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Phantom: Disrupting Consumer Spectacle Through Interactive Gaming

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Abstract

Interactive digital games can serve as effective tools for fostering critical awareness of consumer culture and encouraging reflection on consumption habits. This is particularly relevant for younger audiences who are heavily exposed to brand messaging and digital marketing in their daily lives. This project was prompted by concern about community fragmentation, and the role of corporate branding in shaping spatial environments and social relationships. The research explores how interactive gaming mechanics can be applied to disrupt consumer spectacle and promote critical examination of the relationship between brands, local businesses, and community spaces.

The research leads to the development of *Phantom*, an interactive game that enables players to photograph imagery from local mom-and-pop shops and use the image to replace corporate brand logos in commercial environments. Within this paradigm of critical design, the project creates a digital space that explores consumer culture critique through the lens of détournement and spatial resistance. This game concept aims to foster critical consumer awareness among young demographics and encourage reflection on alternatives to corporate-dominated commercial spaces.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

This project explores how video games can challenge consumer culture. *Phantom* is a game that questions how brands shape our desires and habits. The game sits at the intersection of art, critical theory, and interactive media. It responds to urgent environmental and social problems caused by mass consumption. By placing players in a virtual shopping street, the game creates a space for players to reflect on real-world shopping choices.

The project combines game design with research on consumer behaviour and capitalism. It aims to demonstrate how interactive experiences can alter our perceptions of purchasing. The game serves as both a critique and an alternative vision of consumer culture, inviting players to imagine different relationships with products, brands, and local economies. This exegesis examines the game's development, theoretical foundations, and potential impact on players.

1.2 Personal experience and interest

My experience of living in three cities in different countries has given me an impression of how the cultural background and city layout can be different, but many aspects of contemporary consumer culture are the same. I'm surprised that whenever I walk down the streets of different cities, so many consumer brands are the same, while the style of the streets varies a lot depending on the culture and location.

Brands are designed to serve as a means of self-expression and act as lifestyle indicators, allowing each customer to forge what they are encouraged to believe is a unique social identity. We are constantly surrounded by what I, informed by my research, refer to as the image of spectacle: polished and highly constructed imagery and representations designed to engage and impress viewers. These appear in different forms, such as advertising, entertainment, and marketing, where the image or representation becomes separate from the actual product or experience being consumed. People are now encouraged to believe that what appears within these ideological or discursive frames must therefore be good. We, as consumers, are encouraged not to notice how corporations manipulate our desires through polished imagery. The spectacle of advertising shapes our values and aspirations. Many of us accept these messages without question.

My project explores how we might disrupt this cycle of manufactured desire that is designed to never be satisfied, and think more clearly about what we truly need. This disruption is important because, as established in the context review below, the desire-driven economy

creates significant problems: environmental damage through overconsumption and waste, social fragmentation as local businesses are displaced by corporate dominance, and psychological strain from constant exposure to manipulative advertising. Rather than bringing genuine happiness and satisfaction, this cycle traps people in endless wanting while externalising its harmful costs to society and the environment.

1.3 Research Question

How can interactive digital games disrupt the spectacle of consumer culture and foster critical reflection on how mass consumption shapes individual identity and behaviour?

1.4 Context Review: The Crisis of Consumer Capitalism

1.4.1 The Desire-Driven Era

Capitalism has evolved from simply putting prices on basic goods to skillfully manufacturing desire itself (Varoufakis, 2023, p. 32). Large firms and brands have mastered the art of commodifying not only physical goods but also experiences, emotions, and even time itself. Through sophisticated advertising and branding strategies, these companies connect products with deeper human concerns: status, identity, and personal fulfilment.

The result is a profound shift in consumer behaviour. We no longer purchase items primarily for their functionality but for the emotional value and social meaning they promise to deliver. While aesthetics and trends have always influenced consumption patterns, what distinguishes contemporary consumer culture is how desires are systematically manufactured and designed to remain perpetually unsatisfied.

Throughout history, consumer products have been designed to satisfy basic natural needs, but the emerging issues which I identify below lie with the proliferation of 'add-ons' which are attached to products - brand identities, lifestyle promises, and emotional associations created through advertising. As Todd, (2016, p. 23) observes, these desires "are created by language and symbols" and "have been twisted away from our basic animal instincts by the way society and advertising talk about products." Modern commodities may fulfill their practical functions, but they always come with additional promises that are deliberately designed through sophisticated marketing to never provide lasting fulfillment. This creates an endless cycle of wanting for next product, brand, or upgrade - a systematic manufacturing of unsatisfied desires focused on the production of want rather than the production of needs, which is what this project seeks to disrupt.

Many companies have faced the problem of how to continue selling their products after the saturation of mass production. Ewen (2001) explains that advertising shifted from simply providing product information to actively creating consumer desire. Advertising helped turn people from citizens into consumers by creating "personal needs which would dependently fluctuate with the expanding marketplace" (Ewen, 1976/2001, Chapter 2, para. 13).

This manufactured desire is brilliantly captured in the TV show *Mad Men* (2007 - 2015), when advertising executive Don Draper explains,

"Advertising is based on one thing: happiness. And you know what happiness is? Happiness is the smell of a new car. It's freedom from fear. It's a billboard on the side of the road that screams reassurance that whatever you're doing is okay" (Weiner & Abraham, 2007).

This insight reveals a fundamental shift in how we relate to products. It demonstrates how advertising professionals deliberately craft messages that target people's aspirations and insecurities rather than the actual function of products. Draper's explanation shows that advertising isn't accidentally creating these emotional attachments, instead, it is the core strategy. The industry knows it's selling fantasy and emotional satisfaction, not just products.

In contemporary consumer culture, commodities have been transformed beyond their practical functions to become mediators for storing our memories, emotions, and identities. We don't simply buy objects; we purchase the feelings, experiences, and social meanings attached to them. When consumers collect memories from special events, wear brand-name clothing, or upgrade to the latest smartphone, they're not just acquiring physical items but emotional containers that promise to preserve and communicate their personal narratives, aspirations, and social status.

This desire-driven economic model has reshaped society, transforming individuals from ordinary people with natural needs into consumers with manufactured desires that can never be fully satisfied.

1.4.2 The Environmental Consequences

This accelerated growth of capitalism has led to mass production and overconsumption, causing serious environmental problems. On one hand are the resource depletion problems. Mass production requires endless extractions of natural resources. As Jackson (2017, p. 14) asked: "What can prosperity possibly look like in a finite world?". He points out that the Earth's finite resources cannot support the infinite growth that desire-driven capitalism appears to be founded upon. The raw materials required for consumer goods production,

from rare earth minerals in electronics to petroleum for plastics, are being depleted faster than they can be regenerated or replaced. This problem intensifies as people are trapped in the consumption cycle described above, where manufactured desires are never truly fulfilled, creating ever-increasing demand for limited resources.

On the other hand, mass consumption also causes a significant waste problem. Products designed for obsolescence create millions of discarded items. According to an investigation from the Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China (2020, Fig. 1), there were 235,602,000 tons of general waste generated in China's major cities in 2019. And while the majority of the waste has been disposed of, the remaining part is still significant, especially in less developed regions with weaker environmental regulations. This poses a direct threat to the local and global ecosystems. As Hawken (2010, p. 34) points out, "Businesses do not need to recognise sustainability to succeed." This shows how corporations operate in opposition to ecosystems, taking resources without concern for future impacts. This growing amount of waste represents the hidden cost of consumer culture, damaging environments and communities while consumers and corporations often pretend not to see the consequences of their disposal habits for their emotional pleasure and personal fulfilment.

The constant creation of consumer desires has expanded markets everywhere. According to Hue and Nguyen (2023, Fig. 2), E-commerce has pushed consumption to record levels, with sales worldwide reaching \$4.280 trillion in 2020, growing by 27.6%. Products that were once hard to get now arrive with just a few clicks. This convenience drives more production and shipping worldwide. The carbon footprint of this global shopping system is huge. Products travel thousands of miles before reaching consumers, while manufacturing releases greenhouse gases. As Klein (2014, Chapter 2, para. 19) notes, "Our economic system and our planetary system are now at war", highlighting a conflict between unlimited consumption and environmental limits. These shopping habits lead directly to climate change, threatening communities worldwide. The convenience of online shopping comes with a hidden climate cost most shoppers never see.

shops have been taken over by big national and global brands, making it look just like many other town centres across the country.

Local businesses typically keep money circulating within communities, while chain stores funnel profits elsewhere. According to Civic Economics (2013), when local shops make \$1 million in sales, it adds about \$450,000 to the local economy. In comparison, a big chain store only adds around \$170,000. Local restaurants give back about \$650,000 to the community, while chain restaurants return around \$300,000. The shop owner who remembered your preferences, extended credit during hard times, and connected you with other locals disappears. In their place, interchangeable employees follow the corporate rules; this shift reflects what has been described as the "McDonaldization" of society (Ritzer, 2004).

The growth of large corporate retailers creates serious economic imbalances within communities. When these companies dominate local markets, money tends to flow upward into the hands of a few, rather than staying and circulating within the community.

At the same time, this economic shift also changes how people connect with each other. When small, community-based shops disappear, the relationships that once formed through local trade and shared spaces begin to fade. Instead of building identity through personal ties and civic involvement, people increasingly define themselves through what they buy. As Bauman (2007, p.100) points out, consumer culture encourages people to feel dissatisfied with who they are and constantly seek a new version of themselves through shopping. This push to continually reinvent your identity through consumption becomes normalised and expected behaviour, both of the corporation towards the consumer, and of the consumer towards themselves.

Together, growing inequality within and between populations and the push to constantly redefine or change identities through acts of consumption are reshaping how people see themselves and their role in society; less as citizens involved in their communities, and more as consumers whose identities are defined by what they buy. This shift toward identity-through-consumption has informed my decision to use *Phantom* as the means to explore interactive experiences that could encourage alternative forms of identity formation and critical engagement with commercial messaging.

1.4.4 Economic Shifts: from Commodities to Access

Consumer capitalism is shifting away from traditional ownership toward what Yanis Varoufakis (2021) describes as "techno feudalism." In this new system, people no longer buy

and fully own products. Instead, they pay for temporary access to services. For example, music streaming has replaced owning records, software is now rented through subscriptions, and ride-sharing apps have reduced the need to own a car. As Rifkin (2000, Chapter 1, para 1) observed, "ownership is steadily being replaced by access."

This change allows companies to collect detailed information about user behaviour and preferences. Using this data, they can shape consumer desires and create systems that encourage ongoing payments. These subscription models act like new factories of constant demand, where people must keep paying for services they used to buy only once. Major technology companies have gained enormous power through this model. By controlling essential digital platforms, they act like landlords in the online world, charging regular fees and influencing everyday life. This marks a major shift in the economy, moving from a system focused on buying goods to one centred on renting access to basic services.

