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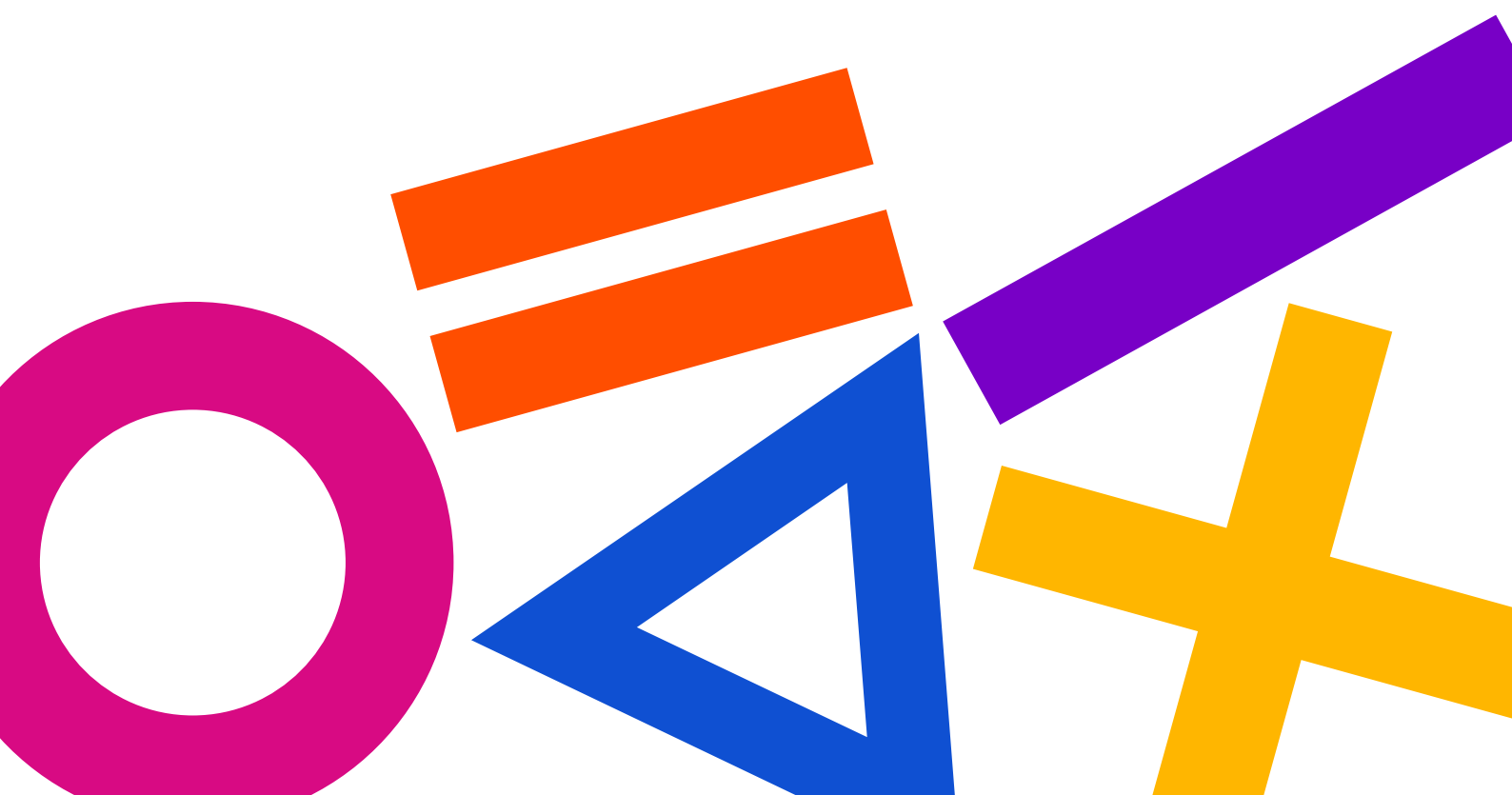
Gaming & Advertising

2020 and beyond

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While gaming has been at the top of the industry pedestal for years, the media never really picked up on the hype until a global pandemic came around.



With an influx of free time and lack of social life, gaming was the only option many people had left – with UK consumers [spending more](#) on gaming last year than any other. Now this isn't a bad thing for the industry itself, it only means it's growing – and will continue to grow.

