arts better for you, our players.

Have An Awesome Day!

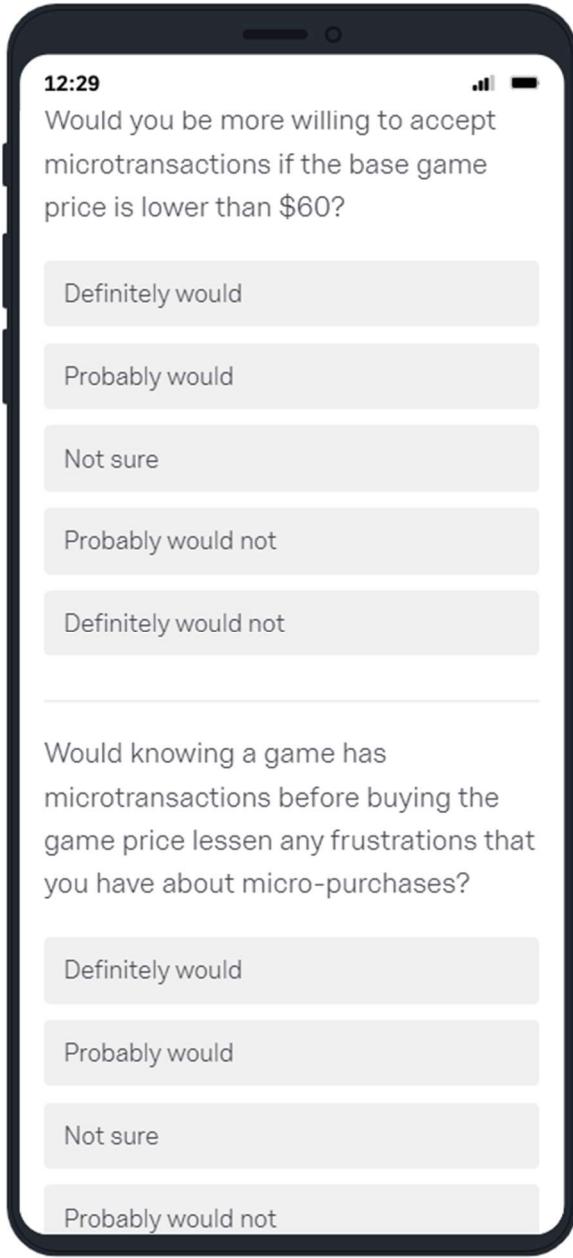
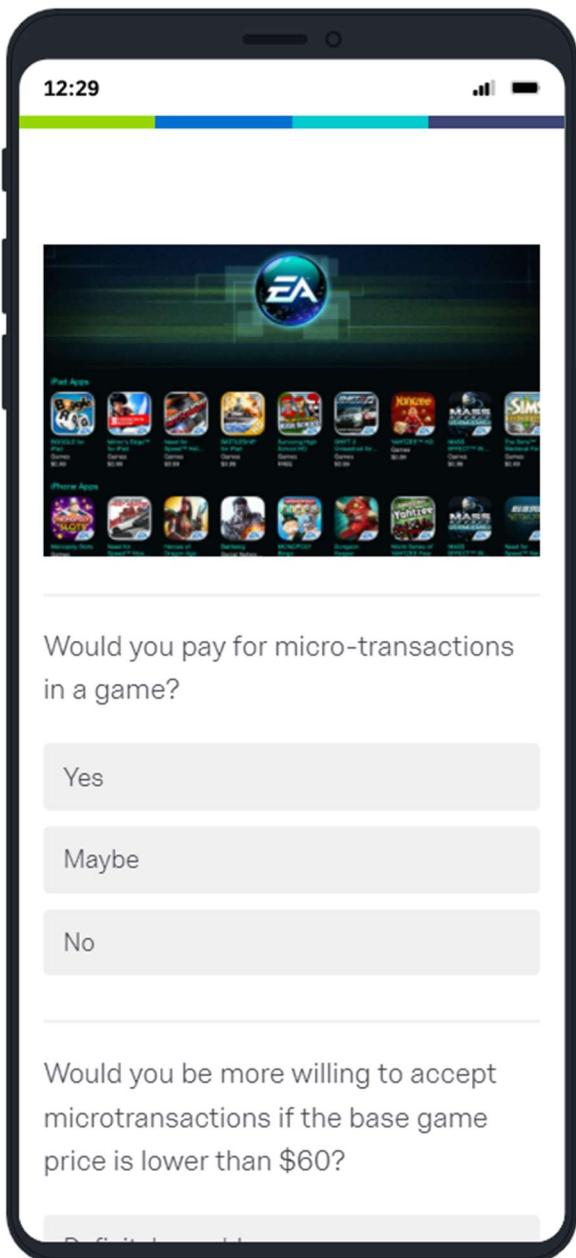
Survey Phone Images: Introduction