1.4.5 The Society of Spectacle

In 1967, Guy Debord introduced an idea called "the spectacle." The spectacle is our world of contemporary capitalism, filled with the images that stand between us and any experience of real life. Debord is not only referring to billboards and advertisements. Debord (1967, p. 2) writes, "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relationship between people that is mediated by images." In today's world, we are encouraged to and predominantly do experience life through screens and symbols. We are constantly comparing our lives to curated images of others and using consumption to bridge the gap between our reality and aspirational lifestyles. The spectacle creates a false reality that has become, for many, more real than our actual lives.

Modern brands perfectly show how the spectacle works. Logos and brand images replace our direct experience with products. We don't wear shoes - we wear Nike. We don't drink cola - we drink Coca-Cola. Advertising doesn't just sell products, it sells a way of understanding the world. Brands create stories about identity and status. They turn simple objects into magical symbols. Shopping malls and brand websites become theatres where these symbols perform. Your outfits are no longer just clothes but a statement about who you are.

The spectacle turns active citizens into passive viewers. We consume images instead of creating experiences. We accept brand messages without questioning them. This passive watching extends beyond shopping to our whole social and political life. This passivity serves consumer capitalism perfectly. Passive consumers don't question advertising claims.

They don't challenge the system. They simply watch, desire, and buy - exactly as brands want them to.

1.4.6 Game as a possible role for interruption

This analysis reveals the interconnected challenges of consumer capitalism. The desire-driven economy manufactures desires that can never be fully satisfied, leaving environmental damage, social fragmentation, and psychological strain in its wake. The shift from ownership to access creates new forms of economic dependence, while the society of spectacle replaces authentic experience with passive consumption of images.

These issues demand creative responses that can break through the spectacle's hypnotic effect. Interactive games offer a unique potential as educational platforms to interrupt these patterns. As Bogost (2007, p. 3) argues, games possess "procedural rhetoric" – the ability to make persuasive arguments through their systems and rules, offering experiences that passive media cannot. Unlike television or books, educational games require what Flanagan (2009, p. 6) calls "critical play," where players actively participate in and questioning aspects of human life.

Games can transform players from passive consumers into active questioners by giving them agency within simulated systems. Gee (2003, p. 86) notes that video games actively encourage such situated and embodied thinking and doing, this experiential learning has the potential to raise awareness about consumer capitalism in ways traditional educational approaches cannot. Sicart (2011) suggests that games can function as "ethical objects" that encourage players to question their values and behaviours in relation to both the game's own ethical demands and wider social consideration. As he explains, "From the perspective of the ethical player, this rule is translated into ethical values during the game experience" (Sicart, 2011, p. 108). However, the ethical impact depends on the game's design intent and content; all games may function as ethical objects, but games specifically designed to promote critical reflection about a certain topic can more effectively foster the kind of questioning to imagine alternatives.

2. Literature Review: Games as Critical Intervention

This literature review explores how interactive digital games can function as critical interventions and social awareness tools. The review explores three key areas related to the development of games that challenge consumer culture. Firstly, it examines how games can reshape player behaviour and influence cultural understanding, providing a theoretical basis for the use of games as educational tools. Secondly, it analyses the target demographics and design methods for educational games aimed at consumer consciousness, with a particular focus on the younger generation as the primary audience. Finally, it provides a precedent analysis of existing games that have successfully intervened in social and cultural issues, examining their mechanics, effectiveness, and relevance to the critique of consumer culture. Together, these sections demonstrate the potential of interactive games to disrupt patterns of passive consumption and promote critical reflection on the systems that shape contemporary consumer behaviour.

2.1 Games in Reshaping Player Behaviour

Video games can impact the development of certain human behaviours (Quwaider, 2019). These games help players learn by doing rather than listening. Some games specifically target consumer behaviour and brand awareness. This perspective leads me to believe that digital games can be a powerful tool for influencing player behaviour in meaningful ways.

Digital game experiences can lead to specific behavioural changes. Squire (2011, p. 129) argues that good learning features are a key aspect of good game design, as a game is fundamentally a problem-solving space designed to engage the player. It can be designed with different tasks to challenge consumer culture and can help players think differently about shopping and brand impact. Games make abstract concepts, such as marketing manipulation, more concrete and understandable. This evidence leads me to believe that interactive experiences are more effective than traditional media in raising consumer awareness.

Educational games can influence the way players behave because they give them control. When players actively disrupt or question the virtual brand environment, they understand how marketing affects them. This hands-on experience stimulates player awareness more than reading books about consumer culture. The decision-making aspect is particularly intriguing to me - players must choose how to respond to brand influences, which makes them conscious participants rather than passive recipients.

Games about consumer culture serve a specific purpose beyond general education. They help players recognise how marketing and branding influence their daily choices. By interacting with virtual shopping environments or brand scenarios, players become more aware of subtle persuasion techniques. This awareness often continues after the game ends, influencing how people view real-world advertising and consumption. The interactive experience makes these insights more personal and memorable than simply reading about consumer manipulation.

The interactive nature helps players develop new perspectives. When games allow people actively resist or question consumer spectacle, they often carry this critical awareness into real shopping situations. Kiili (2005, p.22) shows that educational game designers develop game worlds that support reflective thinking in the private world, and the experiential learning through games creates lasting behavioural changes. Players remember lessons learned through personal action more than information received passively.

Games also offer unique emotional engagement. Unlike academic discussions of consumer culture, games can make players feel the frustration of constant advertising or the satisfaction of resistance. These emotional connections make the learning more personal and memorable. This emotional aspect influenced my decision to create an interactive experience rather than traditional educational content.

2.2 Game in Cultural Influence

2.2.1 Games as Cultural Mediators

Games do more than entertain - they reflect and shape cultural values. Most games contain assumptions about how the world works and what matters. Players absorb these take-away messages through repeated game interactions.

Bogost (2007) argues that when we play games, we question the claims, we consider them, incorporate them into our lives, and carry them into our future experience. Furthermore, Bogost adds that games can function as "cultural artefacts" that both mirror society and influence it. Games require active participation in cultural scenarios. Players must engage with the game's value system to succeed. This makes games powerful tools for cultural transmission. They can reinforce existing beliefs or challenge them depending on their design. The interactive nature means players experience cultural ideas rather than just observing them.

2.2.2 Challenging Cultural Norms

Some games deliberately question dominant cultural assumptions by creating spaces where players must engage with alternative value systems. For example, *Papers, Please* (2013) forces players to work as an immigration officer in a dystopian state, making them complicit in bureaucratic oppression while questioning the ethics of border control and state authority. Whereas traditional media engage in cultural critique from the outside, games immerse the player in an alternative system where they must make choices and live with consequences. Gee (2003) explains that games present "figured worlds" that can either reinforce or challenge how players see reality. Players are expected to navigate unfamiliar cultural rules and experience the consequences of different choices firsthand; this embodied experience often creates a stronger impact than passive observation. For instance, in *Papers, Please*, players don't just read about immigration policy - they must decide whether to separate families or break rules to help refugees, making the moral complexity personally felt rather than intellectually understood. This process helps them understand how cultural systems shape behaviour. Games can make visible the usually invisible forces that guide social life.

2.2.3 Building Cultural Awareness

Games specialise in exposing hidden cultural systems that people usually take for granted. Consumer culture surrounds us and shapes our daily choices, often in ways we don't recognise. Even when we believe we're making independent decisions, the options available to us are typically predetermined by consumer culture's logic itself.

Games can concretise these systems and bring them into question. Zielke et al. (2009) observe that video games provide "a 'safe' place where players can acquire culture and play with cultural identities in a virtual environment that realistically imitates real life." Players discover how cultural forces influence their choices by interacting with them directly. This awareness often extends beyond the game into real-world situations. Experiential learning helps people recognise cultural patterns they have previously ignored. Thus, games are mediators for gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural forces that influence our lives, as will be more fully explored below.

2.2.4 Examples of Cultural Impact

Games can significantly influence cultural understanding through immersive experiences. *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science. Fig. 3) demonstrates this by introducing Chinese traditional culture and aesthetics to global audiences. The game's detailed representation of

mythology from *Journey to the West* (1592) creates appreciation for cultural elements that might otherwise remain unfamiliar to many players. The game's cultural impact is evidenced by its massive reach, achieving 2.2 million concurrent players on Steam on its release day and expanding to multiple platforms, including PS5, Windows, and Xbox. Global players have responded positively to the game's Chinese cultural symbols. For example, discussions on Reddit reveal that many western players were introduced to Chinese mythology, and on platforms like YouTube, over 8 million views of discussion videos related to the game indicate that players are interested not only in the gameplay but also in the cultural significance.

Similarly, *Never Alone* (Kisima Injitchuᅇa. Fig. 4) incorporates indigenous knowledge from Alaska Native communities and has deep cultural meaning, demonstrating effective cross-cultural communication by incorporating indigenous knowledge from Alaskan Native communities through collaborative development. *Never Alone* was created in partnership with the Iñupiat people, who provided traditional stories, cultural practices, and community oversight throughout the development process. Unlike conventional platformers that focus solely on overcoming obstacles and defeating enemies, *Never Alone* integrates cultural education as a core gameplay element. Players learn about arctic survival techniques, traditional hunting practices, and environmental stewardship while progressing through levels based on authentic Iñupiat stories. Both games demonstrate that interactive experiences have the potential to foster a deeper understanding of culture.

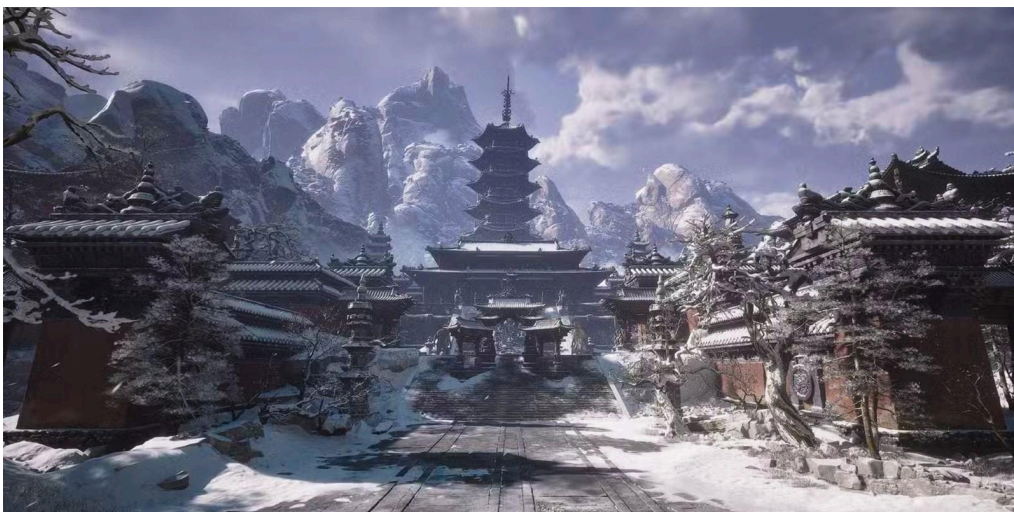


Fig 3: Stills of architecture from *Black Myth: Wukong*.