But the problem lies further ahead. While gaming is booming now, there's no guarantee that this momentum will continue after the pandemic – but is this something brands should be concerned about? Well, let's take a look at the continuing success, and where it could go wrong.

What happened in 2020 for gaming?

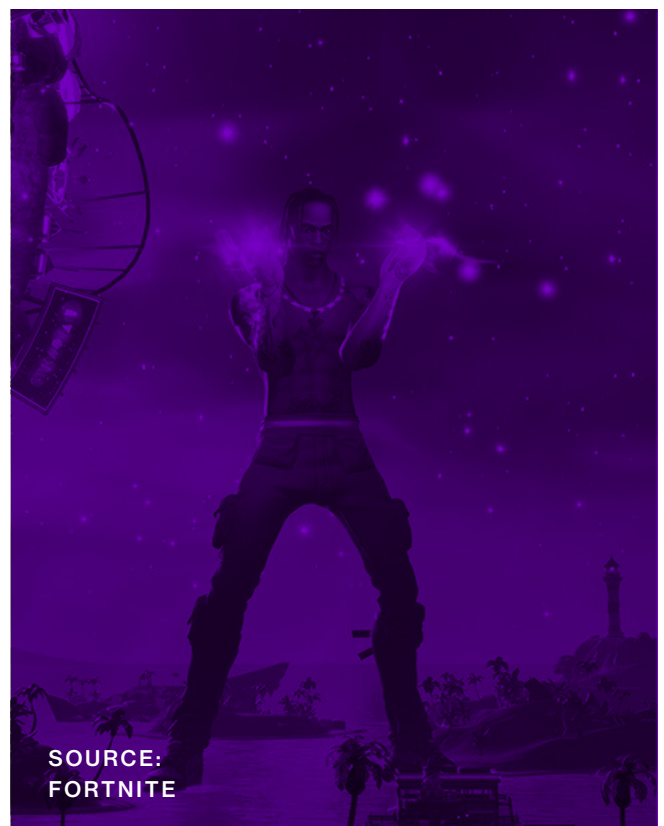
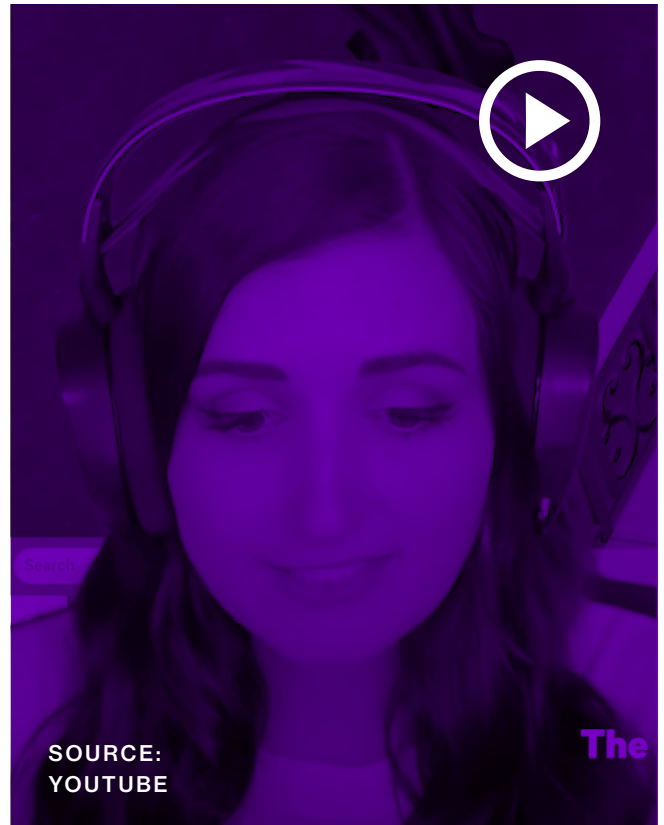
From existing players, to the old gamers coming back to relive the nostalgia from their youth, the pandemic took the industry to new heights with a predicted [2.7 billion](#) gamers around the world.

Animal Crossing stole the hearts of families, while the release of Call of Duty: Warzone took the online spotlight with over 100 million players dropping into Verdansk. Not only that, Sony and Microsoft launched their next-gen consoles that are still selling out all over the world.

[YouTube published its best ever year in gaming](#) with watch times spanning over 100 billion hours – as more and more people become interested in live streaming.

Oh, and how could we forget the largest virtual concert of all time, [Travis Scott in Fortnite?](#) But enough with the stats, moments and memories.