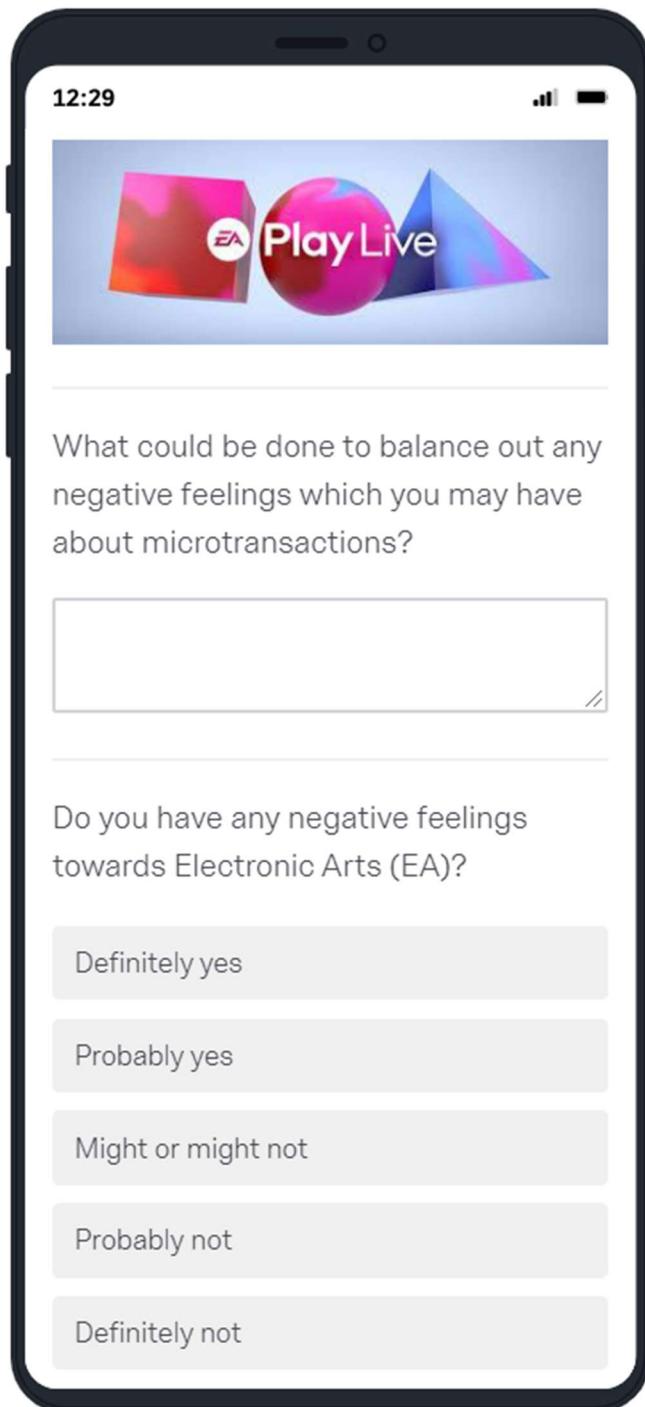
Survey Phone Images: Microtransactions Definition