Fig 4: Stills of the gameplay from Never Alone.

2.2.5 Personal Reflection on Games in Cultural Impact

Making games about consumer culture offers unique advantages over traditional media. When players are actively engaged in a branded environment, the experience becomes personalised and memorable because they are making choices and experiencing direct consequences rather than passively receiving information. For example, when players must navigate through commercial spaces and make decisions about how to respond to marketing messages, they develop an understanding of how consumer pressure operates that simply reading about advertising cannot achieve. The act of making choices within these environments - whether to engage with or resist commercial messaging - transforms abstract concepts about consumer manipulation into concrete, personal experiences.

Games' interactive nature can generate emotional responses that academic texts cannot - frustration at being bombarded with advertisements, satisfaction at resisting marketing messages, or surprise at recognising the impact of a brand. This affective dimension seems particularly important for addressing consumer spectacle, which itself operates on an emotional rather than a rational level. The game also allows players to experiment with other responses to consumer culture. Players can experiment with different ways of navigating the commercial space, exploring strategies of resistance without realistic consequences. These qualities lead me to believe that educational games could be an ideal medium for cultural interventions in consumer spaces.

2.3 Educational Games: Target Demographics and Audience Considerations

Educational games about consumer culture would work when targeted at specific demographic groups. Understanding the intended audience helps designers create more effective and engaging experiences. For games addressing consumer awareness, younger generations represent a potentially effective target demographic due to their digital fluency, direct experience with consumer culture, and openness to questioning established systems.

The primary audience for educational games should be younger generations. According to an article by Aircards (2023), with 38% of gamers falling between the ages of 18 to 34, the gaming space is ideal for reaching Gen-Z and young millennial consumers. This demographic possesses several characteristics that make them ideal participants. As digital natives (Prensky, 2001), they grew up with technology and interactive media. They feel comfortable navigating game interfaces and understand digital communication naturally.

Younger generations also function as heavy consumers in today's digital economy. Research shows that millennials and Generation Z (age 13 to 44) demonstrate the highest levels of brand engagement on social media platforms, particularly with fashion brands on networks like Instagram (Bolton et al., 2013; Casalo et al., 2018; Nyadzayo et al., 2020). They drive much of consumer spending and actively engage with brands across multiple platforms. This direct experience with consumer culture makes game content relevant to their lives. They recognise the scenarios and brand influences presented in games because they encounter them daily.

This demographic mix of digital fluency, consumer experience, and social awareness creates ideal conditions for meaningful participation in consumer culture games. They have the technical skills and personal relevance needed for effective learning through interactive media.

2.4 Precedent Analysis: Consumption Awareness Games

2.4.1 *Phone Story* (2011)

Phone Story (Fig. 5), developed by Molleindustria, serves as a direct precedent for games that critique consumer culture through interactive mechanics. This mobile game forces players to participate in the hidden supply chain behind smartphone production, revealing the uncomfortable realities typically concealed from consumers.

The game includes four mini-games that simulate different stages of smartphone production. Players must manage child labourers extracting coltan in African mines, prevent factory workers from committing suicide by installing safety nets, manipulate consumers through advertising psychology, and handle electronic waste disposal. Each mini-game uses simple touch controls but creates ethical discomfort by requiring players to perform morally questionable actions to progress.

Phone Story makes abstract global systems tangible and personal. By forcing players to actively participate in exploitation rather than passively observing it, the game creates cognitive dissonance that traditional media cannot achieve. The controversy surrounding its removal from app stores amplified its message (Gross, 2011), generating even wider discussion about the ethics of consumer electronics production.

This demonstrates how games can reveal the hidden costs of consumer culture. *Phone Story* transforms players from passive consumers into active participants in the system they usually ignore. This approach directly parallels the goal of making invisible consumer mechanisms visible through interactive experience, providing a strong model for consumer culture intervention through gaming.

Phone Story's approach of forcing players to actively participate in normally hidden systems of production and consumption influenced my decision to make brand manipulation visible and interactive. Rather than simply telling players about consumer spectacle, I wanted them to experience and engage with it directly, like how *Phone Story* makes players complicit in smartphone production chains.



Fig 5: Stills of the gameplay from *Phone Story*.

2.4.2 *Dead Rising* (2006)

Dead Rising (Fig. 6) by Capcom uses a zombie outbreak in a shopping mall to create a powerful critique of consumer culture. The game transforms the classic consumer space into a survival horror setting, using both gameplay mechanics and environmental design to comment on consumption behaviours.

The game places players in Willamette Parkview Mall, where they must survive a zombie outbreak using any available items as weapons. Players can grab everything from shopping carts and mannequins to lawnmowers and cash registers. The photography mechanic allows players to document the chaos, adding a media commentary layer. The time pressure mechanic creates urgency similar to limited-time sales promotions or Black Friday events, forcing players to make quick decisions about resource use without careful consideration.

This time mechanic proved particularly interesting for my project, as it mirrors how consumer culture operates - bombarding people with choices and creating artificial urgency that prevents critical reflection. I considered incorporating similar time pressure mechanics in *Phantom* to simulate the overwhelming pace of brand exposure that consumers experience daily, where there's little time to critically examine advertising messages before being pushed toward the next purchase decision.

The visual environment of the shopping centre reinforces the critique of consumer culture through its setting and atmosphere. Storefronts, brand logos and commercial billboards are kept intact and lit up while chaos reigns around them. The decorative elements typical of shopping centres, like promotional banners, sales signs and corporate advertising displays, stand in stark contrast to the horror of what is happening. Food courts, clothing shops and electronics shops maintain their commercial character while becoming a battleground.

Dead Rising succeeds by setting the player against consumer culture itself. The zombies represent mindless shoppers wandering around the shop, attracted to sound and movement as much as consumers are attracted to promotions. The absurdity of using consumer goods as weapons highlights how these objects dominate our lives.

The game demonstrates how consumer spaces can become sites of resistance and critique. By transforming the mall from a place of passive consumption into an active survival space, *Dead Rising* shows how interactive experiences can reframe our relationship with commercial environments. This environmental setting also inspired my focus on shopping

environments as game settings. The way *Dead Rising* recontextualises the mall influenced my approach to making players view commercial spaces with fresh, critical eyes through camera mechanics and logo replacement.



Fig. 6: Stills of the gameplay video from *Dead Rising*.

2.4.3 *Moncage* (2021)

Moncage (Fig. 7), developed by Optillusion, serves as a visual and mechanical precedent that influenced the aesthetic and observational aspects of *Phantom*. This puzzle game presents players with a cube containing different miniature worlds on each face, requiring careful observation and spatial thinking to solve interconnected puzzles.

Moncage employs a unique perspective-shifting mechanic where players rotate a cube to view different miniature scenes on each face. Players must observe how objects on one face can connect or interact with elements on adjacent faces. The gameplay centres on finding visual connections and spatial relationships between seemingly separate worlds. Success depends on patient observation and the ability to see beyond immediate appearances.

The game features a distinctive, stylised, cartoonish aesthetic with clean lines and muted colours. Each cube face presents a self-contained miniature world with careful attention to atmospheric detail. The visual design emphasises clarity and readability, allowing players to focus on spatial relationships without visual clutter.

Moncage's puzzle-solving approach, where players must locate specific interactive elements within complex visual environments, directly influenced how I designed the logo-finding mechanics in *Phantom*. Just as *Moncage* players scan cube faces to identify objects that can connect across surfaces, *Phantom* players must scan commercial environments to locate stall items and brand logos that can be photographed and replaced.

The clean, stylised aesthetic provided a visual reference for creating environments where brand elements could be clearly identified without visual clutter. *Moncage's* emphasis on methodical observation and discovery informed my decision to make the process of locating and targeting consumer symbols a central gameplay element, encouraging players to actively examine their commercial surroundings rather than passively accepting them.



Fig 7: Stills of the gameplay video from *Moncage*.

3. Design Process and Research Methods

Phantom is an interactive experience that transforms players from passive consumers into active observers of commercial environments. The game places players in the role of a camera character navigating a virtual shopping precinct dominated by corporate brands. Through a simple but powerful mechanic – photo shooting and replacing brand logos with alternative imagery – players engage in what Debord would recognise as détournement.

Détournement, meaning "rerouting" in French, is a concept developed by Guy Debord and the Situationist International movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Holt (2010) defined it as "turning expressions of the capitalist system and its media culture against itself". This practice involves taking existing cultural elements - such as advertisements, slogans, or images - and twisting them to create new, subversive meanings that critique the original system. Rather than creating entirely new content, détournement uses the system's own tools against itself, thus creating a window for criticism. In *Phantom*, players practice digital détournement by using the game's photo shooting mechanics to subvert corporate branding and create new meanings within commercial spaces.

The game visually presents a familiar commercial environment that mirrors real-world shopping spaces, complete with storefronts, advertising displays, and corporate branding. Mechanically, it empowers players to actively disrupt this branded landscape through photography and replacement actions. Conceptually, it serves as a playable critique of consumer spectacle, making visible the usually invisible dominance of corporate imagery in our daily environments.

At its core, *Phantom* serves as an interactive research tool that enables players to experience consumer culture from a critical perspective. Rather than lecturing about brand manipulation or consumer spectacle, the game creates a space where players can experiment with resistance, explore alternative ways of seeing commercial spaces, and reflect on their own relationships with branded environments. The experience aims to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding of consumer critique and embodied personal awareness of how brands shape our spatial and psychological reality.

3.1 Concept Design: Game's critique and mechanics

The conceptual foundation for *Phantom* emerged directly from the theoretical analysis of consumer spectacle and its pervasive influence on contemporary life. As established in the

context review, consumer capitalism has evolved beyond basic needs to manufacturing desires that shape individual identity and behaviour (Bauman, 2007). The game's design responds to this by creating an interactive space where players can critically examine and disrupt these usually invisible systems.

The decision to focus on commercial environments reflects the spatial analysis of how brands dominate public spaces, displace local businesses and homogenise community character. Rather than create an abstract critique of consumer culture, the game situates players in a familiar shopping environment where they can experience how corporate branding shapes spatial reality. This approach aligns with Debord's concept of spectacle as "a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord, 1967), making visible the mediating role of brand imagery in everyday spaces.

The choice of interactive games instead of traditional media emerged from the literature review findings that games can reshape player behaviour through experiential learning (Gee, 2003). Following the precedent set by *Phone Story*, which makes the abstract global systems tangible through the player's participation, *Phantom* transforms passive consumption of branded environments into active, critical engagement. The game's mechanics express what Holt (2002) says, "turning expressions of the capitalist system and its media culture against itself", allowing players to practice digital détournement within commercial spaces.