An article published on BBC News described the situation perfectly. [“There has never been a better time to play games.”](#) They’re right, and there won’t be a better time for brands to capitalise on it. When Netflix said their biggest competitor was Fortnite, they weren’t lying - and brands now know this.



Brand Advertising in 2020

With gaming having a monumental year, brands were quick to tap in – and let's be honest, it was a bit of a no-brainer. Gaming for the most part is an unexplored advertising space – so 2020 had to be a learning curve for many of the brands trying to reach gamers. Animal Crossing played a massive part in that, producing a great area for brands to experiment with in-game placements. [Getty Museum](#) loaned out their artwork, [H&M](#) created a new island, and [Pride](#) built a global campaign.

But obviously Animal Crossing was not the only game that was released or advertised in last year. [Balenciaga](#) actually made their own video game to run a fashion show, while brands like [Samsung](#) dived head-first into mobile-gaming billboard placements.

So brands are getting involved, that's obvious – but are they doing it right? The difference between Animal Crossing entries, and the Samsung placement show clear areas for

improvement on how to enter the space.

But why? A gamer has been so spoilt in terms of advertising, or lack of it, that when it does come up on their screen it's easy to spot. Animal Crossing provided new experiences for them in the game, it gave gamers something new to explore. Even going back to the Fortnite events or experiences, they're exclusive real-time moments. But Samsung just placed a billboard on a side of a mountain, got loads of visibility and left. You're not exactly going to tweet "*I was there for the Samsung billboard*", but the Travis Scott event is a moment you had to be there for.

Although it might have worked for Samsung, would the billboards or "intrusive advertising" hold up in a larger game like Animal Crossing? Maybe in a global pandemic, but what about when things return to normal? It all depends on whether the brands are looking to make real connections, and provide value.

And that's where streamers come into play.



