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How Lego Constructs a Cross-promotional Franchise with Video Games

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HOW LEGO CONSTRUCTS A CROSS-PROMOTIONAL

FRANCHISE WITH VIDEO GAMES

by

David Wooten

A Thesis Submitted in

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ABSTRACT
HOW LEGO CONSTRUCTS A CROSS-PROMOTIONAL
FRANCHISE WITH VIDEO GAMES

by

David Wooten

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013
Under the Supervision of Professor Michael Newman

The purpose of this project is to examine how the cross-promotional Lego video game

series functions as the site of a complex relationship between a major toy manufacturer

and several media conglomerates simultaneously to create this series of licensed texts.

The Lego video game series is financially successful outselling traditionally produced

licensed video games. The Lego series also receives critical acclaim from both gaming

magazine reviews and user reviews. By conducting both an industrial and audience

address study, this project displays how texts that begin as promotional products for

Hollywood movies and a toy line can grow into their own franchise of releases that stills

bolster the original work. This study also examines why Lego was chosen to co-brand

with Disney, Warner Bros., and Lucas Films to create these cross-promotional games.

The target audiences and industrial strategy behind these games directly affects the

difference between these texts and other licensed adaptation video games on the market.

This thesis also analyzes the discourses surrounding the Lego video games to discover

what these texts offer above and beyond other licensed games that makes them a unique

as cross-promotional products.

By using media studies concepts such as transmedia storytelling and paratexts, this study seeks to determine how audiences construct meaning from the Lego adaptations. Jonathan Gray's notion of paratexts provides the groundwork for this meaning construction. The Lego video games edit the original franchise content to make family-friendly changes, offer the opportunity to create and manipulate the gaming environment, and offer humor through parody, which positions the target audience, young consumers who have not been exposed to the films, to understand the content in a way the Hollywood movie may not offer. In the same manner, parents/adults who have seen the films will have a different experience from interacting with the Lego games. Lego games rejuvenate the older franchises through the parents/adults reexperiencing the material, recruit younger consumers into the franchises with the Lego brand, and entice older non-gaming adults into gaming through the familiar licensed material. This thesis determines that the importance of these video games lies in their accessibility to a mass audience, their ability to function as an independent franchise of releases, and as recruitment tools for not only the licensing franchises and Lego, but for non-gamers to start playing.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The current trend in most video games is to achieve the highest level of realism possible through computer-graphic representation. The progression from console generation to generation typically doubles the console's bits or the computer's processing power making the avatars on the screen take on more and more realistic attributes. However, one type of game release, the Lego video games, does not seem to follow the realistic trend. The Lego Group has collaborated with some of the most iconic and popular movie franchises in recent history to create licensed video games that are successful among critics and players. Instead of realistic graphics, the Lego games feature digital versions of the licensed physical toys sets using a cartoonish graphics style to relay the well-known franchise material.

This study will argue that, besides being a vehicle for the licensing franchises, the Lego video games also manage to stand out from other licensed products in several ways that make them worthy of study. These video games are interesting because they provide children an entryway into these franchises without needing to consume the original film material, which makes these video games cross-promotional products that function as more than tie-ins or spin-offs that simply translate the original series. The games also serve a nostalgic function to the parents that are purchasing them. With the Lego brand attached, these games are accessible enough that parents are not just buying the texts, but non-gaming parents are entering the new medium to play video games. The parents and children playing these games can share the experience of the adapted material, which points to these texts serving as a source of recruitment and rejuvenation at one time. Another key point in this project is that these cross-promotional video games have

become their own franchise. These games are initially released as promotional products for Lego and the collaborating media conglomerates, but with their popularity, accessibility to all audiences, and quality game play, this series functions as a franchise independent from the original licensing franchise.

For the purposes of this project, a quick distinction between brand and franchise should be explained. A brand is the identity of company, which is composed of the name, logo, how a company distinguishes itself from other companies, emotions, associations, and much more. A brand is the cumulative image of a company and its products. A franchise is all of the associated products surrounding an intellectual property. A franchise is built around a series of releases in the same or different media that focus on characters, narratives, worlds/universes, etc. The Lego video game series becomes its own franchise based on the gaming environments. The Lego video game series licenses many iconic film franchises (Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Harry Potter, Batman, Pirates of the Caribbean, and the Lord of The Rings), but the common theme connecting these games that makes them a new franchise is the Lego building block environment and the style of changes made to the original material. Even with different franchise making up the characters, narratives, and settings, the Lego video games series connects these separate works by using a consistent gaming formula centered around the toys.

One of the many ways of analyzing media franchise material is through transmedia storytelling. I will develop on the transmedia work by Kinder and Jenkins, and the Lego video game series will provide me with an excellent example of transmedia storytelling. The Lego games serve as a good case study because they continue existing

franchise material, offer spatial exploration of the narrative world, are the joint

collaboration of major media branding, and provide the already established film

franchises with new material rather than simply translating information from the movies.

This study's focus is on the targeting of children as the consumers of these

promotional/advertising games. The combination of the Lego brand (targeting young

children) and video games create a form of recruitment for the original film franchises

and Lego products that is not matched by other video games or other media. The use of

the Lego brand allows entryway into a media franchise without any initial understanding

of the films, which would be optimal for the companies targeting children. Branded toys

or video games that do not require the children playing with them to have any

relationship with the original films or televisions shows are intriguing and worthy of

study.

     Most branded toys act as an extension of the original text, but these games

function as primary texts instead of spin-offs to the children playing them. The use of the

Lego video games' cartoon-style graphics points to targeting young children in a manner

that is similar to the 1980s Saturday morning cartoon advertising style. Even though

Lego's color scheme and construction toys primarily target boys, gender studies do not

fall into the scope of this project. Instead, concentrating on Lego and the media

conglomerates publishing the games provides the background for understanding

promotional video games from an industrial standpoint. Analyzing the audience address

and demand for these types of video games offers a base for understanding why Lego

video games are doing things other video games may not be doing. The Lego releases

must have a reason for standing out in a video game market with many

franchise/adaptation games and recruiting young children into these iconic media franchises is the most logical reason.

Film franchises with multiple sequels or installments that have collaborated with Lego include Warner Brothers' Batman, Harry Potter, and Lord of the Rings; Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean; Lucas Arts' Star Wars and Indiana Jones series. All of these games are forms of cross-promotion synergy, which means that the original films in a franchise are promoted or continued by another horizontal branch of the media conglomerate that originally produced the work. The Lego video games that feature popular movie franchises seem to be going against the realistic/simulation trend in the video game industry by featuring the round, yellow-headed, toy representation found in Lego toys. What do Warner Bros., Lucas Arts, and Disney stand to gain by producing games that use the Lego Company name and toy line? Do these games offer something different from the ordinary games that translate or adapt a movie's plot and characters?

The Lego video games are adaptations of several licensed film series. In the video games, the environment and characters are completely made of Lego bricks and minifigures (minifigs). The games are based on building solutions to puzzles with Lego bricks. The games contain entire trilogies and allow the players to manipulate the gaming environment. The franchise environment takes on a life of its own with the Lego building aspects. Lego has chosen to license franchises with dynamic environments, so that its building blocks can be fully utilized. All of the Lego video games license science fiction or fantasy films with environments that are as important as the characters in the films. The players go through these dynamic worlds as minifigs that represent both the protagonists and antagonists of each franchise. The games have added cut-scenes with no

dialogue that encourage the players to insert their own take on the character interactions. This imagination aspect becomes important depending on whether the players have experienced the films or if the games are their first experience with the franchise material. The Lego video games do take certain liberties cleaning up the darker or violent material in favor of humor through parody for a family-friendly experience.

The family-friendly content or experience should be explained for clarity. The cartoon-style graphics and Lego characters and environment are only a few aspects to being family friendly. The Lego characters and the iconic franchises also create an aspect of familiarity and nostalgia to the parents buy and eventually playing these games. As will be pointed out in the coming pages, the parents buying these games get to share the gaming experience with their children, but they also share the story and bond that is created by playing cooperatively through the stories now presented in these games. Family friendly refers to the parents being able to enjoy these games through accessible game controls, an world that can be spatially explored, and an understanding of the narrative as much as the games being edited for children.

This project focuses on the transmedia position of the multiple Lego video game releases that build off or continue popular movie franchise properties such as Indiana Jones, the entire Star Wars saga, Batman, and Harry Potter. The Lego video games series began to be released in 2005, and with few exceptions, the games appear on every video game console that was current at the time of release (Nintendo Game Cube, Wii or Gameboy advanced; Playstation 2 or 3; X Box or X Box 360; and computer systems). Some of the titles include *Lego Star Wars: The Video Game* (2005), *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy* (2006), *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga* (2007), *Lego Batman:*

The Videogame (2008), *Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventure* (2008), *Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4* (2010), *Lego Harry Potter: Years 5-7* (2011), and *Lego Pirates of the Caribbean* (2011). One interesting aspect of the Lego games is that all of the publishing is done in-house, meaning that Warner Bros., Disney, and Lucas Arts (now a Disney company) are actually writing and producing the games instead of farming the work out other major video game publishers like Electronic Arts or Capcom who produce many other games that are cross-promotional or licensed works.

This study focuses on the industrial/promotional transmedia motivations of combining popular movie franchises with the Lego brand, what the creation of these video games mean in terms of promotional video games, and a critical examination of these games. The main aspect of the industrial study portion of this project is how the Lego video games function as part of a larger, cross-promotional system. The project includes background company information on Lego and the companies providing the franchise material (Warner Brothers, Lucas Arts, and Disney), as well as, how the companies have collaborated, and the formula that is used to ensure that Lego's reputation for creativity is not compromised. The project is interested in how these games address a particular audience

The Lego video game releases combine successful movie franchise properties with the well-established toy brand of Lego, which creates a business model in the video game industry that is different from the cross-promotional video games that are typically produced. Usually, licensed video games have release dates that are very close to the films they are adapting, which allows the games to capitalize on the movies' success, but the Lego games are separated enough from the films' release dates that they seem to once

again go against the trend found in other game releases. This portion of the study sheds light on these video games' cross-promotional aspects by studying the histories and materials from Lego, Warner Bros., Disney, and Lucas Arts to display why and how the Lego video games are different from many other contemporary video games' cross-promotional strategy. This study examines the family-friendly content changes that occur to the franchise material as the result of the power dynamic between Lego and its media conglomerate collaborators.

<div align="center">**Literature Review**</div>

The Lego video games use a co-branding strategy with Warner Bros., Disney, and Lucas Arts to create games that are based on licensed Lego toys sets. One area of this study discovers why the media conglomerates have chosen to release games with the Lego brand when the owners of the franchise could produce the games without featuring the Lego brand. Both Herman's *A Million Little Bricks: The Unofficial Illustrated History of the Lego Phenomenon* and Baichtal and Meno's *The Cult of Lego* offer insight into the history, strategies, and practices that Lego has used to become such a powerful brand.[1] Both of these books are popular studies about the Lego Group from a dedicated audience member's standpoint. These two books display how dedicated both children and adults are to the Lego brand while also outlining specifics about The Lego Group's history and business practices. The Lego video games remediate the physical toy sets that have licensed popular film franchise characters, and the fact that Lego uses licensed themes has importance to this study because Lego has typically succeeded on its own brand.

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[1] Sarah Herman, *A Million Little Bricks: The Unofficial Illustrated History of the Lego Phenomenon* (New York: Skyhorse, 2012), 5; John Baichtal and Joe Meno, *The Cult of Lego* (San Francisco: No Starch Press, Inc, 2011), 8.