This conceptual approach targets the younger demographic identified in the audience analysis - digital natives who possess both the technical fluency to engage with interactive media and direct experience with the consumer systems being critiqued. The design intentionally creates cognitive dissonance between familiar commercial environments and the player's newfound system to alter them, fostering the critical reflection necessary for imagining alternatives to current consumer paradigms.

3.1.1 Game Mechanism:

Replacement as a Core

The core mechanic of *Phantom* centres on a photographic replacement system that translates theoretical concepts of détournement into interactive practice. Players control a camera character who first visits the local mom-and-pop shops to photograph items or products from these independent businesses. With this collected imagery, players can

navigate to corporate brand shops where they can replace brand logos with the photographs they have gathered from the local businesses. (Fig. 8, 9)

This mechanic directly operates Debord's concept of *détournement* by enabling players to "reroute" corporate messaging through the substitution of alternative imagery. Rather than creating entirely new content to critique consumer culture, this replacement system uses existing elements from the commercial environment - both corporate branding and local businesses' imagery - to create new meanings and relationships. When a player replaces a multinational corporation's logo with a photograph of a local business item, they can practice digital *détournement* that highlights the contrast between global standardisation and community-based commerce.

This process of collection and replacement embodies the theoretical tension between corporate dominance and local resistance identified in the context analysis. The initial photography phase in mom-and-pop shops allows players to document and value local business culture that consumer culture normally marginalises. Then the subsequent replacement action transforms this documentation into active resistance, making visible the possibilities of alternative economic relationships.

The mechanic responds to the literature review findings that games can create "situated learning" experiences where players learn through meaningful action rather than passive observation (Gee, 2003). By requiring players to actively seek out local alternatives and manually replace corporate imagery, the game transforms abstract critiques of brand dominance into embodied personal actions. The replacement mechanism thus serves as both a practical tool for environmental modification and a metaphor for broader topics of possibilities of consumer resistance and supporting local communities.

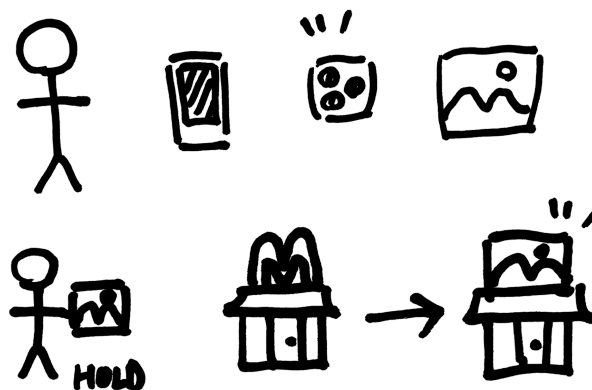


Fig. 8: Illustration of explaining the game's mechanics of replacement.

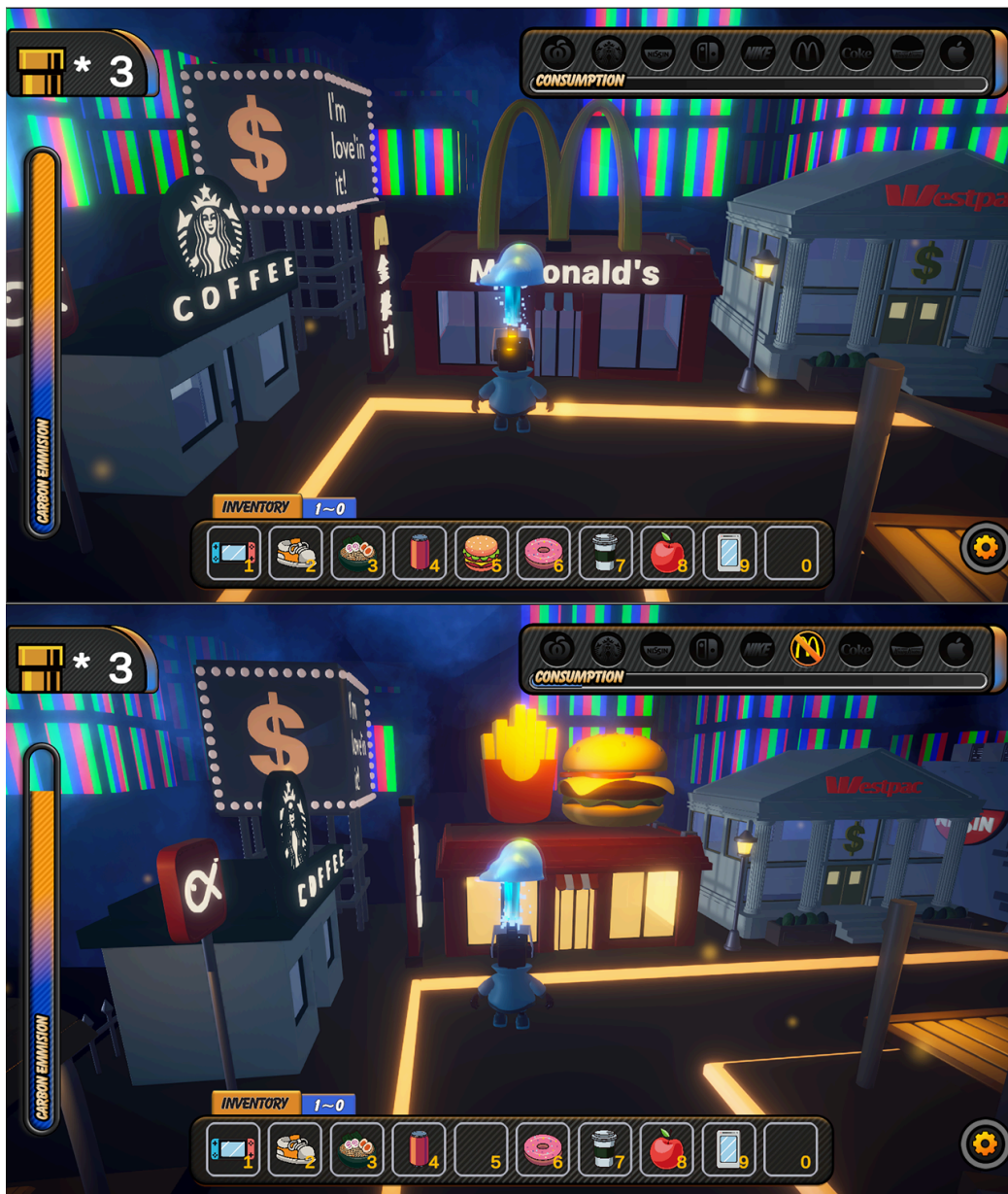


Fig. 9: Replacing the brand logo with imagery photographed at the mom & pop shops.

Cloud Capital

The replacement mechanic is further complicated by a cloud service system that is designed to critique contemporary data capitalism. A physical cloud container exists above the character within the game environment as a metaphor for personal data collection. As gameplay processes, this cloud will gradually fill with the player's behavioural data, representing how digital platforms continuously track user actions. (Fig. 10) When the cloud reached its capacity threshold, the game is paused and requires the player to pay for a subscription to continue the cloud service using tokens collected through the gameplay.

This mechanic directly references Varoufakis’s concept of “cloud capital” and the shift from ownership to access-based economic models, analysed in the context review (Varoufakis, 2021). The cloud system makes visible the usually hidden processes of surveillance capitalism, where platforms extract value from user behaviour rather than direct product sales. Like the time pressure mechanic in *Dead Rising*, which mirrors consumer urgency tactics, the cloud subscription system creates artificial dependency that reflects real-world platform capitalism dynamics.

The physical representation of the cloud as a fillable container clarifies the abstract nature of data collection, making tangible how digital services commodify user behaviour. This mechanic forces players to confront the hidden costs of “free” digital services while experiencing how contemporary capitalism operates through behavioural data extraction, while also demonstrating how we can become ‘frozen’ if locked out of our cloud services. When players successfully replace all brand logos and transform the environment, the cloud disappears and reveals the message:” Brands sell dreams, we buy identities. The more we consume, the less we connect.” (Fig. 11) This takeaway message clarifies the game’s critique of consumer culture’s impact on human relationships and authentic community connection.

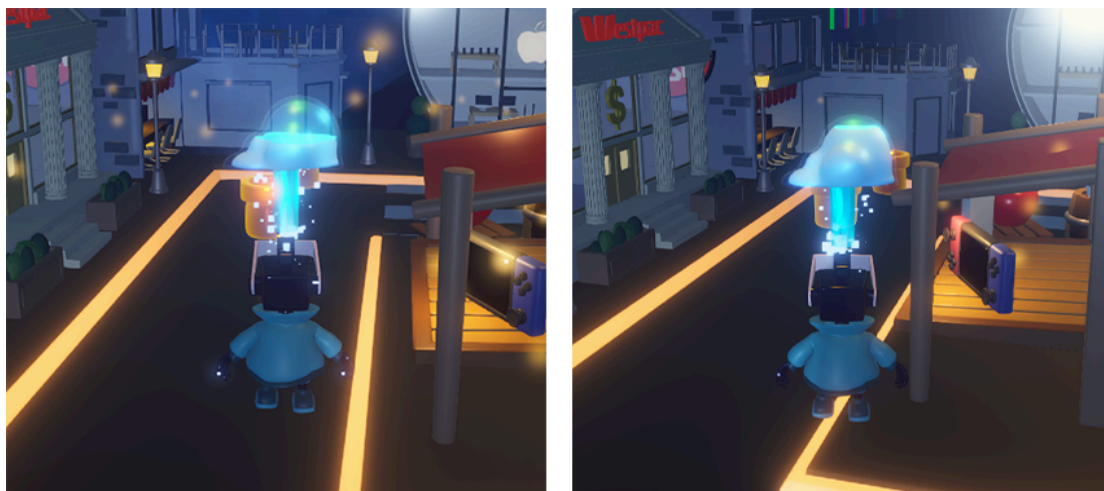


Fig. 10: The cloud service will continually fill until it reaches its threshold.