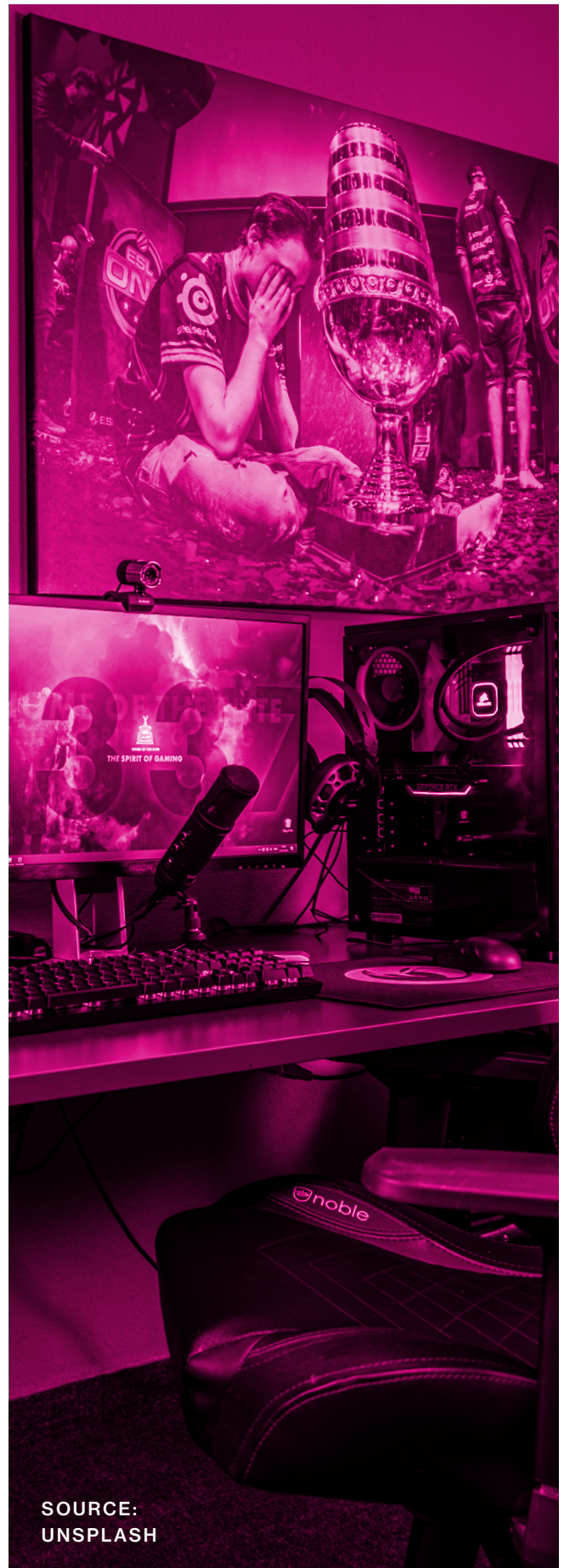
SOURCE:
BALENCIAGA

The power streamers infuse within the gaming scene

Authentic advertising often comes when brands partner with influencers that play the games and stream to their loyal community. 2020 was arguably [the year of live streaming](#) for every industry, but gaming viewership sky rocketed – thanks to the streamers that play and create content for games every single day. But this all brings us back to the common question of – we know gaming is popular, but the concept of gaming videos and streams is harder to understand, so let's break it down.

Why would someone watch video games? Why does someone watch football? It's a strange but quite obvious analogy. The successful streamers are either professional gamers (yes that's a thing) or have that relatability element about them. A gamer always has the aspiration to be better than they are, and watching someone play a game that you play but at a higher level is something to aspire towards. In football you appreciate "liquid football" or a great sequence of play - it's no different in high level gaming. But the other side of it is personality and relatability. On the relatability side of things, watching something that you play is so relatable, especially when the person playing feels the same joy or frustration as you do. Relatability is something only a gamer can understand.

Personality is arguably the bread and butter, and you could probably compare it to prime time Saturday night television. Say there are two similar programmes on, but which one are you going to watch – Graham Norton or Jonathan Ross? You pick your favourite host or the guests that are on. It's no different in gaming – with thousands of streamers playing and streaming the same game, you watch the persona that you enjoy the most.



SOURCE:
UNSPLASH

So how did brands tap into streaming in 2020?

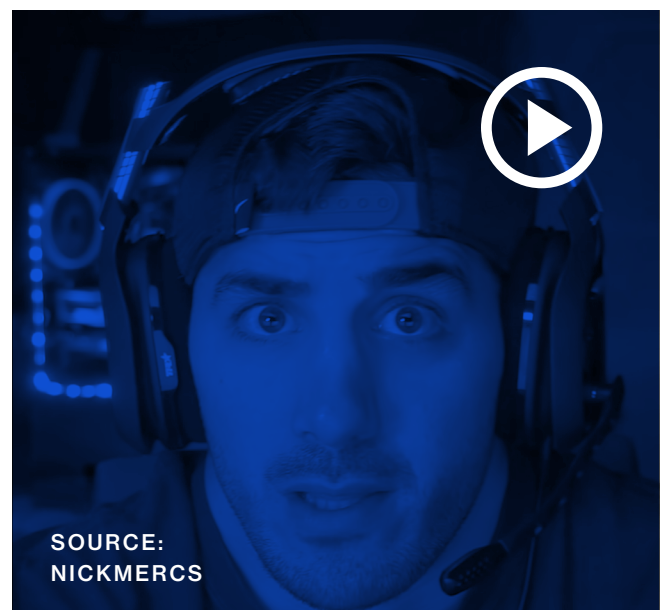
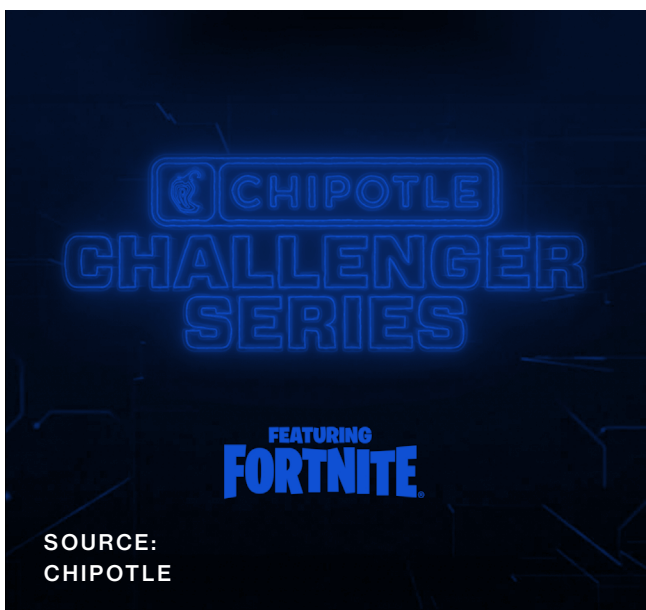
Brands have been doing this for quite some time – not just in 2020, but for years before this as well. But what they did do in 2020 was understand the audiences' needs a little more – particularly under 3 key categories.