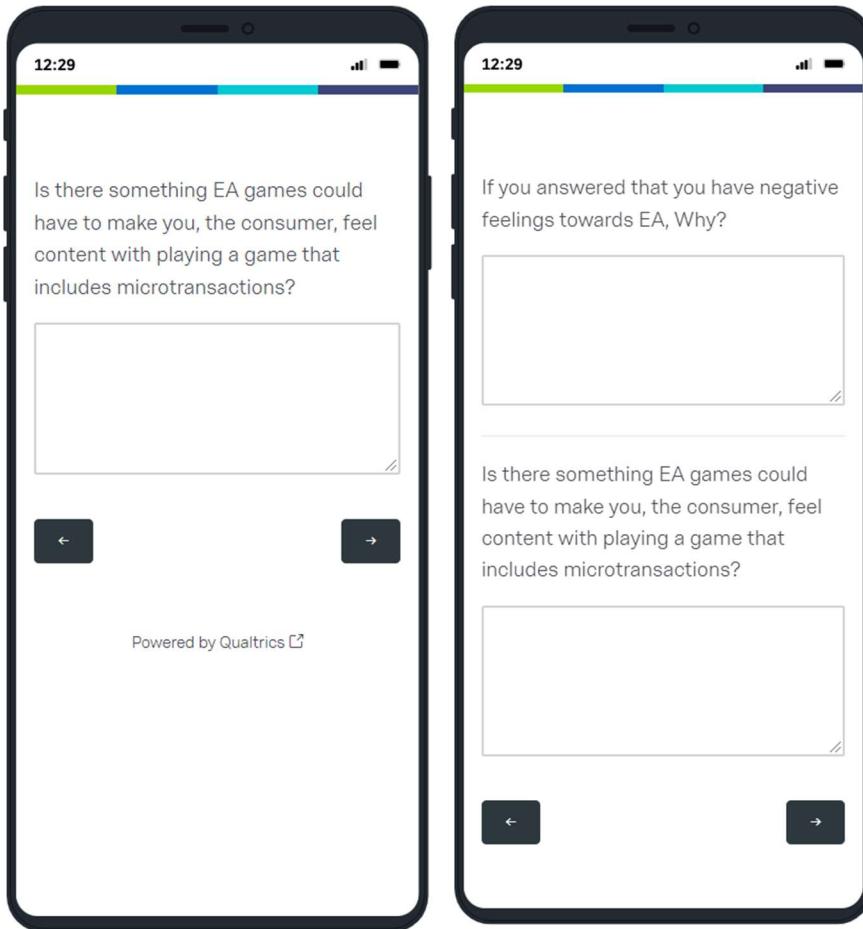
Survey Phone Images: Microtransactions willingness