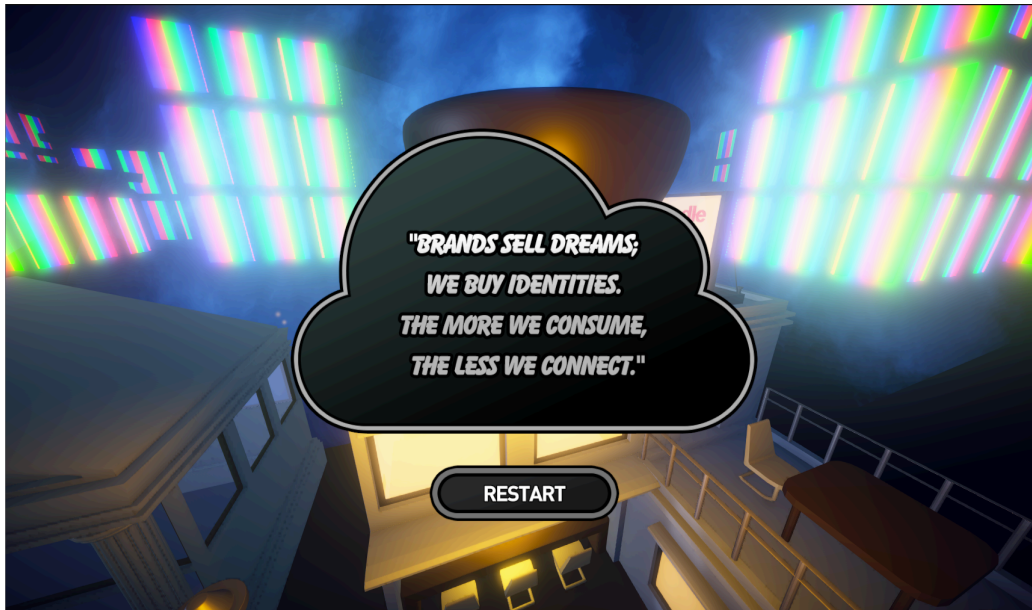


Fig. 11: When the game ends, the cloud will fly away, drain the “data” inside, and show the take-away message.

3.2 Level Design: ‘Mom and Pop’ Shops and Corporate Businesses

The spatial design of *Phantom* directly responds to the analysis of community fragmentation and corporate dominance established in the context review. The game environment is structured as a deliberate contrast between corporate brand dominance and local business resilience, creating a spatial narrative that embodies the theoretical tensions identified in the research.

The “mom-and-pop shops” refer to small, family-owned businesses typically operated by a couple or family members. This phrase was chosen for the game design to emphasize the intimate, personal scale of these businesses in contrast to corporate chains. This phrase, which has its origins in the United States, is deliberately chosen because it suggests nostalgia in relation to consuming objects. The phrase also hints at the idea of a simpler time, similarly suggested by the rose-tinted glasses, and points towards the golden age of advertising represented by such media texts as *Mad Men*, and others. While *Phantom* does not suggest that a ‘golden age’ of objects was superior, the game does seek to reproduce the direct experience of objects without the ‘add-ons’ of contemporary capitalism.

The overall spatial arrangement places mom-and-pop shops at the centre, surrounded by corporate brand stores that form an imposing outer ring (Fig. 12) reflects the real-world

displacement patterns, where local businesses become marginalised by corporate expansion. However here in *Phantom*, the spatial design positions them as central pillars in this commercial environment, suggesting their continued important role in the community.

The atmospheric design uses material contrast to enhance this spatial hierarchy and create emotional resonance with the theoretical critique. The outer layer of corporate brand shops is depicted as a “concrete forest”, which is cold, standardised and reflects the environmental homogenization discussed earlier (Fig. 12). This aesthetic draws on the architectural critique of corporate retail environments that prioritise efficiency and brand awareness over community character.

In contrast, the inner layer with mom-and-pop shops utilised warm wooden materials and cosy atmospherics that evoke traditional craft and local identity. This choice of materials references the community functions historically provided by local businesses, which, as identified in the context review, served as meaningful spaces for social interaction before being replaced by corporate businesses (Fig. 12). This design emphasises the interpersonal relationships and community connections that characterise local businesses, in contrast to the corporate retail environment.

This spatial conflict is designed to make players visually experience the theoretical tension between corporate standardisation and community authenticity, encouraging them to actively disrupt the brand dominance through the replacement mechanics while experiencing the emotional appeal of the business environment.

In addition. The audio design reinforces the spatial critique through distinctive sound effects termed the 'last sigh' of branded shops, distinctive sound effects will play when Mr.Camera successfully replaces corporate logos. Each sound references the brand's core product: McDonald's triggers a cow's moo, Apple produces the Mac startup chime, and Starbucks emits coffee grinding sounds. These playful audio elements provide clear replacement feedback while critiquing what corporate symbols actually represent beneath their polished imagery.



Fig. 12: Top left: Corporate Brand stores. Top right: Mom-and-Pop shops.
Bottom: spatial arrangement of corporate brands and local businesses.

3.3 Character Design

The player avatar in *Phantom* is embodied as “Mr.Camera,” a character whose design serves as both a functional game element and a critical commentary on contemporary media consumption (Fig. 13). The character is conceptualised as a camera wearing 3D glasses, a visual metaphor that addresses how people increasingly experience the world through screens and lenses rather than direct observation.

The 3D glasses element operates on multiple levels of meaning. While 3D glasses typically mean enhanced visual experience, they also reference the concept of “rose-tinted glasses”, which is a perspective that overlays optimistic or positive interpretations of the world and one’s experiences of the past, often ignoring negative aspects. In the context of consumer culture, this suggests how technological mediation can filter reality in ways that obscure critical understanding of commercial manipulation. The glasses symbolise how screens and

digital interfaces can limit authentic perception while creating a seemingly enhanced experience.

The camera-body design draws from Marshall McLuhan's observation that "in this electric age we see ourselves being translated more and more into the form of information, moving toward the technological extension of consciousness" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 63). Mr.Camera embodies this technological extension, representing how digital photography and screen-based interaction have become primary modes of engaging with commercial environments. However, the character functions as an ironic commentary on this condition, while technology typically serves consumer culture by facilitating passive consumption and surveillance, Mr.Camera inverts this relationship by using the same technological tools to actively disrupt and critique the branded environment.

By making the camera itself the protagonist, the game recognises that mediated vision has become the dominant way people navigate consumer spaces. The character therefore seeks to create an intentional ambiguity about whether technology enables or constrains critical vision, reflecting the complex relationship between digital tools and authentic experience that underlines the game's critique of consumer spectacle.

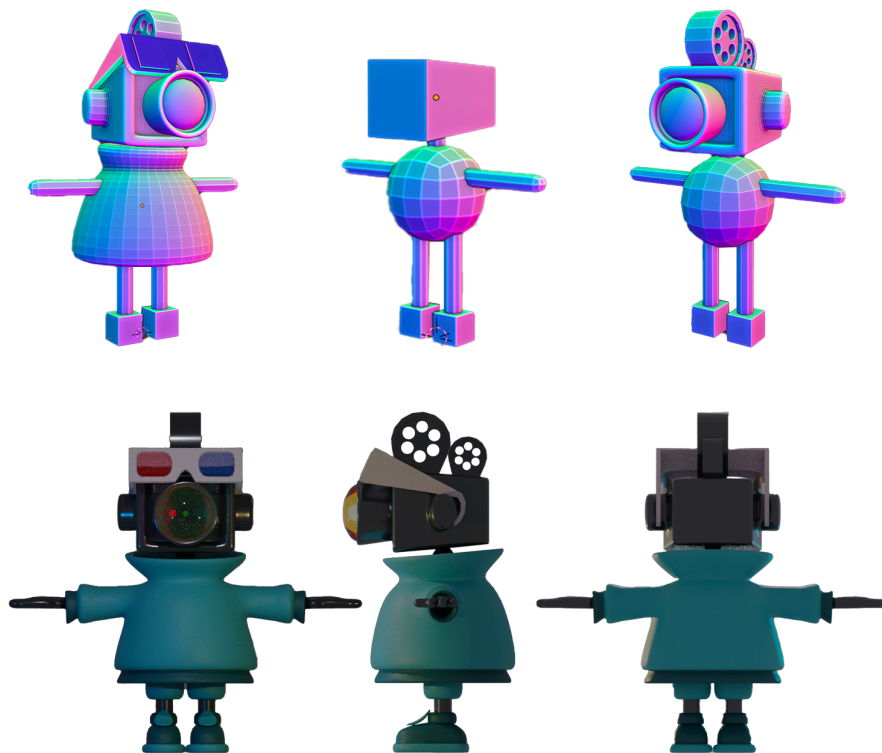


Fig. 13: Modelling process of the game's protagonist, Mr.Camera.

3.4 User Interface Design

The user interface design in *Phantom* integrates multiple functional panels that support both gameplay mechanics and the theoretical critique established in the research. Each interface element serves dual purposes: facilitating player interaction while reinforcing the game's commentary on consumer culture and environmental impact.

Inventory Panel

Inventory panel stores imagery collected from mom-and-pop shops, displaying these photographs as available resources for the replacement mechanic (Fig. 14). When players approach corporate brand shops in the outer layer, corresponding inventory items blink to remind players which numpad keys (1-0) to press for replacement. This visual cueing system emphasises the central mechanism of substituting corporate imagery with local alternatives, making the *détournement* process intuitive and accessible.

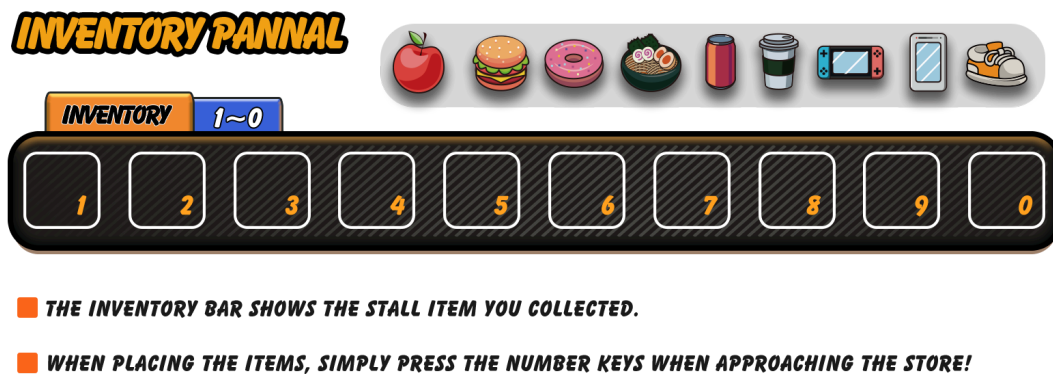


Fig. 14: Inventory Panel.

Tube Panel

Tube panel tracks golden tubes collected throughout the street environment, which players need for draining liquid from the cloud capital system (Fig. 15). This mechanic connects to the critique of access-based capitalism, which requires players to actively gather resources to maintain their agency within the subscription-dependent system.



Fig. 15: Tube Panel.

Payment Panel

The payment panel will show when the cloud above the character reaches its threshold, demanding subscription payment to continue the cloud service (game). This interface embodies Varoufakis's "technofeudalism" concept, interrupting gameplay with the economic realities of platform capitalism and making visible the hidden costs of digital dependency.

Consumption Bar

This panel measures progress by tracking replaced brand logos, providing clear feedback on the player's disruption of corporate dominance (Fig. 16). As players advance through the replacement process, this bar visualises their success in transforming the commercial environment from corporate-dominance to community-oriented.



Fig. 16: Consumption Bar.