Media Franchises and Tie-ins

In addition to understanding the Lego Group's history, brand, and business strategy, analyzing media franchises is an important facet to grasping the production system behind these video games. Derek Johnson's work, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Culture Industries*, details the industrial organization and cultural patterns around media franchising.[2] Johnson argues that franchises are the result of industrial production, media institutions, and producers that network to continue the use of franchising. Johnson's work views the franchise as a site of complex forces coming together to shape the cultural production of media products. Johnson's work sheds light upon the co-branding between Lego and the multiple collaborators on these video game releases.

Two authors that shed light on the methods that media conglomerates use are Elana Levine and Janet Wasko. Elana Levine's article, "Fractured Fairy Tales and Fragmented Markets: Disney's Weddings of a Lifetime and the Cultural Politics of Media Conglomeration," provides a view into the internal synergistic practices and associated textual meanings produced by a media conglomerate.[3] Her work outlines how Disney works to maintain a consistent brand while being a horizontally integrated media conglomerate with many divisions. Levine's work informs how cross-promotional products (the Lego video games) both support and complicate a conglomerate's brand image. The companies collaborating with Lego need to maintain a consistent brand while licensing the franchise material, but at the same, want to extend the brand image with

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[2] Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 17.

[3] Elana Levine, "Fractured Fairy Tales and Fragmented Markets: Disney's Weddings of a Lifetime and the Cultural Politics of Media Conglomeration," *Television and New Media*, 6 no. 1 (2005): 71-88.

Lego to gain access to a new audience with a fresh take on older media. Janet Wasko's article, "Challenging Disney Myths," provides a critical political economy of Disney as a media conglomerate and its founder.[4] Her analysis of Disney's expansion brings to light how media conglomerates expand both their holding and brand through different means, which ties to the way that the Lego video games serve as cross-promotional products for each conglomerate.

At first glance, the Lego video games may come across as a form of advertising for both the licensed physical Lego toy sets and the films Lego has licensed, but other strategies may also be at work. These video games can do more than offer advertising potential. Ian Bogost's *Persuasive Games* analyzes the ways video games mount arguments and influence players through political policy, advertising, and education.[5] He specifically spends time on how advertising in video games should move toward a simulation of the products building brand awareness. Gonzalo Frasca makes a similar argument for simulation as a means of analyzing video games in "Simulation versus Narrative," which is noteworthy because the Lego video games are simulations of using the licensed, physical-toys sets [6]

Moving from advertising through simulation, Douglas Brown and Tanya Krzywinska examine movie-game tie-ins as part of a larger advertising system that piggybacks on the hype and advertising created by a blockbuster film.[7] These authors examine how video games fit into franchise systems and what they require from the

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[4] Janet Wasko, "Challenging Disney Myths," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 25 no.3 (2001): 237-257.
[5] Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Video Games* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007).
[6] Gonzalo Frasca, "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology," in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003), 221-235.
[7] Douglas Brown and Tanya Krzywinska, "Movie-games and Game-movies: Toward an aesthetic of Transmediality," in *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies*, ed. Warren Buckland (New York: Routledge, 2009) 86-102.

audience. Brown and Krzywinska see the potential of movie-game tie-ins as a bridge between film and video games aesthetically and economically. The authors stress that cinema and video games are different, but that video games still have an enormous potential in storytelling even if they differs from film, and that movie-game narratives allow the player/audience member to embody different aspects of the narrative universe spatially. Brown and Krzywinska also stress that how the story and characters connect between the original source text to the multiple other media outlets that present the same characters and story is crucial for fidelity and continuity.

Marsha Kinder first described the mania surrounding video games and products licensed from a popular franchise as a supersystem, and with intertextuality or the structuring of events (like releases) through different modes of media production connecting the different products in the system.[8] Kinder's work describes the changes in the media industry following the deregulation of the 1980s, and she spends a considerable amount of time on the importance of the conglomeration of the media industry. Kinder's work offers the foundation for more recent tools used for studying the media industry. Cross-promotion, transmedia storytelling, and paratexts build on Kinder's work in the early 1990s on the synergistic practices of franchise properties and licensing.

Cross-Promotion

Video games are not produced and played in a vacuum. Most video games have some kind of association to other media products. Licensed video games are so ingrained with media franchises and marketing plans that it is hard to see them as a separate entity that can be analyzed without considering the entire media system in which they belong.

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[8] Marsha Kinder, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 122-123.

Most licensed video games could stand alone, but the industry has chosen to continue with tie-in licensed games. With media ownership limited to only a few companies, it is not surprising that a certain amount of synergy and cooperation between conglomerates will occur to achieve the greatest commercial gain. Jonathan Gray states that synergy "refers to a strategy of multimedia platforming, linking a media product to related media on other 'platforms,' such as toys, DVDs, and/or videogames, so that each product advertises and enriches the experience of the other."[9] Synergy, or horizontal integration of media properties, is the foundation for cross-promotion or transmedia storytelling. Any media conglomerate will attempt to profit as much as possible from one media property by using the advertising and hype from a major release of a film, video game, or show in conjunction with other releases. The co-branding and release of franchised films with the Lego brand video games emphasizes how these games function as part of the interconnected systems of cross-promotion, transmedia storytelling, and paratexts.

Cross-promotion is directly related to synergy as a profit-generating tool for media conglomerates. Eileen Meehan's account of Warner Bros. release of *Batman* in 1989 outlines the process of cross-promotion for a major media conglomerate.[10] Meehan's work in this article is interested in how the political/industrial aspects of a conglomerate will influence the cultural impact of a particular work. Meehan explains that cross-promotional synergy creates a web of cross references in the larger text that is created from using multiple media outlets to promote and exhibit a specific work like

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[9] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 5.

[10] Eileen Meehan, "'Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!': The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext," in *The Many Lives of The Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, 1991), 47-65.

Batman.[11] She details the internal, external, and exhibition factors that goes into making a blockbuster. She also explains the detailed process of licensing a conglomerate's media property. Meehan's work on cross-promotional practices inside of a conglomerate's holdings and the licensing of franchise property ties directly to the Lego video games extending the brand of Lego and the collaborating media conglomerates.

The Lego video games are based on financially successfully licensed physical Lego toys before the games are produced. Jonathan Hardy's work more recently describes cross-media promotional strategies, and he takes a critical stance suggesting that many forms of cross-media promotion break down regulatory standards.[12] Hardy's work compares and contrasts the U.S. media system with the United Kingdom offering his analysis of the differences. He makes proposals for altering the future of cross-media promotion, but his explanation of the trends and practices of synergy used by media conglomerates and its changes since Meehan's work on *Batman* are relevant to the Lego video game series. Hardy explains that one difference in the current media industry is the shift to a less-is-more strategy where a smaller number of licensed products are actually more effective in promoting a film than flooding the market with more products.[13] It is these types of difference that will shed light on the industrial changes in licensed, cross-promotional, media-franchise video games. Both of these studies will also display the importance of licensed products operating within a blockbuster film's advertising campaign window.

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Jonathan Hardy, *Cross-Media Promotion* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010).

[13] Ibid., 80.

Transmedia Storytelling

Transmedia storytelling is not necessarily a new phenomenon, but Henry Jenkins has put it into perspective in the age of convergence. Transmedia storytelling offers a way for narratives and information to spread across multiple media channels by allowing every medium to offer its own contribution by doing what it does best.[14] Transmedia storytelling allows audience members to dig as deep as they want for a franchise's richness by uncovering more and more of the entire narrative universe. Jenkins uses The Matrix franchise as the model for what he refers to as "the art of world making."[15] The Matrix was a big moneymaking franchise that contained entry points in films, video games, comics, and animated shorts. The narrative stretches across all of these properties; it does not just mean that the same story is presented in multiple media forms, but that critical narrative elements of the entire Matrix narrative are found throughout all of these. The Matrix can be viewed as the three films, two video games, 90 minutes of the *Animatrix*, and a series of comics.[16] Jenkins' model displays that to understand the entire Matrix narrative a consumer has to seek out the information from multiple outlets.[17]

Jenkins also explains that a transmedia system may be more than most viewers can handle. It seems unrealistic to think that general viewers are so entranced by media products that they will go searching for and understand every media form that The Matrix takes. Jenkins does express that transmedia storytelling is a new form of media production in the age of convergence, and that the true potential may not be fully realized

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[14] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 98.
[15] Ibid., 21.
[16] Ibid., 103.
[17] Ibid., 21.

for some time.[18] *Convergence Culture* was published in 2006, and Jenkins is writing about a specific cultural moment, so as convergence alters the media landscape, the model for understanding media and convergence will change with it. The synergistic practice of transmedia storytelling is not a new concept, but the fiction being integrally spread across multiple media channels to create a larger story is where Jenkins sees convergence leading the media industries.

Jenkins' transmedia storytelling provides an important foundation for the current study on the Lego video games by displaying the connection between existing franchise material and the licensed video games being presented in new ways. The games position themselves as an entry point into the greater narrative universe of each respective franchise. The important aspect of the Lego video games as entry points into the franchise is that gamers of any age are not required to have seen the films to understand the greater narrative. An eight-years-old can play *Lego Star Wars* without watching the six films, *The Clone Wars* animated series, *The Clone Wars* film, reading the comics, playing with any licensed toy, or playing any of the other associated video games. Transmedia storytelling is not the only tool for analyzing these cross-promotional video games. Another model of understanding media franchises may shed more light upon what meaning these games offer.

Paratexts

Examining Jonathan Gray's work on paratexts may provide more insight into the connections between cross-promotional franchise products.[19] Grays sees promotions, synergy, narrative extensions, and licensed products as an important aspect in the

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[18] Ibid., 99.

[19] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

political economy of media production, but he suggests that the more important aspect of

these franchise tools is positioning, defining, and creating meaning for the original work.

Gray puts forth two types of paratexts: entryway and in media res. Entryway paratexts

condition audiences on how to "read" or decode a text before it is encountered, and in

media res paratexts are those texts that affect how a work is "read" or decoded during or

after the consumption of a text.[20] In media res paratexts allow for strong connections

between texts that may not have a converging narrative structure including adaptations

and other texts that do not directly continue a grand narrative across media like

transmedia storytelling games. Gray combines two models of media expansion and

convergence. The first is Jenkins' multiplatform convergence[21] as an inward move of

texts to one narrative meaning, and the second is Brooker's overflow as the expansion of

texts outward into other products or paratexts (licensed products, web sites, and

soundtracks).[22] Gray positions his paratexts as "the beating heart of a text," in between

the inward convergence and the outward overflow.[23] The position and fluidity of

paratexts allow for an even more inclusive and open model based off Jenkins' transmedia

storytelling.

Gray uses *The Simpsons Hit and Run*[24] to distinguish the relationship between *The*

Simpsons television show as a text and the video game as a paratext.[25] *The Simpsons Hit*

and Run being written and produced by the show's creators, gives the game substantial

merit as part of The Simpsons universe, and especially as a paratext that is meant to

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[20] Ibid., 40.
[21] Ibid., 41. Gray is referring to *Convergence Culture* (2006).
[22] Will Brooker, "Living on Dawson's Creek: Teen Viewers Cultural Convergence and Television
Overflow," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4.4 (2001). 456-472.
[23] Ibid., 41.
[24] *The Simpsons Hit and Run* (2003)
[25] Ibid., 192-194.

change how the audience is positioned to understand the show.[26] Gray asserts that *The Simpsons Hit and Run*, while not offering large amounts of new material, allows for spatial exploration of the Simpsons' world that has never been offered in the show. He positions that "with an expansive storyline and space for gameplay…the game provides significantly more *Simpsons* than an episode of the television program."[27] From Gray's reading of this game, it is not so much of an adaptation as a "sandbox" game of Springfield.[28] From the standpoint of viewing the game though the lens of paratexts, this distinction may not be important, but as part of a transmedia system, it is.