- **Brand-led events** – Chipotle launched “[The Fortnite Challenger Series](#)” and have carried it on throughout 2020 in 2021 – but what is it? Quite simply, it's a tournament sponsored by Chipotle that gives gamers the chance to win some huge prizes and play in the grand final where some of the biggest streamers are invited to play – and stream it.
- **Streaming partnerships** – G-fuel partner with almost every gamer that exists, rolling out streamer inspired flavours for fans to buy. G-fuel seems to have led the way for more prominent partnerships outside of the gaming space – with a big US partnership forming between streamer [Nickmercs and Barstool Sports](#). Their partnership includes charity

streams, giveaways and exclusive bets from the streamer.

- **Sponsored streams** – When a brand sponsors a stream, it often adds something for the viewers to look forward to. Examples for this change everyday, but many of them include a 1-2 hour segment of the streamer reminding their audience of who the sponsor is, with a huge giveaway of the product at the end or during the time.

So what connects all of these together? Value. They're adding to the stream, they might have a chance to win something, get a discount code. It's an obvious advertisement, but it doesn't disrupt what they're there for. As advertisers we cannot take away from what they're watching or playing - we have to connect with them. And we can do that, even when they're not playing.



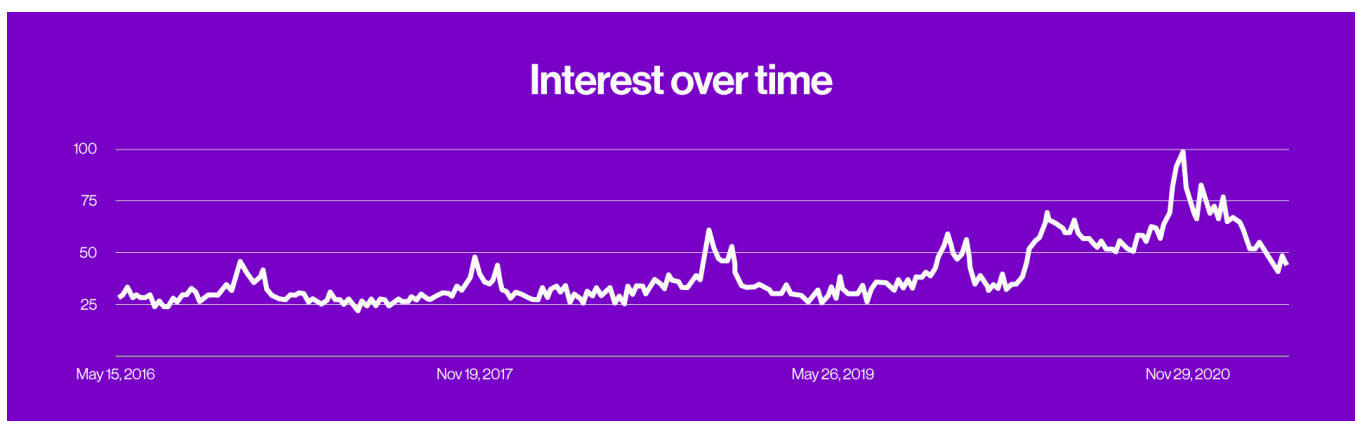
Connecting with gamers outside of the game

Picture your stereotypical gamer. The current gamer couldn't be further from it, because of how diverse the gaming community is. Almost everyone around the world has played a game, or regularly plays games, which makes them a really hard audience to target – or does it?

The boom of gaming has introduced a host of social and TV ads across the UK. Broadband companies have launched Wi-Fi ads targeting the pain gamers feel with “lag” on poor Wi-Fi, [Bud Light launched a console](#), and [KitKat](#) have also tapped in with some ads. Both created

connections through a pain point, or relatable moments – igniting a connection between brand and gamer. The point made is that as an advertiser, we don't always have to look into the games themselves – but the people that play them, their feelings and behaviour as well.

But now we know what went well, what's been done, and what we can do – there's a problem. Following on from worldwide success, are we close to seeing the end of the huge uptick in the industry?