Carbon Emission Bar

The carbon emission bar declines as players replace brand logos, connecting the replacement actions to environmental benefits. This interface element references the environmental consequences of consumer capitalism discussed earlier.

Tutorial Panel

This tutorial panel provides essential gameplay controls and hints, ensuring accessibility for all players (Fig. 17). The panel concludes with an illustration of keyboard input for this game and another abstract illustration that visualises the game's narrative, helping players understand both the technical mechanics and the conceptual framework underlying their actions within the consumer environment.

TUTORIAL PANNEL

■ PLAYER INPUTS AND TUTORIAL STORYBOARD!

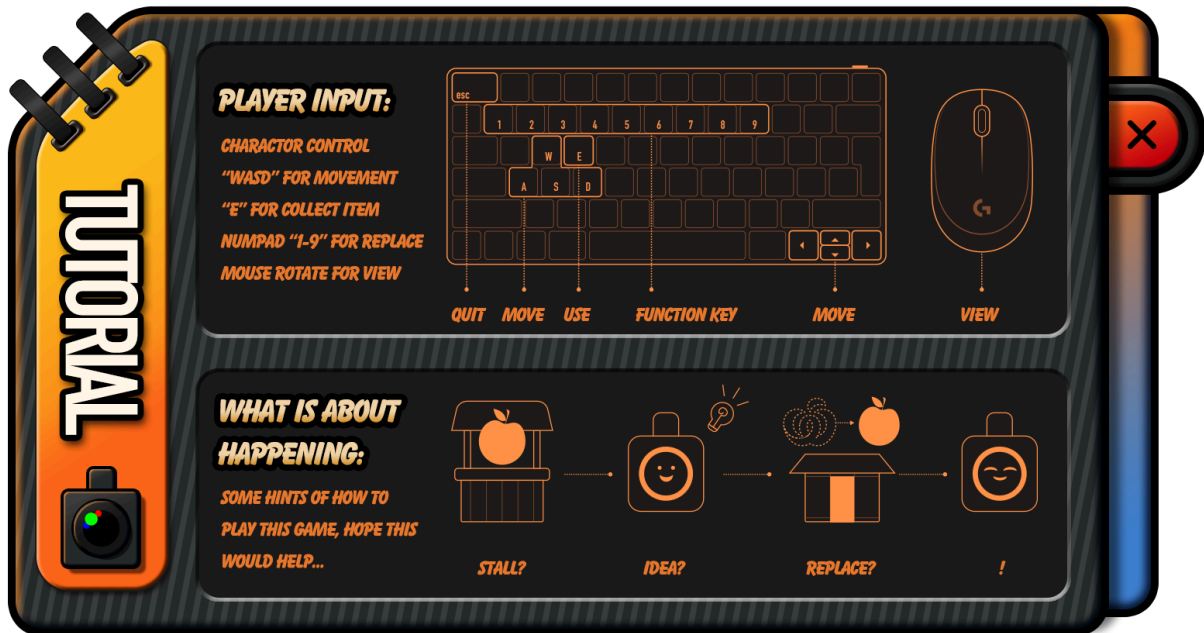


Fig. 17: Tutorial Panel.

3.5 User Testing

User testing serves as the primary research method for measuring *Phantom's* effectiveness in fostering critical reflection on consumer culture. The testing methodology employs two questionnaires designed to measure shifts in player attitudes toward corporate brands, local businesses, and consumption habits. This approach aligns with the research question's focus on whether interactive digital games can disrupt consumer spectacle and encourage critical reflection.

The user testing protocol consists of three phases: pre-game questionnaire, gameplay experience, and post-game questionnaire. The pre-game survey establishes baseline attitudes toward corporate brands, brand consciousness levels, shopping preferences, and purchasing decision factors. Participants then engage with *Phantom* for a complete gameplay session, experiencing the logo replacement mechanics and cloud subscription system. The post-game questionnaire measures changes in perception and self-reported consciousness about consumption habits.

Pre-Game Questionnaire (31 responses)

This initial survey reveals a participant group with mixed relationships to corporate brands. (Fig. 18) Most participants (32.3%) try to balance between corporate and local brands, while 25.8% passively consume corporate brands without much thought. Notably, only 9.7% actively avoid corporate brands, suggesting limited pre-existing resistance to corporate dominance.



Fig. 18: Answers about participants' relationship to corporate brand.

Regarding brand consciousness, (Fig. 19) 54.8% report being moderately conscious about corporate brand influence when purchasing, while 16.1% are slightly conscious and another 16.1% are very conscious. These findings indicate that participants have some awareness about brand influence which indicates potentials for developing further resistance.

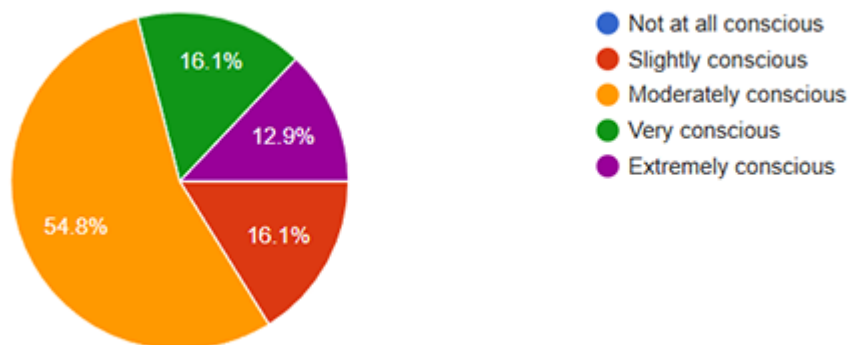


Fig. 19: Answers regarding participants' brand consciousness.

The preference data shows a slight corporate lean, with 51% somewhat preferring corporate chains versus 32.3% showing no preference. Only 9.7% strongly prefer locally-owned businesses. Product quality emerged as the dominant purchasing factor with 61.3%,

followed by price with 12.9%, suggesting practical concerns often overrides brand considerations. (Fig. 20)

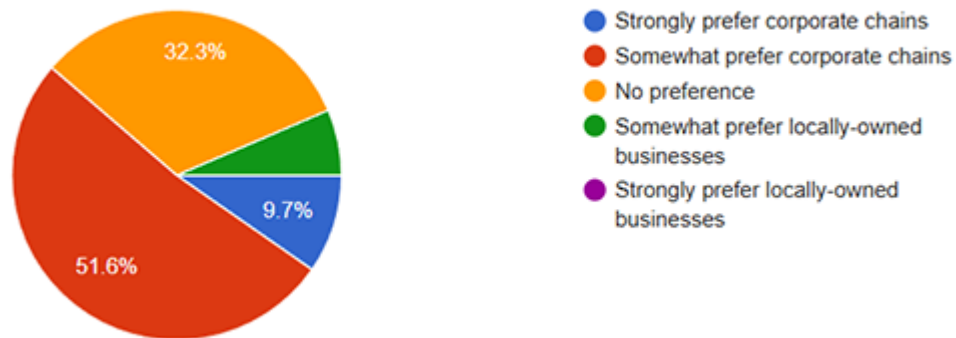


Fig. 20: Answers about participants' preference.

Post-Game Questionnaire (25 responses)

The post-game results showed some meaningful shifts in participant attitudes (Fig. 21). Most notably, 64% of participants reported that the game made them reflect on their consumption habits, suggesting the interactive experience prompted consideration of previously unexamined behaviors.



Fig. 21: Answers about participants' attitude shifts.

The data indicated potential changes in how participants view corporate brands, with some showing increased awareness of the contrast between corporate chains and local businesses. The spatial design contrasting mom-and-pop shops with corporate environments appeared to make visible different economic relationships that participants might not have previously considered.

Regarding future purchasing behavior, participants showed some increased openness to considering local alternatives, with 52% participants reported that they are likely to consider alternatives in future purchase (Fig. 22). The game experience seemed to make visible choices that were previously unconsidered rather than dramatically altering established preferences. The emotional responses during gameplay, particularly satisfaction when replacing logos and frustration with subscription interruptions, suggest the mechanics created personal engagement with the critique.

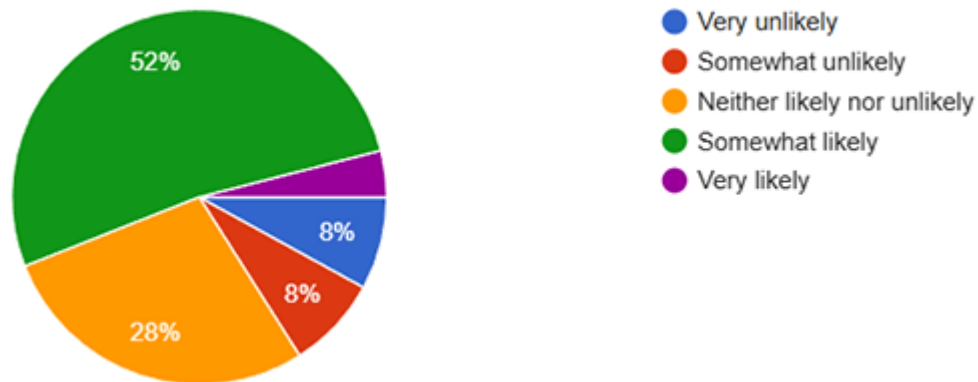


Fig. 22: Answers about participants' future purchasing behaviour.

Overall, the results indicate that *Phantom* has the potential to create space for critical reflection on consumer choices, making alternatives seem possible rather than definitively changing behaviors or attitudes. The game appears to achieve its modest goal of helping players recognize that choices exist within consumer culture.

3.6 Possibilities of Other Levels

The current version of *Phantom* represents the foundation for expanded gameplay that could possibly address different aspects of consumer culture critique identified in the research. There are two additional levels have been considered and conceptualized to explore alternative forms of resistance and environmental transformation, each responding to specific theoretical concerns raised in the context and literature review.

Level of Active Resistance

This level transforms the gameplay from replacement to direct engagement with corporate branding. Mr.Camera become actively pursued by brand logos throughout the game environment, requiring players to escape while using the camera flash to make logos vanish.

However, this direct action carries consequences that reflect real-world complexity. Destroying a bank logo will eliminate golden tubes from the streets, removing players' ability to pay for cloud services. Vanishing McDonald's or grocery shop logos slows player movement, suggesting the practical dependencies that exist within consumer systems.

This mechanic responds to the literature review's discussion of games as ethical objects by demonstrating that resistance actions have complex outcomes rather than simple victories. The level avoids presenting corporate brands as entirely negative while acknowledging the legitimate need for certain services or products. Player's experience of fighting consumer culture involves consequences, reflecting the relationship between necessary services and excessive branding identified in the theoretical analysis.