Gray's work is beneficial to the current project in many ways. Seeing the importance and meaning created by licensed products, like video games, allows the Lego video games to be analyzed as a credible extension of the franchise system whether they are transmedia or not. The potential for paratexts to add meaning and situate audiences for understanding the original film or television show displays that even without strategic intent licensed products do have a legitimate place in the franchise media system. Gray sees the potential of promotional material extending the narrative of franchises systems. In the same way Gray uses the *Simpsons Hit and Run*, the Lego video games provide a similar type of case study in the following pages. The paratext model allows the audience members to make connections and meanings about the source text through interacting with cross-media products whether films, toys, or games as opposed to transmedia storytelling. This project uses more of a paratextual approach to understand how cross-promotional products position an audience to understand franchise texts.

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[26] Ibid., 192.
[27] Ibid., 194.
[28] Ibid., 193.

Narrative and Space

In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins denies that adaptations fit within the transmedia model. Jenkins refers to Neil Young's term "additive comprehension," which is the inclusion of extra details or elements that change the meaning of the original text as necessary for transmedia storytelling.[29] Gray's paratextual model sees the potential importance of not only adaptations like *The Simpsons Hit and Run*, but he sees importance in many other "translated" narratives that do not have Jenkins' additive comprehension elements. It would seem as though Jenkins would see the importance in a game like the *The Simpsons Hit and Run* in spatial terms.

Jenkins' article "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" positions narrative and the spatial properties of video games as environmental storytelling.[30] Jenkins asserts that game spaces contain the story, and that different game environments foster different narratives. He states, "environmental storytelling creates the preconditions for an immersive narrative experience in at least one of four ways: evoked… enacted… embedded… and emergent narratives."[31] All of the narratives serve a different aspect of games and stories. Gray asserts a similar function to *The Simpsons Hit and Run*.

Jenkins also inserts an interesting facet of transmedia when compared to his writing in *Convergence Culture*. He claims that the Star Wars adaptation video game is transmedia because "The Star Wars game may not simply retell the story of Star Wars, but it doesn't have to in order to enrich or expand our experience of the Star Wars saga… [It] exists in dialogue with the films, conveying new narrative experiences through its

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[29] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 127-128.
[30] Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (MIT, 2004),
[31] Ibid., 123.

creative manipulation of environmental details."[32] Here, regardless of the adaptation,

Jenkins is stating that the translation or adaptation of film or other text into a video game

does fit into transmedia storytelling because the story is translated spatially adding a new

layer to the franchise. This point seems to contradict the co-creation criteria for

transmedia storytelling in *Convergence Culture,*[33] and at the same time, gives access to

the narrative world, similar to Gray's assertion about *The Simpsons Hit and Run*, that

contains more information than any one episode of *The Simpsons*. It is exactly this type

of spatial exploration that is an important aspect of video games in transmedia

storytelling. The Lego texts exemplify the environment being an important aspect to

video games by choosing to license franchises with dynamic geographies that are of

crucial importance to the content. A concrete example of viewing video games through a

transmedia storytelling lens sheds light on the importance of this medium to the modes

storytelling.

With the Lego video games in mind, the spatial aspects that Jenkins brings up in

"Game Design as Narrative Architecture" connect many of the aspects between

transmedia storytelling and paratexts. It is the dialogue between the original source (the

films) and the Lego games that allow these games to be more than advertising or just

adaptations. The Lego games convey the story through a manipulated environment, so

that when a younger child plays these games they can experience the dynamic worlds of

Harry Potter, Star Wars, Batman, or Indiana Jones before knowing the story or watching

the films. From the perspective of an adult who watched these films before the video

games were created, this may seem like backwards thinking, but a child who has not seen

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[32] Ibid., 127.
[33] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 107.

or been exposed to some of these iconic media franchises, these games offer a unique entry point into the franchise, which is why this article is important to the current study.

Child's play

Gray's model of paratexts positions promotional products and licensed toys and games as creating important meaning for the source text, but understanding how children's texts become licensed products and how children interact with branded toys will also provide valuable insight into why the Lego games are worthy of being studied. In *Powerplay: Toys as Popular Culture*, Dan Fleming views licensed toys as more than simply spin-offs of children's texts, and in the same manner as Gray, sees these toys as carrying narrative traces of the source text, functioning as stand-alone objects, and conveying meaning through play with licensed toys.[34] Fleming elaborates on branded toys through a cultural studies lens examining how toys carry cultural meaning, how children play with toys, and how video games (in the early 1990s) fit into his notions of cultural meaning and identity formation. Fleming's work with branded physical toys and their functions as more than spin-offs is a main part of this work used. The Lego toy sets and video games functioning as more than spin-offs is the focus of this study.

Ellen Seiter's *Sold Separately* follows the same trajectory as Fleming, but Seiter's work asserts how branded toys function in a consumer culture for both children and the parents buying them.[35] Seiter views the parents falling prey to advertising and marketing to buy educational toys for their children, while children desire the social standing that branded toys provide with their peers. Seiter traces how print and television advertising

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[34] Dan Fleming, *Powerplay: Toys as Popular Culture* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996).

[35] Ellen Seiter, Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, 1993)

has progressed in the United States, and she provides gendered cases studies of toys for girls and boys. Seiter's work also concentrates on class differentiations with branded toys and children's television. Her work suggests that childhood and parenthood can be understood through consumer culture. Seiter's work applies to the Lego video games because they are educational and "safe" from a parenting perspective and as a "badge" of status to children. The Lego games do require an expensive console system (PS3, X-Box 360, or Wii) that may be financially out of the reach of some families, while the price of the games also comes into play. The games and the associated consoles may provide many children with a consumer status, which is an aspect to branded toys.

There are varieties of different issues that can be considered when children are being recruited as media-franchise consumers, as this study points out using the Lego video games as an example. All of these studies provide insight and an excellent foundation for studying children's use of co-branded toys and games. In the context of analyzing the Lego video games, the ways that children's media advertises and attempts to tap into the popularity of licensed products lies at the heart of this study. Every one of the Lego video games has another competing, licensed video game targeting an older demographic, and the Lego co-brand offers something that sets these games apart from other adaptation video games. The studies on children's use of branded toys provide valuable insight into this phenomenon.

Methods

This research project analyzes and identifies the co-branding, industrial strategy behind several popular media franchises collaborating with the Lego brand resulting in extremely popular video game titles. The Lego video games are licensed works that

remediate physical toys sets that the Lego Group has successfully produced and marketed. These games are released in tandem with other licensed video games, toys, and media that license the same franchise work, which asks why the variable of the Lego brand changes the success or failure of licensed products. To understand why the Lego video games differ from other licensed video games, this study determines the primary target audience of the co-branded Lego video games as young children, and the secondary audience as the parents buying these games. Both the primary (children) and secondary (parents) target audiences are positively responding to the Lego formula used in these games. This study utilizes a cultural studies approach considering media production, reception, and critical analysis with other media concepts including cross-promotional strategies, transmedia storytelling, paratextual studies, and children's media and children's play concepts.

The industrial study considers the production of these video games by media conglomerates and Lego. The history, business strategies, and brand aspects of Lego are considered to understand what the toy company offers the video games. To accompany the Lego Group's research, similar analysis of the collaborating companies provides insight into why these film franchises co-brand with the toy company. These media conglomerates do have an extended history of producing video games that are part of each company's synergistic practices, but production is typically outsourced to an established video game publisher that specializes in the content and has the expertise that is required for an adaptation game. The cross-promotional methodology sheds light upon the synergy related to release times for the games and films, which determines that the video games' release dates are initially in the blockbuster-advertising window, but the

gaming titles continue to succeed outside of the hype marketing campaign for other releases. The cross-promotional approach shows how conglomerates' properties extend and support each other in other ways including cross-referenced story lines or bringing in other synergistic ties to help support the entire franchise through the video game release.

The industrial study shows the cross-promotional status of these games, and the advantages Lego brings these franchises over other toy companies. As a transmedia storytelling franchise, these games extend the fiction of the original source in new ways by a strategic plan, and the games provide an essential experience that other licensed products do not. This portion of the study provides insight into the synergistic practices that are used to reach audiences outside of the media franchises' usual fan base. This area also brings to light the alterations to make the original franchise material acceptable to the parents of the children that are buying the games. The cross-promotional study informs the other aspects of this work.

The reception methodology examines how these games are well received by the players and critics in the context of other video games. The success of these video games as stated in gaming magazines and player reviews provide insight into what the Lego brand and simulated use of the construction toys adds to the game environment. The method utilized for this will be an analysis of popular gaming magazine and retail web sites to find how these games rate, as well as, any important comments about the games themselves. The analysis of the games' reception focuses on the connections to other episodes in each franchise system. An example of this would be how the *Lego Harry Potter* video games are continuing or fitting into the Harry Potter franchise. These games are not simply adapting the movies or books to the new medium, but they are offering

something that other Harry Potter releases do not, such as spatial exploration, parody, and the chance to build the narrative environment. This aspect of the audience reception methodology directly influences the paratextual and transmedia storytelling aspects of the study.

As with the cross-promotional part of the study, the games must offer "additive comprehension" and have aspects of co-creation to fit Jenkins' criteria for transmedia storytelling. A critical analysis of the games will provide insight into the connection between the Lego video game releases and the source material for the games' plot. The added spatial aspects categorize these games into a paratextual system that allows the consumers to make meanings and connections with other franchise properties.

Analyzing the texts surrounding children's play and media usage provides the groundwork for understanding that children are the target audience for the Lego video games and that this demographic will internalize the promotional techniques used to sell not only the games, but the franchises they are connected to. With a transmedia or paratextual system, the ancillary texts serve to add richness or meaning to the primary source, which means that eventually the source text will need to be consumed.

Chapter Descriptions

This introductory chapter is a project overview that states the goal of studying the Lego video games as part of co-branding, cross-promotional film franchises. The second chapter of this study, "Building a Video Game Block-by-Block," is concerned with the industrial/promotional transmedia motivations of combining popular movie franchises with the Lego brand. To begin this study, the Lego brand and business practices are outlined. Many licensed video games based on films are produced every year, but to

understand why Warner Bros., Disney, and Lucas Arts are producing co-branded games that are published in-house rather than through an established video game firm is a central focus. In addition to researching the Lego brand, a review of the three collaborating media conglomerates provide the strategies behind co-branding already established franchise brands such as Harry Potter, Indiana Jones, Star Wars, Batman, and Pirates of the Caribbean. The strategy behind these games includes determining the target audience, identifying who is actually playing the Lego video games, and recognizing the video game systems that these games are played on. The answers to these questions determine that these video games are trying to target children in the hopes of recruiting new consumers into these iconic media franchises.

This chapter distinguishes how the Lego video games function as part of a larger, cross-promotional system. The chapter considers what the creation of these video games mean in terms of promotional video games. Licensed video games have typically been placed in a promotional category and may sell well, but the Lego games' co-branding seems to complicate the promotional status of these games. This chapter contains a review of how the licensed products of each respective franchise fit into a connecting web of reference that bolsters the other franchise media and associated products. This includes how the Lego video games use the blockbuster-advertising campaign in scheduling release dates. The industrial portion of the project answers these questions by referencing press releases, company reports, popular books, trade journals (*Variety*, *Global License!*, *Nielsen*, and *Adweek*), gaming magazines (*Game Informer*, *IGN, Game Informer*, *and Game Pro*), and relevant web sites (Moby games, the Internet Movie Database, VG Chartz, and the Entertainment Software Ratings Board).