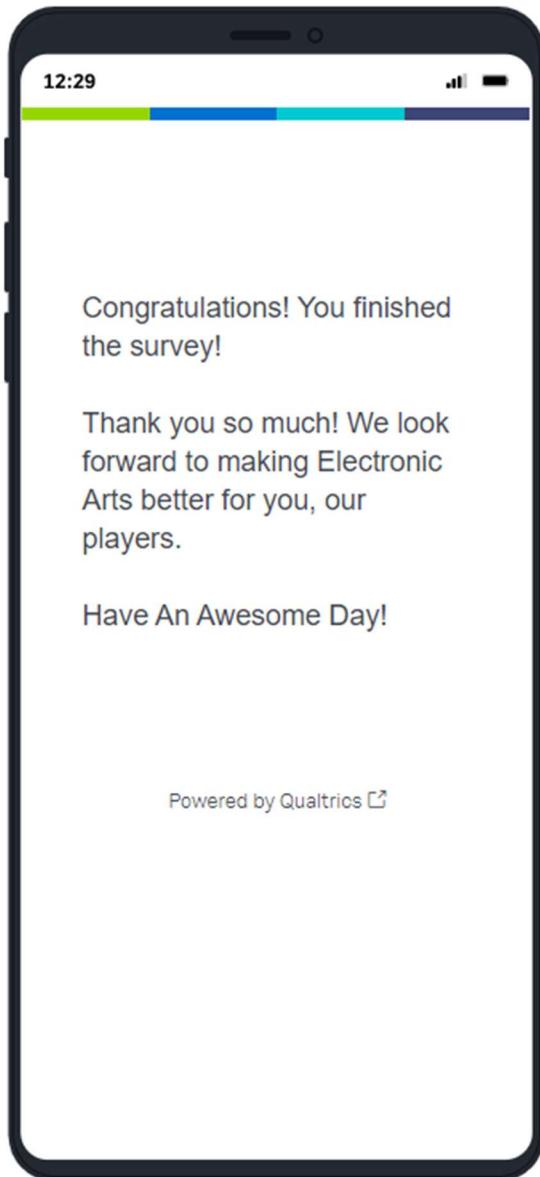
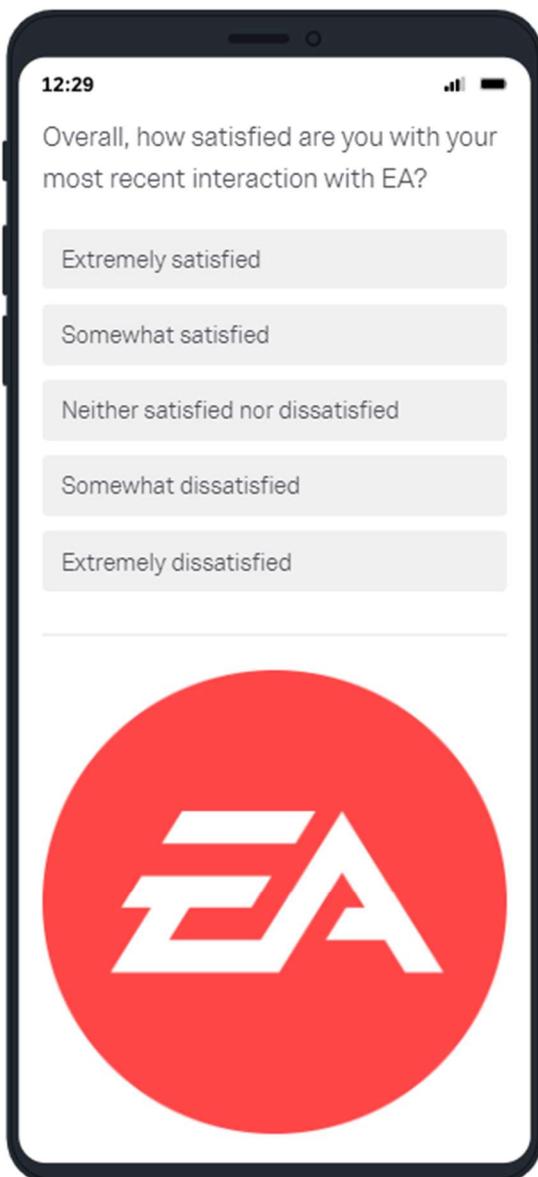
Survey Phone Images: Negative Opinions Section



Survey Phone Images: Potential Fouth Page Options



Survey Phone Images: EA Satisfaction & Completed Survey



Evaluative Research

This section will summarize the campaign as well as present some response examples from the survey.

Formulative Research

Electronic Arts (EA) is an American video game company. It is the second-largest gaming company in Europe, South, and North America by market capitalization and revenue. The company has over 450 million registered players worldwide and with over 340 different games, the company offers games across multiple genres, age demographics, and platforms.

EA has had many issues and controversies surrounding how its publics view them. The public perception around EA suggests that it is the “worst company” in America. It has won this award in 2012, 2013, and 2019. This perception has even reached the founder of the company who left EA and no longer has a positive opinion of what the company has become. This is reflected in several google searches and articles. The plan of action for EA is to change the opinion of people towards the company. This negative perception is rooted in their game dealings around Digital Rights Management (DRM), microtransactions, and game emulations, but this campaign will focus on the public perception concerning microtransactions.