Level of Environmental Diversity

This level focuses on spatial transformation in a commercial environment. Mr. Camera photographs different architectural styles and can place buildings anywhere within the scene, with the environment changing dynamically based on these layout decisions. Different building arrangements lead to varied endings. For example, grouping local businesses in the center while positioning corporate shops at the edges might lead to a community-focused ending, whereas spreading local shops among dominant corporate chains could result in the gradual decline of the local shops in the face of corporate opposition. The game's conclusion would reflect the spatial arrangements players create - demonstrating how different commercial layouts can either strengthen community bonds or accelerate corporate dominance.

This level operationalizes the spatial research findings about how commercial environments shape community interaction. By giving players control over environmental design, the game explores how diversity in commercial spaces might create alternative relationships with consumption. Rather than simply removing corporate presence, this level investigates how architectural variety and spatial arrangements could foster different forms of economic and social engagement.

Both expanded levels maintain the project's ethical approach of offering possibilities rather than prescribing solutions. They demonstrate that players have agency to resist, question, or transform consumer environment while acknowledging the complexity of these actions. The goal remains returning products to their functional purposes without the manufactured

“add-ons” that drive endless consumption, whether through direct resistance or redesign commercial environment. These levels translate game ethics into social ethics by showing that meaningful change requires understanding consequences and exploring alternatives rather than simply reject the existing systems.

4. Conclusion

This exegesis has examined how interactive digital games can function as tools for critical intervention in consumer culture through the development and analysis of *Phantom*. The research has demonstrated that games can create space for critical reflection on consumer choices by making visible the usually invisible mechanisms of consumer spectacle. The user testing results showed that 64% of participants reported increased consciousness about their consumption habits, suggesting that interactive experiences could potentially help players recognize alternatives that were previously unconsidered.

4.1 Self-Critique

4.1.1 Potential Limitations

The user testing involved a relatively small sample size of 31 pre-game and 25 post-game respondents, which limits statistical confidence in the results. Additionally, the most significant gap in this study is the lack of data to understand whether increased consumer awareness translates into sustained behavioural change. While participants reported raised awareness immediately after gameplay, but the study provides no evidence of long-term impact on actual purchasing decisions or maintained critical perspective when encountering real-world branded environments.

From the technical perspective, the game faces several development constraints that limits its current scope and functionality. Programming limitations restricted the complexity of the game mechanics, potentially reducing the aesthetic style or the impact of these critical design elements. Further more, the time constraints also affected the research scope, with two additional levels remaining in conceptual phase rather than fully developed and tested. These two levels have the potentials for providing crucial data about different forms of player engagement with consumer critique. The current single-level design therefore represent only a fraction of the game’s potential effectiveness as a tool for consumer awareness and critical reflection.

4.1.2 Next steps and Emerging Questions

The most immediate next step involves developing and testing the two conceptual gameplay levels which remains unimplemented. The active resistance level, where players directly confront logos while experiencing consequences for their actions, could provide crucial data about how different forms of engagement affect consumer awareness. Similarly, the environment diversity level, allowing players to redesign commercial spaces through architectural placement, would investigate whether spacial control enhance critical reflection about consumer environments.

The research also raises questions about applicability of differing game mechanics to other forms of spectacle beyond consumer culture. Could interactive replacement or environmental modification address other system, such as social media influence that shape perception through image saturation? This suggests potential for developing a broader framework of interactive critique that extends beyond commercial branding to address various forms of contemporary spectacle that mediate social relationships through visual manipulation.

Finally, a critical question emerges about long-term impact: does the enhanced consciousness reported immediately after gameplay persist when player encounter real-world branded environments weeks or months later? Further studies could track whether interactive critique creates lasting behavioural change or temporary awareness that fades within familiar consumption contexts.

5. Appendix

5.1 User Testing Questionnaires and Answers

Pre-Game Questions

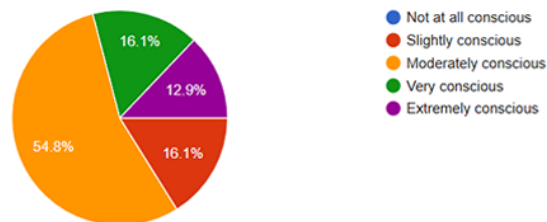
How would you describe your relationship with corporate brands in your daily life? [复制图表](#)

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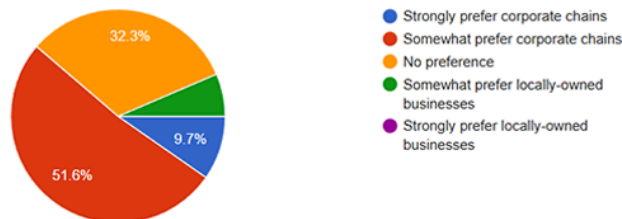
How conscious are you of brand influence when making purchasing decisions? [复制图表](#)

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Which do you typically prefer? [复制图表](#)

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What factor MOST influences your purchasing decisions? [复制图表](#)

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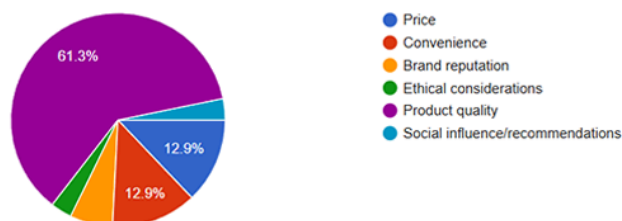


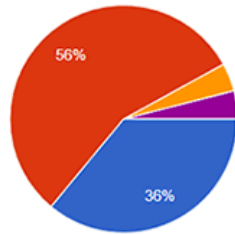
Fig. 23: Screenshots of Pre-Game responses .

Post-Game Questions

Which best describes your thoughts while replacing corporate brands in the game?

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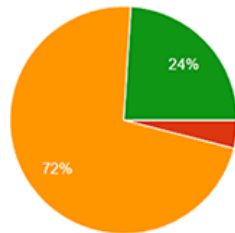


- I felt satisfaction/enjoyment
- I felt conflicted/unsure
- I felt indifferent
- I felt uncomfortable
- I was focused only on completing the task

Did playing the game make you reflect on your own consumption habits?

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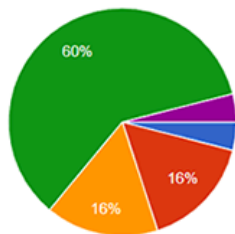


- Not at all
- Very little
- Somewhat
- Considerably
- Significantly

How has your perception of corporate brands changed after playing?

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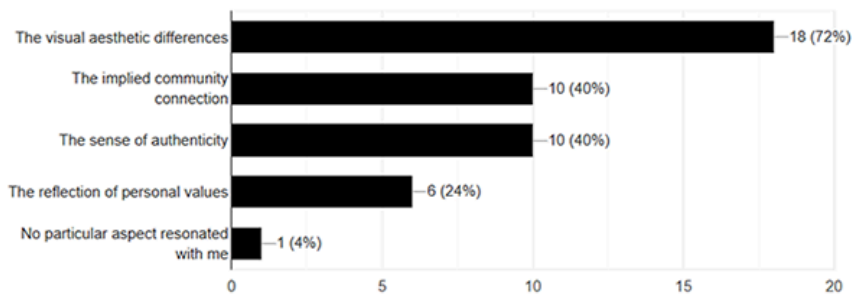


- More favorable toward corporate brands
- Slightly more favorable
- No change
- Slightly more critical
- Much more critical of corporate brands

What aspect of the mom-and-pop shop versus corporate brands resonated most with you?

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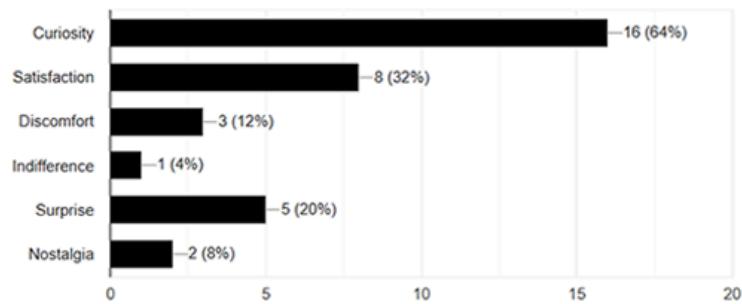
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What emotional response did you have when seeing familiar brands being replaced?

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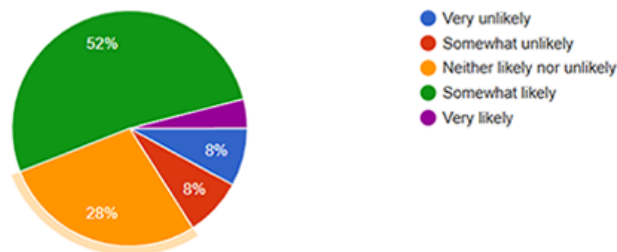
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How likely are you to consider alternatives to corporate brands in your future purchases?

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What aspect of the game experience stood out to you the most?

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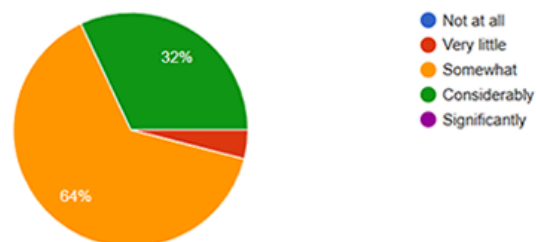
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Did the game inspire you to think differently about consumption?

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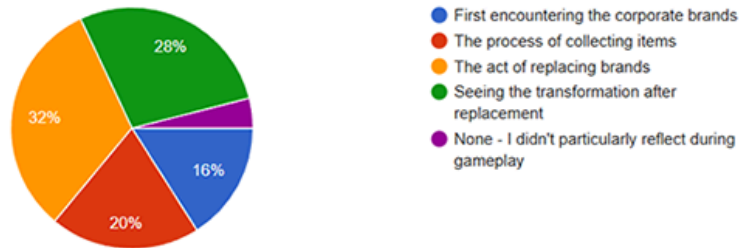
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Which moment during gameplay made you pause and reflect the most?

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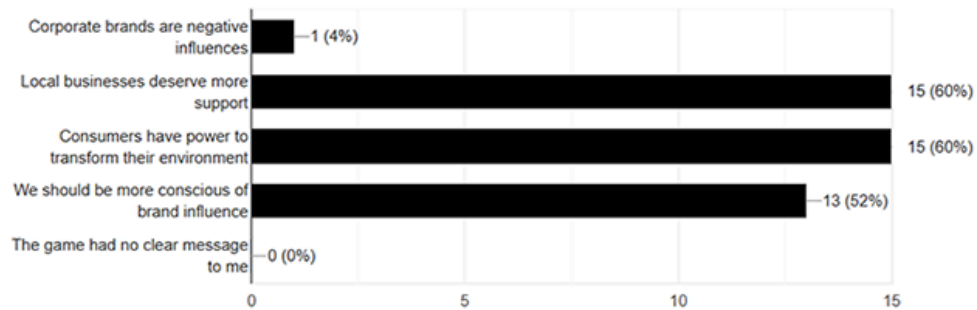
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What do you think was the main message of this experience?