The third chapter of this study, "The Lego Video Games and Discourses around Their Use," focuses on the ways that the Lego games function in the current video game market as part of a transmedia system. This chapter analyzes how the Lego games differ from the graphically-detailed, licensed video games that are available with contemporary video game systems. This study determines the cross-promotional status of these video games to the people playing games. From a reception standpoint, this study answers how these games function as paratexts for the films and other media products associated with the film and that these video games can stand on their own or as part their own franchises.

A significant portion of this chapter determines that the Lego video games rejuvenate older popular media franchises by presenting the material in a new medium to children and that the parents buying these games are recruited into gaming at the same time. The use of the Lego brand allows the consumers entrance into a media franchise without any initial understanding of the films, which is optimal for the companies targeting children. This portion of the project accomplishes this by referencing the Lego web site, collaborating licensing companies' web sites, gaming websites and message boards (Moby Games and Game Spot) surrounding the games, gaming magazine reviews (*Game Spy*, *Game Pro*, and *IGN*), and user reviews from the people buying these games (Game Stop and Amazon).

The fourth and final chapter, "The Final Block," is a conclusion connecting the second and third chapter together while answering how the Lego video games function as part of a transmedia system. This conclusion ties together the industrial strategies (cross-promotional techniques, target audience) with the reception aspects indicating who these

games are targeting, how that target audience is responding to the video games, and what

significance the co-branded Lego video games hold in the current market. The final

reflections in this chapter and study address the cross-promotional status of these games,

how the Lego games have built on other popular adaptation titles, and offers what these

makes these games different from other licensed releases.

Chapter 2 – Building a Video Game Block-by-Block

Lego creations are built using interlocking stud and tube bricks, and in the same manner, the Lego video game series has been constructed using separate brands and franchises that have built a sum greater than any of their individual pieces. Lego, its collaborators (Disney, Lucas Arts, and Warner Bros.), and iconic film franchises (Star Wars, Harry Potter, Pirates of the Caribbean, Batman, and Lord of the Rings) are the pieces of the Lego video game model that come together to produce video games that promote the original material, the conglomerates' brand, and Lego's brand and toy line.

To begin to understand how the Lego video games function as cross-promotional products in a transmedia system, it is crucial to understand why large media conglomerates who own media franchises would choose to split a well-developed brand with a toy company that does not have an established history as a video game publisher. One of the focuses of this chapter will be to analyze the industrial strategies of Lego with Warner Bros., Lucas Arts, and Disney to discover what each company/brand has to gain with these co-branded video games. Lego is a toy company, with its concentration on maintaining and expanding its brand in this market, and I will argue that these video games have developed into their own franchise with a devoted consumer base of their own, which makes these texts more than promotional products for the toy company or the media conglomerates.

In this chapter, I will be a conducting an industrial study that considers the production of these video games by media conglomerates and Lego. I will also examine the brands and merchandising strategies of Lego, Warner Bros, Lucas Arts, and Disney. Viewing these companies as separate entities will allow me to pinpoint how Lego offers

the conglomerates an established family-friendly brand that opens up a new audience for their franchise material. The Lego brand also offers the conglomerates an opportunity to refresh the original material through the building-block environment. While the conglomerates receive access to a new audience, Lego benefits from the co-branding strategy by being allowed to enter a new medium to present its toys and the profits of licensing popular film franchises.

Through analyzing Lego's recommended age for playing these games, the Electronic Software Rating Board rating of these games, and the companies' press releases, I will demonstrate that the primary target audience of these games is young children and identify the secondary target audiences as the children's parents and brand loyal consumers of the media franchises. The strategy of targeting young children is significant for two reasons. First, a child audience is perfect for recruiting a new generation of consumers into the franchises that the Lego games are licensing. Second, the cross-promotional status of these games seeks a new audience outside of the brand loyal consumer base already interested in the previous franchise material. A young child audience should internalize the franchise material and be interested in the Lego toys that are presenting the games. In this chapter, I will use trade journals, academic books and articles, gaming web sites, company web sites, and popular web sites to research Lego and its collaborators. I will argue that by combining the brands together, Lego video games function as cross-promotional products that begin by being released in the associated film's advertising window but become their own series of releases that build on the franchise's brand and their own new brand.

The Lego Video Games

The Lego video games are accomplishing several things that have been a struggle for video games to do well. Lego releases are translating existing franchise material (film) into video games successfully, offering some new material to very popular media franchises, and co-branding the existing franchise material.[1] The Lego titles (released on every console available at the time of the individual game's release) have succeeded in turning established film series into popular video games.[2] Such popular films as *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean* have been adapted into financially successful video games. This success may in part be credited to another aspect that Lego video games are succeeding at where others have failed.

The Lego games build in new material and challenges that add to the film franchise material. In the *Lego Batman* games, a new story was included in the game that was not directly translated from any of the films.[3] This allows the player to experience a new part of the greater Batman narrative universe. The other Lego games include challenges or cut scenes in the style of Lego building using the elements found in the physical toy sets.[4] All of the Lego video games put emphasis on building solutions (out of digital Lego blocks) and problem solving to progress through the games. This focus on building and problem solving changes the overall progression of the story's narrative arc making the game's plot progression different from that of the adapted film. The inclusion of new narrative material by another form of media in a franchise is referred to

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[1] Many video game adaptations of films have been failures. Marsha Kinder, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Douglas Brown and Tanya Krzywinska, "Movie-games and Game-movies: Toward an aesthetic of Transmediality," in *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies*, (New York: Routledge, 2009) 86-102.

[2] Herman, *A Million Little Bricks*; Baichtal and Meno, *The Cult of Lego*.

[3] Ibid

[4] Ibid

as transmedia storytelling, but this concept will be handled more in the coming sections.[5] The inclusion of new material in these franchises is greatly due to the Lego Group's brand being on the product, which leads to the other aspect of why these games are important.

The co-branding of any of these franchises with the Lego Group ultimately means altering or censoring violent or dark material from the original films. The Lego Group's dedication to family-oriented fun insists that the video game adaptations alter any inappropriate material to carry the Lego brand. For instance, in any of the Lego game releases, when the player kills a "bad guy," the body falls to the ground turning into Lego bricks, and then pops back to life.[6] This wink at violence is only one of the changes that the Lego group requires from the media conglomerates that control the franchise. The Lego Group refrains from making war toys, and the company debated about the licensing deal with Lucas Arts simply because the Star Wars name contains the word war.[7] The Lego Group requires its partners to respect a level of family-oriented entertainment, which its products have always inspired. The Lego games also display the bricks and mini-figures (minifigs) so well known with the Lego brand. Using these elements graphically alters the game's presentation from that of the films and other adaptation video games. Instead of the graphic realism common in almost every video games, the Lego games have a cartoonish feel that presents the material differently than most other video game adaptations based on film franchises.

The Lego titles are certainly not the first successful attempt to adapt films into video games or vice versa. Rare, LTD.'s *GoldenEye 007* released in 1997 was a huge

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[5] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006)
[6] Sarah Herman, *A Million Little Bricks*; Baichtal and Meno, *The Cult of Lego*.
[7] Sarah Herman, *A Million Little Bricks*.

success with critics and players as a movie adaptation video game. *GoldenEye's* release was two years after the film it was based on, which means the development was not rushed to meet a deadline. The Lego video games follow the same type of release pattern with only the first game associated with a franchise accompanying a blockbuster-advertising window. *GoldenEye* allowed the player a view into being James Bond by being the character and exploring his world, and the game expanded the movie's plot and the action sequences. The player was able to explore the narrative universe of the film thoroughly. Every possible place in the film's world was a discovery including closets, toilet stalls, tanks, and shipping containers (most of which held bad guys). James Bond's gadgets and weapons were ready to use as the player progressed through the game. The Lego games offer a similar experience to *GoldenEye*, but offer more possibilities including adding humor and the ability to alter and shape the environment with Lego blocks. *GoldenEye* is most likely an early model that was used to create the Lego video game formula. As a cross-promotional product, *GoldenEye* brought a new James Bond experience to a specific gaming demographic, but the game did not extend to as large of an audience or other markets (licensed products, the larger Bond film series, or associated franchises) to the extent that the Lego games have shown the ability to do. *GoldenEye* is only one example of a successful cross-promotional game, but it is an important one. Sixteen years after its release and two gaming generations later, *GoldenEye* is still lauded for its innovations and legacy.

The Lego games have developed on all of the key aspects that made *GoldenEye* a success. The differences between the Lego series and *GoldenEye* are similar to the Harry Potter comparisons in Chapter 3. The Lego products, the blank canvas, and parody-style

humor add a heart-warming touch to the film franchises that allows parents to feel better about the video games in their children's lives. One of the key differences between most adaptation video games and the one with the Lego logo is the liberties available to the players in the adaptation. *GoldenEye* added to the film's plot, but the game rigidly held to following the overall storyline sequence with intertitles and specific cut scenes. The Lego video game's lack of dialogue and plot summary allow a player's imagination to roam with the spatial exploration of the game. The vagueness of representation using minifigs follows the same premise. *GoldenEye* (even though limited by the game technology of its time) was a remarkable game that provided the blueprint for even more innovations.

There are other video games that feature cross-promotions. Disney's *Kingdom Hearts* series utilizes cross-promotion combining characters from Disney (Mickey, Donald, and Goofy) with Final Fantasy characters and is successful with players and critics. There have also been a number of releases such as *Marvel vs. Capcom*, *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe*, and *Street Fighter X Tekken*, but these games are obvious cross-promotions that focus on selling the video games. The brilliance of the Lego video games co-branding strategy, compared to any other examples, lies with the modeling and simulation of the Lego brand.

<div align="center">*Lego*</div>

A brand is the identity of company, which is composed of the name, logo, emotions, associations, and much more. A brand is the cumulative image of a company and its products. The Lego brand is so well established that the company is the third

largest toy manufacturer in the world in terms of sales as of this writing.[8] The Lego name

is a significant part of the company brand coming from the Danish words "leg godt"

meaning play well.[9] The Lego name establishes the company's Danish heritage and

cannot be mistaken for any other companies. The Lego logo is distinctive and is simply

the name of the company written in white letters with yellow tracing on a red

background, but the font and color scheme culminate into the immediately recognizable

logo for the stud and tube construction block that the Lego Group has been making since

1958.[10] The stud and tube construction brick is also part of the Lego brand's

distinguishing features. The construction brick and high-quality plastic distinguishes

Lego's products from any other company making similar products. The Lego logo is

molded into each one of the studs on every piece, showing the attention to detail Lego

puts into every brick it makes.[11] This dedication to detail and quality shows through in

the Lego video games that are technically well done and show close adherence to the

franchise material.

Lego's brand and entire company history is centered on its family-owned status.

The Lego Group is a toy company that was started in 1932 by Ole Kirk Christiansen.[12]

The company has always prided itself on quality, innovation, and family entertainment.

The Lego Group has attempted to make family-friendly toys that do not encourage

violence or war. Lego's emphasis on family-friendly entertainment is one of the key

factors that separate the Lego video games from other adaptation games in the

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[8] www.lego.com
[9] Herman, *A Million Little Bricks*.
[10] Ibid.
[11] John Baichtal and Joe Meno, *The Cult of Lego* (San Francisco: No Starch Press, Inc, 2011).
[12] Sarah Herman, *A Million Little Bricks: The Unofficial Illustrated History of the Lego Phenomenon* (New York: Skyhorse, 2012), 5; John Baichtal and Joe Meno, *The Cult of Lego* (San Francisco: No Starch Press, Inc, 2011), 8.

marketplace. The Lego video games show the company's dedication to innovate by producing digital bricks instead of just the physical bricks. Lego has always shown an incredible ability to innovate and stay ahead of the trend curve without necessarily following the craze for popular toys.[13] Lego has concentrated on innovation rather than following other companies or trends.[14] When plastic just stared to be used in toy production in 1949, Lego had already purchased and had been developing a plastic toy line since 1947.[15] The Lego video games show the company's dedication to innovate to making digital bricks instead of just the physical bricks.