Strategy

Acting under a reactive strategy to rectify issues with EA’s behavior up until now, the company should launch a survey to satisfy the four steps of the process. These steps will include investigation, corrective action, restitution, and repentance. First, the office of InvisySpeaks suggests making a survey that will ask for user input and comments. The survey will include Likert scales and comment sections. The goal is to address and identify what EA practices cause

distress for players. We also recommend promoting the survey on social media and within in-game stores. Players should receive an incentive to take the survey such as 100 coins, new character skins, etc. EA should listen to customers' feedback and implement changes based on what is recorded. Numerical evidence should be presented to the public about what was said, and how those relate to the new changes created.

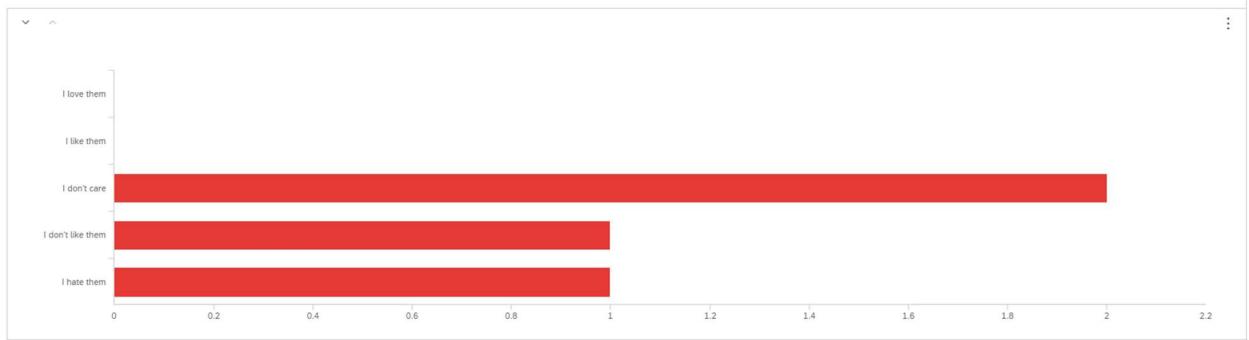
Tactics

An eight-to-ten question survey was created and sent to various EA consumers. The survey was comprised of Likert scales and open-ended comment sections. The survey was no more than five minutes, for convenience, and proposed to customers through social media posts, custom generated links sent to emails and an anonymous link/QR code within the different in-game stores of EA videogames. The survey could be taken on computers or phones and was open for fourteen days. A two-week sale was placed on all games to generate interest in the survey. A special gift was also given to those who completed the survey. Survey data was then compiled and shared by the CEO to the players about upcoming changes based on consumer responses.

Evaluative Research

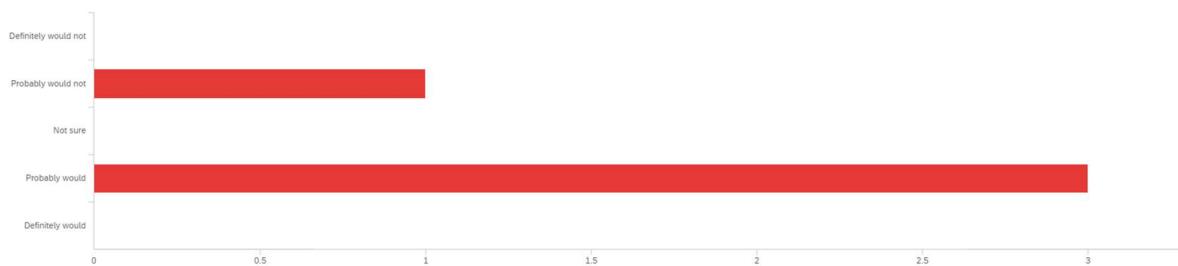
This part of the Evaluative Research Section will present some of the evidence gathered from survey responses. *This evidence was gathered at the beginning of the survey's launch is not necessarily representative of the entire EA fanbase as a whole but is likely skewed as only four participants took the survey at this point.*

All participants played EA games, and most felt negative about microtransactions.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How do you feel about Microtransactions?	3.00	5.00	3.75	0.83	0.69	4