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In your own words, please describe how the experience of replacing corporate brands in the game made you feel. Were there any thoughts, emotions, or realizations that stood out to you?

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When the brands were replaced I realized the power of the corporate brands and the costumers sometimes too obsessed with their products because of their commercial ads and ignored the local brands which had limited funds to advertise.

Supporting local businesses is meaningful

The marketing plans of different brands have a great influence on the consumption concepts of the general public, resulting in the brand added value far exceeding the original value of the product. Only if more and more products of the same quality appear will the market be fair.

This whole experience made me realise that local businesses are also an option to choose from, not just the corporate brands, and that maybe I should consider the option of supporting local businesses more when purchasing products.

local brands deserves more recognition and support.

does feel been used to popular brands, made me wanting to reconsider to break this chain of thoughts

Fig. 24-26: Screenshots of Post-Game responses .

5.2 Technicial Implementation:

This section details the technical process of *Phantom*, focusing on core programming and visual systems. *Phantom* was developed in Unity 3D using C# scripting for all interactive mechanics and player systems. Major game mechanics will presented as visual diagrams to illustrate logical flow and system interconnections. This section also covers Unity's Shader Graph implementation for dynamic visual effects supporting the game's thematic goals.

Replacement System

Phase 1: Collection

The player explores the game world looking for collectible items. When they approach an item (within trigger distance), a message appears prompting them to press 'E'. Upon pressing E, the item disappears from the world and gets added to the player's inventory system.

Phase 2: Inventory Management

Once collected, the item appears as a visual icon in the inventory bar UI. Each slot has a corresponding number (1-9) that the player can use to activate items. The inventory system tracks what items the player has and manages their visual representation.

Phase 3: Positioning and Feedback

The player must walk to specific drop zones in front of the corporate shops. Each drop zone is designed for a particular item type (burger, apple, etc.). When the player enters the correct drop zone for an item they possess, that item's icon in the inventory bar begins to glow, providing clear visual feedback indicate that they're in the right location.

Phase 4: Replacement Action

While standing in the correct drop zone, the player presses the number key corresponding to the glowing inventory slot. This triggers the replacement sequence where the system checks if the item matches the zone's requirements.

Phase 5: World Transformation

If successful, the item is removed from inventory and the world undergoes a visual transformation. Corporate brand objects (logos, signs, etc.) are disabled while local/alternative objects (indoor lights, stall items, etc.) are enabled. This creates the core "replacement" experience where corporate presence is literally replaced with local alternatives.

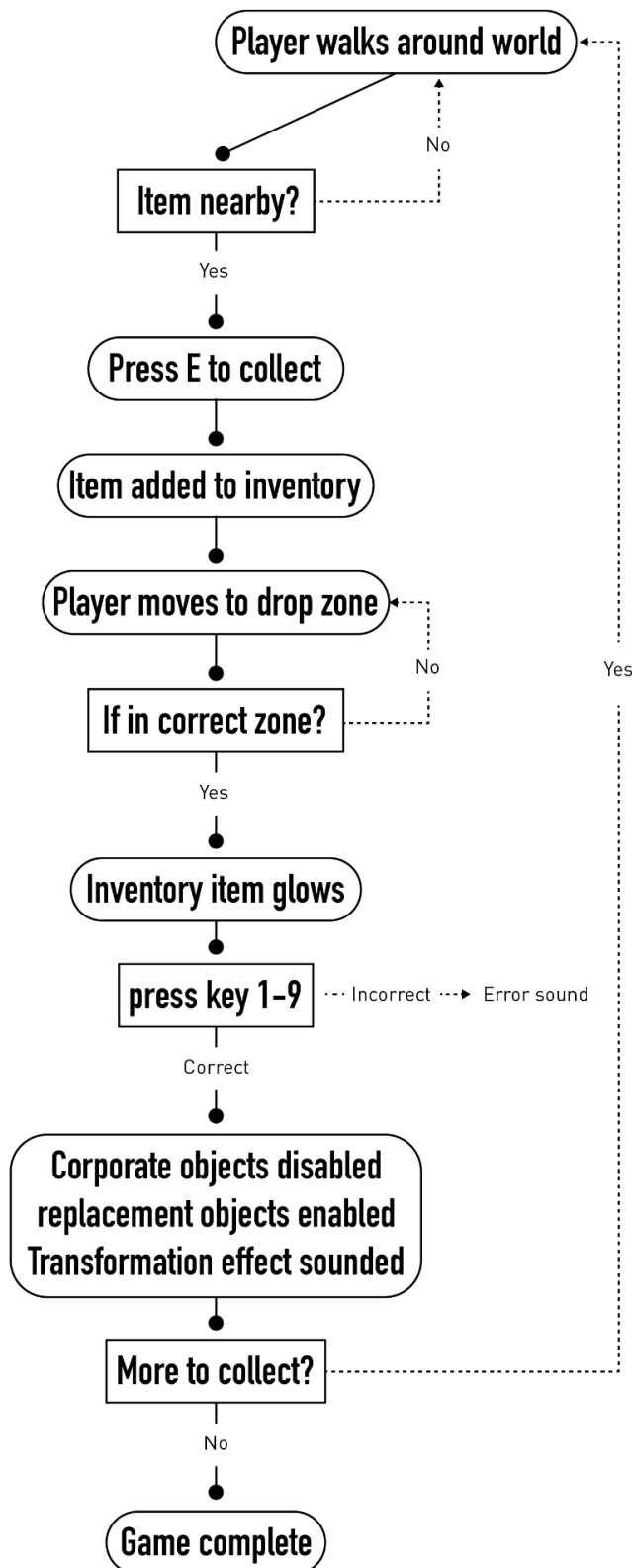


Fig. 27: Diagram of Replacement System Mechanic.

Cloud Service System

Phase 1: Fill Initialization and Progress Monitoring

When the game starts, the liquid container begins filling from bottom to top using a shader-based system (Fig). The `FillDetector` script continuously monitors fill progress by updating the material instance's `FillTime` property, creating smooth visual animation over a configurable duration while tracking when the liquid reaches the predetermined threshold.

Phase 2: Threshold Detection and Game Pause

When the liquid reaches the threshold, the system automatically pauses all game elements including player movement, camera controls, and the filling process itself. This creates a decision point for the player while maintaining the current game state.

Phase 3: Payment Interface Activation

A payment UI appears offering two options: continue (requires spending collected golden tubes) or restart (resets the level). The interface integrates with the coin collection economy, checking the player's current balance against the continue cost.

Phase 4: Resolution and State Mangement

If the player chooses to continue and has sufficient balance, the system deducts the cost and resumes gameplay. If they choose restart, the scene reloads with a smooth fade transition, resetting all progress including coin collection and liquid levels back to initial state.

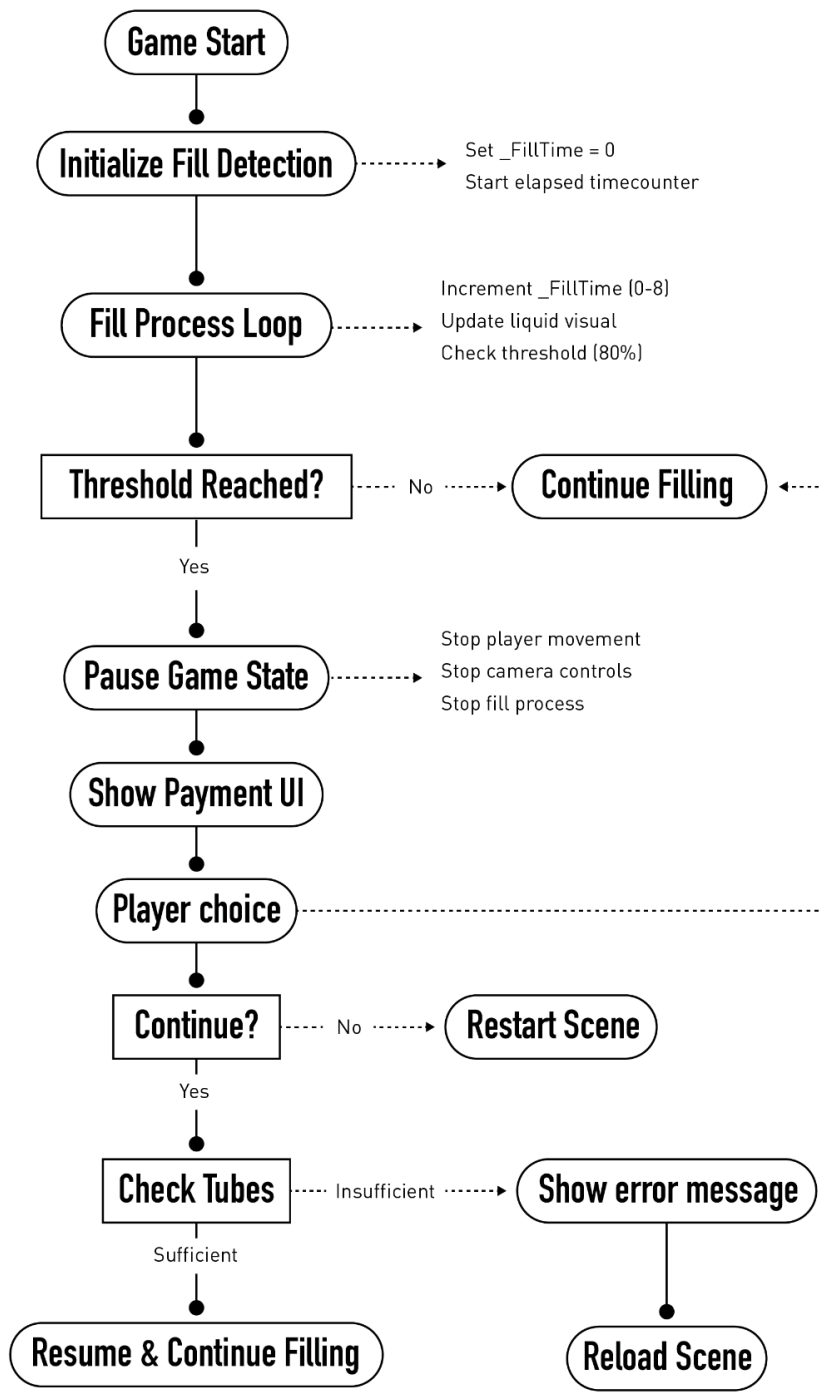


Fig. 28: Diagram of Cloud Service System Mechanic.

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Fig 3: Stills of architectures from Black Myth: Wukong. Retrieved 16th May 2025 from HARDCORE GAMER: <https://hardcoregamer.com/black-myth-wukong-beautiful-visuals>

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Fig. 27: Diagram of Replacement System Mechanic.

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