Research and development is an important arm of the company. Lego began by searching to create more than individual toys by developing an entire system of play that requires expansion through continued purchases. The system of play would promote extended play that encouraged imagination and thinking as well as requiring more toy sets to be purchased. The system of play continues into the Lego video games where an entire film franchises' geography is presented in a digital environment where buying the next Lego video game is similar to buying the new set of Lego toys. Since Lego's research and development division created the Lego wheel in 1961, the company did not license any toys or themes until the Star Wars theme in 1999.[16] Lego's thorough use of research and development to create intricate building sets are highlighted throughout the Lego adaptation video games. The digital environments presented in the games are based on the physical sets that Lego produces.

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[13] Herman, *A Million Little Bricks*, 5.
[14] Ibid.
[15] John Baichtal and Joe Meno, *The Cult of Lego.*
[16] Sarah Herman, *A Million Little Bricks,* 27; Baichtal and Meno, *The Cult of Lego, 219*.

When Lego's sales began to plateau in the early 1970s, the company revitalized its basic play town by developing and releasing its first miniature figures (minifig) to inhabit the Lego toy sets in 1974.[17] The minifig's final form, which is still the same today and serves as the characters in the Lego video games, was finished in 1978.[18] It would seem that just creating little, yellow characters would not do much, but it is just these kinds of changes that have allowed Lego to stay alive and profit by allowing its customers to build their own world. Minifigs are not only breathe life into Lego physical toy sets by allowing the Lego worlds to be inhabited, but they are one of the strongest Lego brand symbols in the Lego video game series. Players walk through the Lego environments as different minifigs that represent Indiana Jones, Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, Harry Potter, and Captain Jack Sparrow.

Other ways that Lego has innovated to stay fresh and expand the brand are with its themed sets. In 1962, Lego began creating themed sets with Lego Space.[19] Many other themed sets have come since Lego space (Lego Castle, Lego Pirates, Lego Train, and Lego Wild West). Most of the Lego sets that license franchise material are close to the themed sets Lego already produces.[20] *Lego Star Wars* is similar to Lego Space and Lego Pirates becomes the licensed *Lego Pirates of the Caribbean*. Lego's most successful themes have used other strategies to sell its sets of construction toys.

The Lego licensed themed sets began with *Lego Star Wars* in 1999.[21] Obtaining the rights from Lucas Licensing to produce Star Wars construction toys allows Lego to access the franchise's fan base. Even though Lego originally doubted licensing the

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[17] Sarah Herman, *A Million Little Bricks, 62.*
[18] Sarah Herman, *A Million Little Bricks, 62.*
[19] Ibid., 77; Baichtal and Meno, *The Cult of Lego*, 124-125
[20] Herman, *A Million Little Bricks*, 77.
[21] http://aboutus.lego.com/en-us/lego-group/the_lego_history/1990/

franchise because of the word war and went against its family-friendly entertainment policy, Lego refers to the Star Wars licensing as "co-branding as a year-on-year 'blockbuster success' and it continues to be one of its biggest sellers, especially in the United States."[22] *Lego Star Wars* success has given rise to many other licensed themes like *Lego Indiana Jones*, *Lego Harry Potter*, *Lego Batman*, and *Lego Lord of the Rings* all of which have become the licenses that the video games are based on.[23]

The Lego Group's bricks and system of play functioned well by themselves for many years, and a major question is why Lego began to use licensed themes after so many years of in-house production. The answer is profits.[24] In 1998, the Lego Group experienced its first deficit and wanted to profit from licensed themes, and Star Wars provided the perfect union to help Lego out of debt.[25] Derek Johnson suggests that the success with the physical Star Wars theme was strong enough that "Lego also pursued media licensing arrangements that allowed it to participate in the production of culture from media brands in film and comics."[26] Lego was interested more in licensing popular franchise material for its physical toy line than for video games, which is displayed by all of the Lego video games being based on financially successful toy sets. The successfully licensed construction toys have also opened up Lego for other licensed possibilities that can promote the physical toys and the original franchise material, which are licensed video games that use the Lego construction set as the basis for content and world building.

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[22] Baichtal and Meno, *The Cult of Lego,* 229
[23] Ibid., 232-247.
[24] Herman, *A Million Little Bricks*, 167.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 234.

According to Baichtal and Meno, "A primary reason for the Lego Group's involvement in the video-game industry is surely to sell its non-software products. Their licensed toy lines, notably Harry Potter, Batman, Indiana Jones, and Star Wars, all have corresponding video games."[27] The Lego video game releases have been extremely popular and many more are slated to be released in the future. Even if the Lego video games are simply promoting the physical toys sets, the Lego brand has crossed from just being a little, plastic construction block to a digital construction block. If Lego's brand is changing with the release of video games, there must also be a change in the media conglomerates licensing the films to Lego as well.

Warner Bros.

Warner Bros. has an established brand that goes back to when the film studio was founded. Warner Bros. expanded its brand from film into television in the 1950s, and in the 1970s and 1980s, Warner Bros., known as Warner Communication Inc, quickly expanded into many different facets of the entertainment industry by buying satellite companies, record labels, toy companies, cable companies, and a home video game company spreading the Warner brand.[28] In 1989, Warner merged with Time to create Time-Warner slightly changing the brand to more of a transindustrial conglomerate, and then again in 2001, Time-Warner merged with AOL to create a brand that included the synergy potential of the Internet.[29]

Warner has aggressively over-expanded in its history, which has hurt the company's brand leaving subsidiary companies no longer part of the Warner brand umbrella. Seeing how Warner has an established history of expanding its brand and

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[27] Baichtal and Meno, *The Cult of Lego*, 219
[28] Meehan, 50
[29] Hardy, 73-74.

business into areas other than film and television, the company moved to capitalize on the

console video game market as early as 1976.[30] The Warner brand has created a video

game division called Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment.[31] Under this title, Warner

Bros. owns six video game publishing/development companies, including the Lego video

game developer TT Games.

TT Games is a Warner Bros video game publishing/development company that

formed from a merger between Giant Entertainment and Traveller's Tales.[32] These

companies specialized in creating licensed video games mainly from Disney with games

adapted from *Toy Story*, *Finding Nemo*, *A Bug's Life,* and *Toy Story 2*. Warner bought

TT Games in 2007, and this division is the leading developer of games for the Interactive

Entertainment division at Time-Warner.[33] TT Games' first release was *Lego Star Wars*

produced in 2005, and TT Games has produced all of the Lego video games since.

The Warner brand has changed over the years to include more and more different

media. The company may have had setbacks in its history, but through constant

acquisitions and mergers it has grown. After the Time merger, Meehan states, "The

major difference between the independent WCI and the new Time-Warner is a difference

in size, not in kind."[34] Warner Bros. is still a media conglomerate that acquires the

companies it needs to make money and expand its brand. There is still a strong film,

television, and print publishing aspect to the company. Hardy states, Time Warner seeks

to package and promote their entertainment products across the fullest range of media

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[30] Ibid;
[31] David Adams, "Warner Bros. Opens Games Divison," *IGN Online*, January 14, 2004. Accessed April 24, 2013. http://www.ign.com/articles/2004/01/14/warner-bros-opens-games-division.
[32] http://www.ttgames.com/history/; http://www.mobygames.com/company/tt-games-ltd.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Meehan, 50

platforms."[35] It is clear from the company's history that Warner Bros. strives to extend

its brand through many methods of licensing. The statement clearly divulges that the

company will license its material to gain brand exposure and profit. The iconic franchise

material that Warner holds the rights to is going to be high on the list for licensing due to

its already profitable status as a film, television, animated product, or comic book media

conglomerate. Warner Bros. and its TT games division has already licensed four media

franchises with the Lego (DC Comics including Superman, Batman, Harry Potter, and

Lord of the Rings) in the hopes of profiting from merchandising its products, distributing

the material in a new form, and reaching a global audience in a new way.

Warner Bros. is a company that has learned the game of synergy well. Meehan

points out in her study of the 1989 *Batman* that Warner quickly found that film

soundtracks were a great source of repackaging the same content for profits.[36] An artist

signed to Warner Records would record tracks for the soundtrack, then parts of the film

would be included for the music video, the artist's album could be sold separately from

the soundtrack, and the artist would be included as part of the advertising campaign for

the film.[37] This process allows Warner to capitalize on one product as many times as it is

able to. Although Warner Music Group is no longer part of the company, the process that

started with soundtracks has continued with Warner licensing film content to video

games. Although Warner Bros. attempts to expand its brand every chance it gets, do the

other Lego collaborators follow the same corporate patterns?

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[35] Jonathan Hardy, *Cross-Media Promotion* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), 85.
[36] Meehan, 51
[37] Ibid, 52

Disney

Disney's brand comes from its long history of making children's media. Disney considers its start as October 16, 1923 as The Disney Bros. Studio.[38] The company's logo is the mouse ears based on its character from a 1928 cartoon short. The mouse ears are arguably one of the most recognizable logos for any company in the world, and continue to invoke the brand's identity as a children's animated film creator. Disney has many business interests and has several brand images including the full-length, animated movie, theme parks, and producing fairy-tale dreams like being a princess. Disney is also known from a heavy-handed control of its catalog and intellectual property, known as the vault. Disney only releases titles from its classic catalog in cycles, which creates a demand for the films and media products. It is interesting that Disney, a children's entertainment company, would co-brand video games with Lego given its heavy-handed control of its media properties, but as Johnson states, "even conglomerates like Disney and Time Warner enter into contractual agreements with independent parties seeking mutual beneficence."[39]

Just as Warner Bros. has expanded its brand, Disney has always forwarded its brand by adding more media channels and holding.[40] From the 1930s to present day, Disney has expanded its company and brand by either starting media outlets (print, radio, television/cable channels, film studios, video games, and Internet) or by buying companies that carry or produce brands that Disney wants (The Muppets, ABC, Pixar,

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[38] http://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about-disney/Disney-history
[39] Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 43.
[40] Janet Wasko, "Challenging Disney Myths," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 25 no.3 (2001): 237-257.

Marvel Comics, Miramax, and Lucas Films).[41] The Disney Company is a media

conglomerate that engages in business as a corporation regardless of its popular image as

a children's entertainment company.[42] Disney is a media conglomerate with holdings

spread horizontally, and extending and maintaining its brand is an important aspect of

providing its stockholders with profits.

Disney has a strong brand that is associated with children's entertainment. The

company is a major media conglomerate owning media production, television and radio

broadcasting, film studios, record labels, cable networks, and video game publishers.

Levine points out that Disney struggles to keep its brand consistent with its wide array of

divisions and daughter companies.[43] Disney segregates its business into categories:

Media networks, parks and resorts, studio entertainment, consumer products, and

interactive media. Johnson explains that each Disney division connects to the company's

intellectual properties in the hopes of extending the brand and creating new licensing

positions.[44] It is apparent that licensing and merchandise are an important aspect to

extending Disney's brand. This segment of the business is also going to work closely

with the Disney Interactive portion of the company to guarantee the brand is being

presented properly with any game produced either in-house or by a licensee. Disney's

ever expanding business practices, children's entertainment brand image, and its

commitment to licensing make it the perfect company to join with Lego in the video

game market regardless of its heavy-handed control of its media properties.