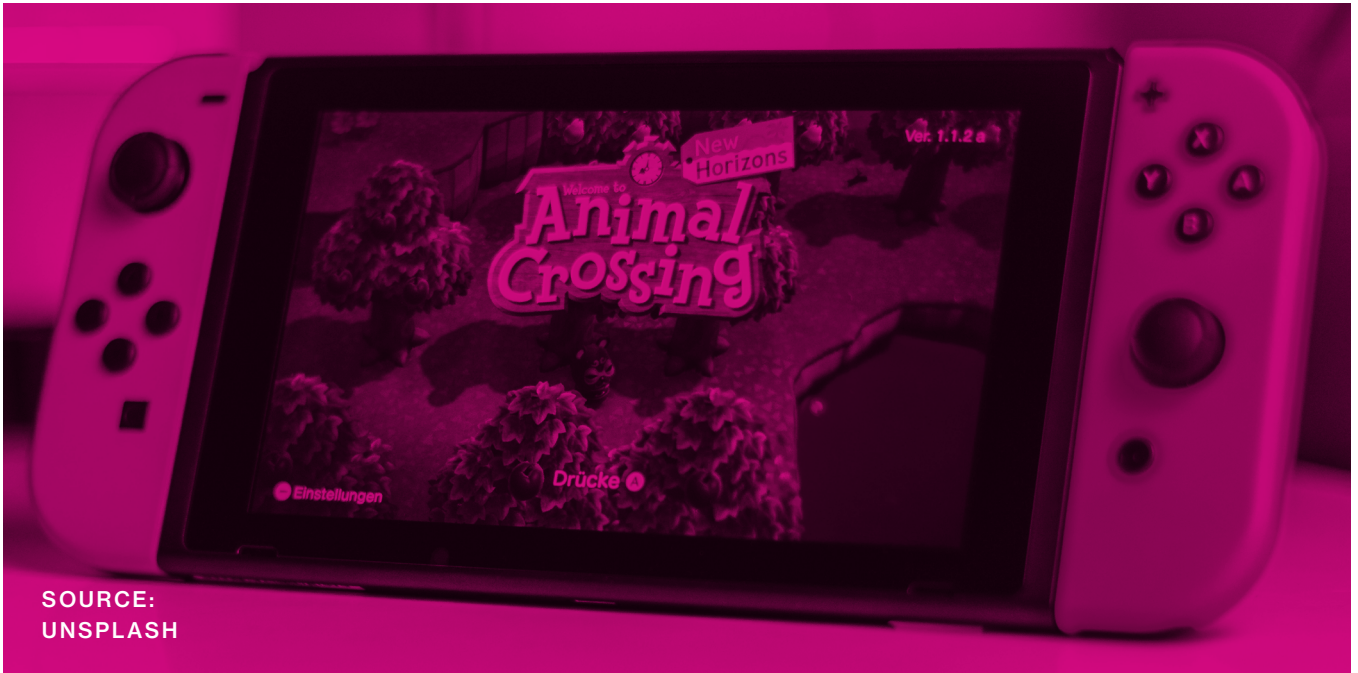


What problems does gaming face in 2021?

Vaccines are coming. Lockdowns are ending. The outside world awaits. All major red flags for advertising in games. The gaming trend is dropping, as shown in the graph above.

Not only is the hype around it disappearing, but the gaming industry faces a major crisis of player acquisition and player retention. We spoke about the rise of gaming, and the retention of the players reliving their love of gaming –

but how quickly will they fall back into their lack of playing games as the world opens up again? It's all mere speculation, but it's a consideration that advertisers and brands need to consider in the next few years. The successful games of last year were fortunate that they were almost finished, but now the delays of new games caused by working from home stare gamers and developers in the face – and there's no way to fight it.



SOURCE:
UNSPLASH

What can we take away from this?

While gaming is set to fall, gamers will always exist. But the essential consideration is how can we add value to their experience?

When you look at the success and media coverage of brand partnerships or successful activations - you think Travis Scott x Fortnite, Post Malone x Pokemon Go and all the incredible brand additions to Animal Crossing. They all add value to the game and the player.

In the future people might play games less, but they won't stop playing altogether – so these opportunities will always be around. But if not, they'll always be on Discord. They'll be somewhere on Reddit. They're on social. They might be watching someone on Twitch or YouTube. But we need to connect with them on their terms. Outside of the gaming space we need to speak in their language. Inside the game, we need to bring them a new experience. To gain any respect from the gaming community, advertisers must never disrupt, always add.

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