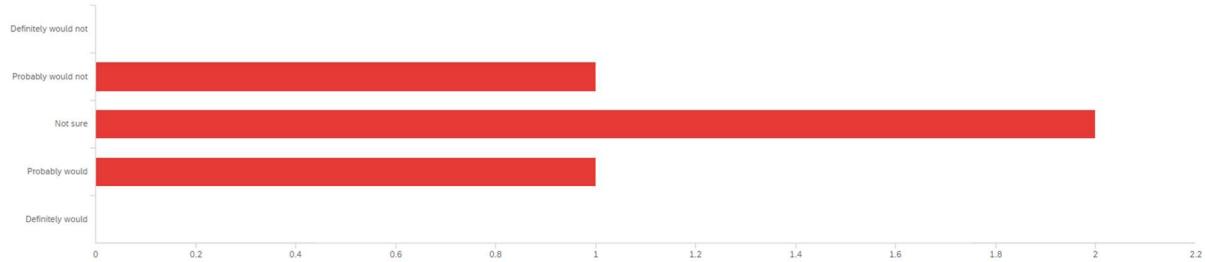
When asked why they felt negative, a participant responded, “Cause why am I spending money on a game I already bought?” Next 3/4 participants agreed that they would not pay for microtransactions with $\frac{1}{4}$ saying maybe. However, players are willing to accept microtransactions if the base game is lower than sixty dollars.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Would you be more willing to accept microtransactions if the base game price is lower than \$60?	2.00	4.00	3.50	0.87	0.75	4

Although, there is uncertainty on whether knowing about microtransactions before game purchase would lessen frustration.

Q4 - Would knowing a game has microtransactions before buying the game price lessen any frustrations that you have about micro-purchases? Page Options ▾



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Would knowing a game has microtransactions before buying the game price lessen any frustrations that you have about micro-purchases?	2.00	4.00	3.00	0.71	0.50	4

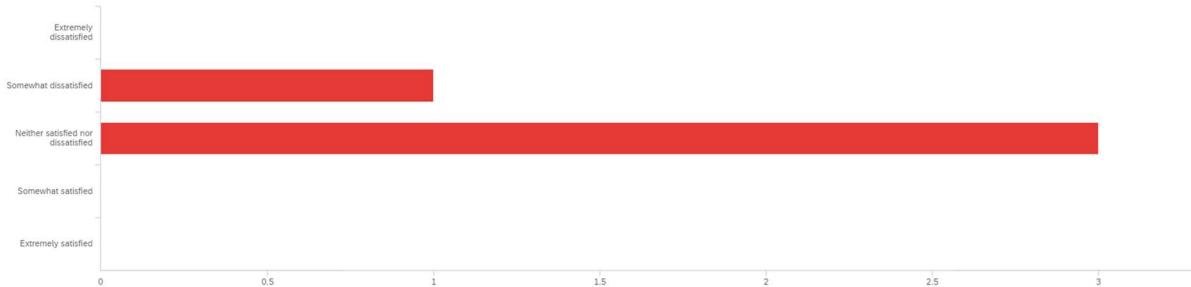
Responses to what EA could do to balance out negative feelings towards

Microtransactions included: “Don't make microtransactions affect gameplay,” “Make the game free and make the game good,” and “Either sell the base game for less or don't have micro transactions.” Half of the participants have negative feelings towards EA while the other half might or might not. The two who did have negative feelings towards EA said that they did because: “Lackluster games that aren't fun without dlc,” and “EA releases the same 2 games every year (Madden and FIFA) that aren't good, but the only updated feature is the Ultimate Team, which is how EA makes a lot of their money.” Actions that EA could take to make consumers content with microtransactions include, “Make the gameplay unaffected by microtransactions,” “Make the game free,” and “Make their games worth micro transactions.”

Finally, it appears that consumers are dissatisfied with EA.

Q8 - Overall, how satisfied are you with your most recent interaction with EA?

Page Options ▾



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Overall, how satisfied are you with your most recent interaction with EA?	2.00	3.00	2.75	0.43	0.19	4

Conclusion

Customers are dissatisfied with EA but are willing to accept microtransactions if EA puts in more effort. They are not fans of microtransactions but are willing to voice their opinion to help EA come along as a company. The company has a bit of a way to go before players are willing to pay for microtransactions in their game, but they are open if EA meets them halfway.