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Elana Levine, "Fractured Fairy Tales and Fragmented Markets: Disney's Weddings of a Lifetime and the Cultural Politics of Media Conglomeration," *Television and New Media*, 6 no. 1 (2005): 71-88.
[44] Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 42.

Disney and Lego have similar brand images and service a similar target market. Disney could release games based on its media franchises, but the Lego video game that Disney has licensed is *Lego Pirates of the Caribbean*, which is a live action movie. With a live-action film, the translation to a cartoon-style Lego format using the minifig toys may target a child audience better than a traditional adaptation video game with realistic character representation that would emphasize action and a narrative path that only follows the film's plot. Disney has already outsourced adaptation video games to TT Games, which produces all of the Lego video games, so the format of the Lego video games is ready and waiting to insert Disney's franchise material.

Lucas Films/ Lucas Arts

Lucas Arts is a division of Lucas Films that was originally started in 1982 as Lucas Films Games.[45] Lucas Arts is the division that develops and publishes the entertainment software for video games on consoles, computers, mobile devices, and the Internet. This division produces the games and expands the Lucas brand considerably, but Lucas Films and another division, Lucas Licensing, are where the Lucas brand truly lies.

Lucas Films started in 1971 when George Lucas released *THX 1138*, but the Lucas brand really developed with the release of the first *Star Wars* film in 1977. The *Star Wars* trilogies are the most significant properties that Lucas Films has produced, and the company concentrates a majority of its time and energy maintaining and expanding this brand. The Indiana Jones franchise is a far second in terms of brand management for Lucas Films. The amount of licensing and associated products for these two franchises displays where Lucas Films interests lie in terms of franchise management. For the rest

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[45] http://www.mobygames.com/company/lucasarts

of Lucas Films, research and development is an important aspect of the company.

Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) and Skywalker Sound are two divisions of Lucas Films

that have pushed visual and audio effects not only through Lucas Films' movies, but also

in many other films, television shows and games as well.[46] Star Wars is the obvious

aspect of the brand that Lucas Films is associated with, but technology is another

extremely important aspect of the company's brand.

In much the same way Disney is mainly associated with children's entertainment,

Lucas is connected to the Star Wars franchise. Lucas Licensing expands the Star Wars

brand through "toys, publishing, apparel, consumer electronics, house wares, and even

the symphonic *Star Wars in Concert*."[47] Lucas Licensing claims that it has over $20

billion in consumer sales worldwide with the best selling boys' toy line of all time.[48]

Referring to licensed products, Ian Bogost states, "Following the strategy that made

George Lucas a billionaire, Hollywood producers and studios now plan their

development in terms of properties and franchises – long-term intellectual property

conglomerates that exploited simultaneously in film, television, videogames, consumer

products, comic books, and any other medium the public will purchase."[49] Lucas knew

early in his filmmaking career that licensing and merchandising were an essential way of

expanding the brand. This is displayed by how early Lucas Licensing was formed, and to

reinforce Lucas' thinking on licensing he stated in a 1971 interview that aired on public

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[46] http://www.imdb.com/company/co0072003/?ref_=fn_al-co_1;
http://www.imdb.com/company/co0072491/ef_=ttcoco1.
[47] Elizabeth Guider, "Mipcom will put spotlight on Licensing: Warner, Lucasfilm Execs to Deliver
Keynote," *Variety Online*, September 20, 2005. Accessed April 23, 2013.
http://variety.com/2005/more/news/mipcom-will-put-spotlight-on-licensing-1117929351.
[48] http://www.lucasfilm.com/division/licensing
[49] Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 174.

television "I like being thought of as a toymaker who makes film."[50] The licensing of

Star Wars toys has been a huge part of the Lucas franchise system, and it has been a

model for many other film franchises that have come after Star Wars.

The Star Wars licensing goes far beyond any other franchise that came before it,

and every film/media franchise that has come since has tried to duplicate its success.

Jenkins suggests that one of Lucas' innovations in toy licensing came from making toys

based on as many secondary character possible, allowing the narrative universe to grow

through children's play with the toys.[51] The brand expansion comes from the children

experiencing and continuing the story of Star Wars through licensed products, which is

referring to physical, licensed toys in this regard, but includes video games as well.

The Lucas Arts division continues Lucas Licensing by expanding the brand

through interactive media. Lucas' Star Wars and Indiana Jones brands have been

continued through video games continuing the franchises after the films have ended and

continue to do so through the many gaming releases including the one co-branded with

Lego. There is a reason that expanding the franchises through video games is desirable

by Lucas Films. The head of Lucas Licensing Howard Roffman states, "Video games are

an indispensable way of engaging people today. People spend two hours at a movie

theater watching a movie, but with a video game, they are spending 10, 20, 30 hours."[52]

Developing a game with franchise material allows Lucas Arts, Disney, or Warner Bros.

to not only expand their brands through products, but to increase the interaction time with

the consumer many times over with every game release.

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[50] http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1312630/news; Peter Martin, "Watch This: Rare 1971 George Lucas Interview, Cinematical, June 22, 2009. Accessed 3/25/2013.

[51] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 117.

[52] Tony Lisanti, "Star Wars' 30th Anniversary" *Global License!* 10 no. 12 (January 2008), 31.

Lucas Arts has extended the Star Wars brand with over 70 video game releases on consoles dating back to the Nintendo Entertainment System. These games far outnumber the number of movies that Lucas Films has released and shows where the brand puts its own emphasis. The Indian Jones film franchise only provides the extra brand presence of 10 video game titles from Lucas Arts in the same period. The Lego video game releases become important in this regard because these games are reaching a mass market as family products for Star Wars and Indiana Jones rather than targeting only the Star Wars audiences that are gamers. The demand for Star Wars products makes the franchise a priority for the entire Lucas Company. The two major brand aspects for Lucas are the emphasis on technological innovation and the Star Wars series. With this extremely narrow brand scope and image regardless of the size, Lucas Films differs from Warner Bros., but Disney's is now extremely similar.

Combining the Brands

The three conglomerates that license franchise material to Lego would now be working closely together. Disney now owns Lucas Films, and the Lucas Arts division has been closed down in favor of licensing out the franchise material, which becomes an important issue for future Lego video games.[53] Warner Bros. owns TT Games who has developed and co-published all the Lego video game releases. The Lego video game series is a meeting point of cross-promotional strategies between at least two and sometimes three different major brands. Lego provides the aesthetic environment for the video games, Warner Bros. has been integrated into the all of the games through the publishing/development company TT Games since 2007, and Disney and Lucas are now

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[53] Marc Graser, "Disney Buys Lucas Film, New 'Star Wars' Planned," *Variety Online*, October 30, 2012. http://variety.com/2012/film/news/disney-buys-lucasfilm-new-star-wars-planned-1118061434; http://gameinformer.com/b/news/archive/2013/04/03/disney-closes-game-publisher-lucasarts.aspx.

one entity as of late 2012. Therefore, in any future games based on Disney or Lucas Films material, Warner Bros., Disney, and Lego are all part of one release culminating in brand exposure for every party involved. The question that still remains to be seen is why Lego and not another toy company.

The Conglomerates with Lego

Each Lego video game release is based on a Lego physical toy set that has been licensed. It is apparent from viewing each of the conglomerates that spreading their brands through licensed merchandise is a crucial part of each of the companies' business strategies. Lucas Film/Arts set the model for toy licensing, and in 1999 signed a deal with Lego to produce "construction toys," but Hasbro has the license for almost every other toy and game with the Star Wars logo.[54] Disney and Warner Bros. have made similar deals with Lego. The Lego brand offers something that is different from any other toy company with products that have a long history of fostering creativity and motor skills, having a family-friendly mission, and has successfully used a transmedia campaign.[55] To reinforce the developmental and educational aspect of the brand, Lego has a section of company website "for parents." The "for parents" section includes literature and expectation for each developmental age of a child's life and of course, the associated Lego toys that would best fit the child's abilities at that age.[56] An example would be that minifigs are typically meant for children over seven years of age. Different themed sets have different age ranges.

In the press releases from Lucas Arts and Warner Bros., Lego is a compelling company to co-brand with because of the extensive environment that Lego construction

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[54] http://www.hasbro.com/starwars/en_US/

[55] Herman, *A Million Little Bricks*, 174.

[56] http://parents.lego.com/en-us/default.aspx.

toys allows kids or anyone else to build. Warner Bros.' press release on the *Lego Batman*
give precedent to the spatial environment in the game stating "From the rooftops to the
sewers, players will experience Gotham City like never before."[57] Lucas Arts chose to
focus on the environmental construction and manipulation in *Lego Indiana Jones: The
Original Adventure* stating, "Parents will enjoy the humorous take on the classic
moments from their favorite movies, and their kids have an opportunity to experience the
most authentic LEGO experience by building their own fun levels brick by brick."[58]
Using Lego bricks as the digital environment allows more than just simulated use of the
licensed toys in the video game, but the ability to manipulate the environment as players
progress through the game.

Lego's strength is that its little bricks can be built into anything, and the co-
branded video games take full advantage of this dynamic possibility. Mattel and Hasbro
do not have this freedom in their prefabricated, licensed toys. There may also be one
major factor that could give Lego an advantage over either Mattel or Hasbro, the
BIONICLE line of toys. Synergy and transmedia storytelling are buzzwords and major
business practices in the industry, and Lego accomplished both of these things
successfully with the BIONICLE line.[59] The Lego brand allows a fluid exchange of
construction possibilities that build on top of the licensed themes from the other
collaborating companies. The media conglomerates that are licensing the films to Lego
allow the video games to make the material more family friendly in an attempt to keep

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[57] Warner Bros., "Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment And TT Games Launch Lego® Batman™: The
Videogame," Press release,
http://www2.warnerbros.com/web/corpcomm/portal/press_release.jsp?id=LegoBatmanThe, September 23,
2008.
[58] Lucas Online, "LEGO® Indiana Jones™ Whips Up a New Adventure," press release, May 29, 2009,
http://www.lucasarts.com/company/release/news20090529.html.
[59] Herman, *A Million Little Bricks*, 174.

the co-branding strategy targeted at a younger demographic. Johnson puts forth that media conglomerates sell or share franchise material, but "the shared intellectual property does not come with a complete recipe for its use: the franchise producer must figure out what to do with it within the bounds allowed, and how to make that use sufficiently differentiable to find a market."[60] Lego, who is giving up the free some of the creativity usually associated with its toys, accomplishes what Johnson mentions and benefits from these games in a few ways: first, Lego is allowed to spread its brand through a new medium that it does not specialize in. Second, the video games advertise through product placement and digital simulation the Lego physical toy sets. Third, the Lego Group makes enormous profits from these video games and the associated physical toy sets.[61] The Lego Group struggled to make profits in 1998 and again in 2003 and 2004, which resulted in Lego selling most of its Legoland theme parks to The Merlin Entertainment Group. The financial payoff is an incentive to continue the licensed themed toy sets and video games.

Target Audience

Lego, Warner Bros., Lucas Arts, and Disney all stress that these video games are meant for family fun, which is an extremely broad target audience compared with many video games in the market.[62] The actual target audience(s) can be narrowed considerably, but with some caveats. These games will have two target audiences with one being the parents with the income to purchase the games and the second is the children who are exerting the spending power through their parents. The Entertainment

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[60] Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 41.
[61] Ibid; Baichtal and Meno, *The Cult of Lego, 8.*
[62] In press releases and on the web sites for the games each company stresses the family aspects of these games.

Software Ratings Board (ESRB) ratings are one way to narrow the audience down. All of the Lego licensed games have an "E for everyone 10+," which according to the ESRB means, "The content is generally suitable for ages 10 and up. May contain cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes."[63] In addition to the ESRB ratings, the Lego website actually puts the recommended age of the players over eight years of age under the product information.[64] The Lego recommended age and the ESRB ratings suggest that these games' main target audience is going to be 8-10 year old children with the parents of these children being a secondary audience. As in Ellen Seiter's *Sold Separately*, the parents are sold educational and "safe" toys from a parenting perspective and the toys act as a "badge" of status to children.[65]

Another target audience for many of these games is the brand loyal fans of each franchise. It is understood that Star Wars fans would want to play a light-hearted adaptation of their favorite film franchise. On the Lego message boards, it is not uncommon to see usernames with Star Wars references. On the *Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventure* game forum, one user went by the handle masterjedi1688.[66] This player's account shows that he or she also played and contributed to the *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga* game forum. The forum does not show the actual ages of the gamers playing any of the Lego video game releases, but it does show that a community does form around these games, and there is cross-over between the games, which indicates that many players are loyal to the Lego video game releases.

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[63] http://www.esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.jsp.
[64] http://shop.lego.com/en-US/
[65] Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately*: *Children and Parents in Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, 1993) 5.
[66] http://community.lego.com/t5/star-wars/bd-p/1028.

Another way that the players could be roughly identified may be determined by viewing the number of sales on each console system for each release. The Lego video games are generally released on every console and handheld system that is available at the time of release, and especially with the current generation of Playstation 3 (PS3), Xbox 360, and the Nintendo Wii, the system being played does suggest who is playing it to some degree. The PS3 and Xbox 360 tend to have more adolescent and young adult players who are male, and the Wii tends to have more females and younger children as its demographic.[67] According to a Nielsen study, the Wii appeals to boys 6-11 years of age, the Xbox 360 has the largest usage from boys 12-17, and the PS3 attracts males18-24 year olds.[68]

Looking at the sales of seven of the Lego video game releases does suggest the age and gender demographic that is playing the games.[69] According to VG Chartz, every Lego release has a fairly similar platform sales breakdown with minor changes.[70] The first indication that can be made from the sales numbers is that PS3 does not sell the Lego titles as well as the other two systems. Of the seven games, The Wii had higher sales for the Star Wars, both Harry Potter games, and the second Indiana Jones video games. The Xbox 360 was the more popular platform for both *Lego Batman 1 and 2* games and *Lego Indian Jones: The Original Adventure* releases, while the Wii version of the *Lego Star Wars*, *Lego Indiana Jones: The adventure continues*, and *Lego Harry Potter Years 1-4*

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[67] Dave Patrick, "Nielsen Games: Wii a Good fit for Women," *AdWeek*, February 19, 2009. http://AdWeek.com/news/technology/nielsen-games-wiis-good-fit-women-111420; "Every Gaming System Has its Fans, but Women Like Wii," *Nielsen Newswire*, February 19, 2009, http://nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2009/every-gaming-system-has-itsfans-but-women-like-wii.html.
[68] Ibid.
[69] I analyzed the sales numbers for the following game release on the Wii, Xbox 360, and the PS3. *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga, Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4, Lego Harry Potter: Years 5-7, Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures, Lego Indiana Jones: The Adventure Continues, Lego Batman, and Lego Batman 2*
[70] VG Chartz, "Game Database in Sales," http://www.vgchartz.com/gamedb.

and *5-7* was more popular.[71] While these sales figures and the Nielsen study are not

definitive, these things suggest that the Lego video games are targeted at and more

popular with a younger demographic of about six-thirteen year olds.

Lego and the collaborating companies all state that these games are family fun,

but in one press release by Lucas Arts on the *Lego Indiana Jones: The Original*

Adventures, the president of Lucas Arts stated, "Parents will enjoy the humorous take on

some of their favorite movies, and their kids get some rousing action/adventure gameplay

that may also introduce them to Indy's original adventures for the first time." This is a

key quote to understanding the intended target audience of the Lego video game releases.

Although Lego, Warner Bros., and Disney do not explicitly state it, these games are

meant to get children into the licensing franchises, while using the family-friendly Lego

brand to help make parents feel comfortable about buying these games. By carrying the

licensed content, Lego is allowed to sell its own products and the conglomerates'

franchise material creating a mutually agreeable collaboration where both products

support each other. Combining this statement with the age range Lego web site

recommends on the web site, the ESRB rating, and the sales figures, the Lego video game

are targeting young children.

<div style="text-align:center">*The Lego Video Games as Cross-promotional Products*</div>

Typically, movie-game tie-ins are not successful critically, but may capitalize on

the film's popularity by selling well.[72] Brown and Krzywinska state, "The crossover

potential for exciting, innovative adaptations of movies into games does exist, but in a

hit-driven business like the games industry the stakes are so high that few companies are

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Douglas Brown and Tanya Krzywinska, "Movie-games and Game-movies: Toward an aesthetic of Transmediality," in Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies, (New York: Routledge, 2009) 89.

really willing to gamble on a movie license which may have been expensive in and of itself."[73] The gamble that Brown and Krzywinska are referring to is between either releasing an underdeveloped licensed game in the window that the hype and advertising from the film provides or creating an intricate, well-developed video game that accomplishes more than a regurgitation of the film without the assistance of the film's advertising campaign. Although, there may be exceptions to the rules that have been outlined, and the Lego video games do seem to be licensing franchise material and creating quality products that are well received.

Bogost asserts that "Video games must necessarily operationalize a licensed property in new ways; unlike a branded lunchbox or t-shirt, a videogame has to allow the player to do something meaningful inside the interpretation."[74] The experience that accompanies video game licensing is different from other licensed products. Jenkins asserts that the spaces that are inhabited in an adapted video game allow the player to interactively explore spaces that film, television, and book narratives do not allow.[75] The spatial exploration of narrative space in video games is one aspect that games offer that other media do not, and it creates a new way of experiencing the intellectual property that is licensed.

All of the Lego video game releases adapt or build on existing film/media franchises, which makes these games part of the franchises themselves. All of the media franchises that co-brand with Lego to make these video games are quite popular, but the films are not the only component of a franchise that uses synergy. Eileen Meehan states

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Video Games* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007), 175.

[75] Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (MIT, 2004);

there is "a product line that extends beyond the theater, even beyond our contact with

mass media, to penetrate markets for toys, bedding, trinkets, cups, and other minutiae

comprising one's everyday life inside a commoditized, consumerized culture."[76] Meehan

is suggesting that the licensing and merchandising of Hollywood is ubiquitous in our

society and expands the films beyond the target audience. Meehan refers to the

synergistic process of moving the films' brand into other areas besides the screen as a

commercial intertext, which is essentially a text that refers to another text while spreading

across media outlets.[77] The Lego games function as commercial intertexts that expand

multiple brands across types of media at one time and refer back to an original source

text.

With the exception of *Lego Batman 1* and *2*, the Lego video games all adapt

films. The *Lego Batman* games are based on an original storyline, but the Batman

character has a long-standing history of different adaptations and transitions, which

would still make these games intertexts.[78] The commercial intertext is essential to the

cross-promotion because the intertext or spin-off product refers to and strengthens the

brand of the source text. The Lego games function as licensed products strengthening a

film's brand. It would seem that a video game release in 2008 may struggle at renewing

interest in a film from 1981, but if a new film in the franchise accompanies the video

game, a renewed interest in the 27-year-old film is possible.

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[76] Meehan, 49.
[77] Meehan, 58; Hardy, 71.
[78] Warner Bros., "Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment and TT Games Launch Lego Batman: The Video Game," Press Release September 23, 2008; Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012).
http://www2.warnerbros.com/web/corpcomm/portal/pree_release.jsp?id=LegoBatmanTheVideoGame.

The synergistic strategy of releasing several strongly branded products such as a film and video games together, allows media corporations to take full advantage of the hype and marketing of one product and spread it across several media outlets. In Kinder's terms, these games are part of a supersystem that is taking full advantage of the mania around franchise material.[79] Hardy states, "Synergy strategies require effort to impose unity onto production, licensing and marketing activities, by promoting and attempting to manage the symbolic as well as material properties of products, and the environments in which the brand is experienced."[80] The Lego games do have the unified brand of the films and characters, but they change the medium in which the material is presented altering whom the games are appealing to. The Lego adaptations and new material all promote the original franchises while opening up the environment to the Lego fans making the content more family friendly. The Lego games function as cross-promotion and recruiting material at the same time, but they do require some assistance from the franchise.

The original assumption that the Lego video games are released separately from the films they are based is not entirely correct. After researching the release dates and Lego company reports, these video games are usually released with the first one video game accompanying a film release for the same franchise. There are several examples of this in the Lego video game releases. For the *Star Wars* video games and films, the films were released in 1977, 1980, 1983, 1999, 2002, and 2005.[81] Only the first *Lego Star Wars* game accompanied the release of the last film in the franchise, and the game was released eleven days after the film, which means the game did not serve as a commercial

[79] Kinder, 122.
[80] Hardy, 75.
[81] www.imdb.com/find?q=Star+Wars&s=all.

or simple promotion preceding the film.[82] The video game was able to capitalize off the hype for the film and add something to the intertextuality of the films after the release of the film, especially since the first *Lego Star Wars* game dealt with the material from the final three movies in the franchise, one of which was still in theaters.

The other *Lego Star Wars* games were released without any film advertising support. The animated *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* feature that was released in theaters did not coincide with the Lego video game release of the *Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars*. With sales figures for the second *Lego Star Wars* video games, based on the original trilogy, at 7.19 million copies and the *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga* selling 13.27 million copies, the games must be able to succeed on their own.[83] They still serve as intertexts that are part of a cross-promotional system, but the video games have established brand recognition that continues Star Wars, while maintaining a type of independence at the same time. The Lego video games are not the only product that licenses Star Wars with books, television shows, comics, toys, and other video games also adding to the web of intertexts surrounding the franchise, but Star Wars as a franchise needs episodes and installments from video games and other media to not only recruit new consumers, but to keep dedicated fans interested in the franchise.

The *Lego Indiana Jones* games used a similar release to *Lego Star Wars* with the first game accompanying the fourth film in the series, but renewed interest in the earlier films may have resulted in the first three films in the franchise being adapted in the Lego video game. The second game followed in the same manner as the Star Wars series

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[82] www.mobygames.com/game/lego-star-wars-the-video-game.
[83] www.vgchartz.com/game/5269/lego-star-wars-ii-the-orinial-trilogy/;www.vgchartz.com/game/12477/lego-star-wars-the-complete-saga/

without a film release to bolster sales. The *Lego Batman* video games were both released to coincide with the major blockbuster films *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). The first *Lego Batman* was released after the film, but the second game preceded the Dark Knight Rises by eleven days. Considering the *Lego Batman* games provide an original story and are not adapting the film, it may seem that the game do not serve as cross promotional, but the Batman brand is still being expanded by the video games. The *Lego Pirates of the Caribbean* (2011) game coincided with the fourth film's theater run. The game was released 10 days after the film. *Lego Pirates of the Caribbean* follows the same trend that Star Wars and Indiana Jones had with the video game and film release. A later film in the franchise is released, the first Lego game is bolstered with the hype from a new film, and the film receives an additional promotional video game to extend the brand.

The Harry Potter series did not have to consider the release dates quite as much, since the series had a franchise film released with no more than two years between films since 2001. The Harry Potter hype has never really stopped with the release of both the books and the film receiving substantial advertising and marketing. The *Lego Harry Potter* games were both released six months from the nearest film releases, but this did not seem to hurt the video games sales.

Reviewing the Lego Group's Annual Reports from 1999-2012, the years that the company did not do as well were years that the licensed theme sets have suffered. The Lego Group's 2003 Annual Report indicates the company's expectations without any movie hype stating "Sales of movie tie-in products developed unsatisfactorily. Interest in the Star Wars range and, to an even greater extent, the Harry Potter series –the 2002 top

seller – fell below expectation in a year without new movie releases."[84] This quote is about the physical toy sets, but video games are included in the yearly expectations regarding sales. In the 2006 Annual Report, Lego stated, "Sales of licensed products are expected to decrease further in the coming year, as no film-supported product launches will take place in 2007."[85] This is a telling fact with the Lego Group's licensed products. Since 1999, the company has counted on the sales of themed toy sets. The years that the licensed material did not receive extra marketing and advertising from a film release were the times Lego suffered the most. Lego does seem to have broken out of this trend with the Lego video game releases. This could be from consumers forming brand loyalty to the Lego video games, which is essentially making the Lego video game series into its own franchise. The video game releases do not seem to follow the associated film's theater run after the first video game release.

The Lego video games are definitely cross-promotional for Lego. Referring to the Baichtal and Meno statement mentioned earlier, Lego uses the video games to sell its physical toys sets, which are still the company's main focus as a producer of toys.[86] Whether the games are successful or not, Lego's brand and its toys are being promoted with the video games. The simulated use of Lego blocks and minifigs in the video games relay the experience of playing with these toys. To the collaborating media conglomerates, the Lego video games open up franchise material to new and returning consumers, spread the brand through the video game medium, and allow sometimes-questionable material to reach further than it normally would with the "safe" Lego brand attached.

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[84] The Lego Group, *Annual Report 2003*, (Billund, Denmark: Lego Group, 2003) 3.
[85] The Lego Group, *Annual Report 2006*, (Billund, Denmark: Lego Group, 2006) 33.
[86] Baichtal and Meno, *The Cult of Lego*, 219.

In conclusion, the Lego video games are the product of co-branding strategies between Lego and media conglomerates. This co-branding strategy allows Lego to develop a major brand presence in the new medium of video games and to promote its physical toy lines that the games environment and characters use as models. Lego is a company that has a safe and reliable brand that makes family-friendly toys. This brand allows the media conglomerates to expose a young target audience to the popular franchise. Each media conglomerate that co-brands with Lego has its own agenda in licensing and merchandising, and the Lego video games allow a mutual fulfilling of these goals for each company. The media conglomerates allow the franchise material to be cleaned-up so that they can collaborate with Lego and make games that can reach a younger demographic. Lego has relied on the profits from licensed physical toys sets and the move into the medium of video games can only expand the company's market share further.

The Lego video game releases are more than just adaptations, movie tie-ins, or spin-offs; these texts allow the players access to the narrative universes, manipulate the gaming environment, and add small additions to the franchise all while being cross-promotional products. These video games function as cross-promotional products that bolster all of the other products associated with each franchise. These games allow for the spatial exploration of narrative universes and also serve as paratexts that add to or change the meanings of the films to the audience. In the next chapter, I will be viewing these games from an audience address standpoint, which will shed light upon how these games fit into the contemporary market of video games.

Chapter 3 – The Lego Video Games and Discourses Around Their Use

What fan does not hope that a favorite character's back-story or next installment will be told in a new movie, comic, novel, or game? It seems as though the characters and plots we come to love as media consumers have a way of finding the light of day in one way, shape, or form in another mode of media. What does the audience think and feel when a title or character in a franchise does not meet the expectations from the original media form because the story changes or the beloved character does not make an appearance? Does the casual reader, viewer, or gamer throw the title away or does he or she come to at least appreciate and decode the new product in its own way? The Lego video games offer adaptations that allow the player to experience popular characters and stories in new ways.

This chapter will be considering how the Lego video games address the audience. The goal of researching this aspect of these video games is to understand the meanings audiences construct from these franchise extensions. I will argue that transmedia paratexts may further enhance the meaning-making process for the consumers of these video games. I will analyze how the Lego games compare to regular adaptation video games in hopes of shedding light upon what the Lego brand and the changes made to the material offer the collaborating franchises. This chapter will also consider how the Lego video games' cross-promotional status allows them to function as paratexts that position the audience for meaning construction. The final area of research in this chapter will be how the Lego video games recruit people into the licensing franchises, the Lego video game series, and video game playing.

All of the areas of study in this chapter have an interest in how different audiences view and respond to the Lego video games in hopes of finding the formula that makes these games successful to players in the current marketplace. In this chapter, I will argue that the Lego video games have grown out of being cross-promotional products and into their own franchise. The use of gaming magazine and user reviews will allow me to highlight the status of these games to the critics and the players. The meanings that are constructed around these cross-promotional, licensed video games leads to understanding the how franchises are extended through different modes of media, as well as allowing us to view how co-branding collaboration affects the consumers of these games.

Functioning as Part of a Transmedia System

Although the Lego video games do not fit into the industrial/media production definition of transmedia storytelling presented by Jenkins, these games do have many traits that allow them to function as transmedia products. Referring to Jenkins' "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" article, video game adaptations do have aspects of transmedia storytelling because they exist in dialogue with the films and offer the opportunity to explore and manipulate the environment. Transmedia storytelling allows the players to experience new layers of the story by exploring the narrative universe of each franchise. The addition of new layers is an important part of the Lego video game formula. The use of spatial exploration and especially environmental manipulation with Lego blocks allows the player to change the geographic design of the films' surroundings.

These games continue and change aspects of the films' plots in the translation to the video game medium. Video games have always had issues directly translating the

narratives from films. Kinder explained that a player should not to be disappointed by the differences in video game adaptations of films due to a lack of fidelity because the adaptations do not "exactly duplicate the film, but rather string together a series of arcade-type situations suggested by aspects of the story.[1] Since Kinder's writing in 1991, video game technology has become better at translating film content, and the extra challenges and spatial exploration involved in many games allows adaptation video games to function as transmedia.

The Lego games provide unique entry points into their associated franchises, which is a key feature to transmedia storytelling. With the accuracy of the Lego video games adaptations, anyone can play the games and understand the plot development of the translated film. Kinder explains that most video game adaptations "manage to preserve something of the excitement of the movie, but the connection mainly serves as a pretext for a long series of challenges and difficulties," which limits a game's ability to function as an entry point because nothing new is added.[2] The adaptation can only function as an entry point for a franchise if there is narrative fidelity with other franchise products. The Lego games' ability to convey a franchise's plot and build on the existing material indicates the transmedia storytelling potential of these titles. Many other licensed, adaptation video games still stray from a film's plot in favor of action sequences to profit from a blockbuster film's advertising window. *Spiderman 3: The Official Video Game* is an example of this type of game. The film's plot elements hardly make it into

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[1] Marsha Kinder, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Game: From Muppets Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 95.
[2] Ibid.

the game, but the game sold well, which Brown and Krzywinska point out regarding

lower quality games making money due to the hype surrounding a blockbuster.[3]

Even though the Lego games offer entry points into the franchises, provide some

new contributions mainly through spatial exploration, and are synergistic, it is not enough

to have these games fit into a transmedia system as presented by Jenkins. Transmedia

storytelling allows these games to be viewed as cross-promotional media products in

popular franchises, but it limits being able to view these games in other ways. The

complication is that the Lego video games do act as more than simple cross-promotional

products. These games allow players to manipulate the environment through building

with Lego blocks, which does add a new dimension to the franchise material. Altering

the geography of the Death Star, Hogwarts Castle, or the Holy Grail cave changes the

original franchise films' content. These games convey the films' plot to players without

any prior knowledge of the films, and they do this using non-realistic, human

representation. The Lego video games' web sites stress that the player has the ability to

explore the world of the characters in the video games, which is a key aspect to Jenkins'

environmental storytelling.[4] The Lego video games are taking past and current media

franchises and repackaging them into successful games that do not necessarily need a

blockbuster-advertising window to succeed. Typically adaptation video games are

concentrating on action that is not based on the film, making Indians Jones or Harry

Potter look as much like the actors as possible, and quickly developing the games to meet

a deadline, the Lego video games accurately translate the films in a different medium, use

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[3] http://www.mobygames.com/game/spider-man-3
[4] http://videogames.lego.com/

Lego minifigs to represent the characters, and produce video games that are well received by the players.

A key issue with analyzing the Lego video games through a transmedia lens is the audience. Whether media conglomerates release titles as part of commercial advertising strategy, consumers desire additions to their favorite media franchises. Returning to a narrative universe that a person loves applies to every medium (as long as the additions have fidelity and are well made). There are consumers of films that desire media companies to produce sequels, prequels, spin-offs, and reboots for many of the franchise that have collaborated with Lego. As I am writing, there is a clamor for a seventh installment of the Star Wars film series. Popular video game series such *Resident Evil*, *Halo*, and *Call of Duty* continue to have new games released. Many comic books have multiple series or versions, and television shows have spin-offs and continuing series. In every case listed above, there are also translations that move the franchise material from one medium to another. As media conglomerates release cross-promotional products, audiences continue to consume these adaptations, continuations, and translations. In Jenkins' transmedia system, the audience members have the ability to "dig as deep" as they like for all of the story, but to completely understand the entire narrative, every media outlet's contribution to the system has to be consumed. The Lego video games' openness in exploration and character development provide enough freedom for the players to build new narrative possibilities into the franchise material.

Even though Jenkins' criteria claim that each episode of a transmedia franchise should be able to stand on its own, it is unlikely that people would hunt and gather for the media outlets they do not normally use, which does fit the "dig as deep as you wish"

aspect of transmedia. The Lego video games are a middle ground for the people who might not play video games. The Lego adaptations translate the story of each franchise without dialogue, which provides the potential for people to build in new narrative aspects for themselves. In the case of a series such as Star Wars, many devout fans want to chase down every game or product that fills in narrative and character information, but Lucas created a major interest in the secondary characters of this franchise with toy licensing.[5] In a franchise like the Matrix, many fans may not get the comic books or play *The Matrix Online*, which does not even consider that people who have not seen the films are less likely to engage with the transmedia material. *The Matrix Online* is a specific type of transmedia game that contains a side story that is crucial to understanding the plot of the second and third films.[6] The Lego video games function as adaptations that offer the same story in a new, humorous way, but the material is still similar enough to the original requiring no additional information for the films or the games to be understood. The target audiences for both of these types of transmedia games are different.

The Matrix Online has a very slim chance of being played by someone that has not seen the films because a majority of the fiction found in the franchise is placed in the films, whereas prior knowledge of the films is not a necessity for the Lego video game players. The Lego video games license franchise material that appeals to a mass audience, and with co-branding with Lego, These games appeal to a broad audience. In a transmedia franchise or any franchise, there is a hierarchy that creates a primary text. Usually this would be the first media product that appears in a franchise. The first *Matrix* film would be the primary text because it was the primary source of information for the

[5] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 176; Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 117.
[6] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

franchise, and all of the other products in the system are secondary texts that support the film's narrative content. The other texts and products fill in the narrative universe. The Star Wars franchise is definitely built around the films. The Harry Potter franchise differs depending on whether the books or films were consumed first, but the films would generally be considered secondary texts being adaptations of the books. The Matrix and Star Wars examples point to secondary texts not being able to stand on their own without a primary text to hold up the franchise, while the Harry Potter example displays how adaptations present the original material in different ways instead of concentrating on ancillary material.

The goal here is not to completely discredit Jenkins' transmedia storytelling model. His model spoke to a very specific moment dealing with the potential of convergence. It seems logical to use other tools (paratexts) at our disposal to make a more viable model that includes more franchises since the content is already being sold to audiences in a cross-promotional system. Using Jonathan Gray's notion of paratexts may be a way to build upon transmedia storytelling to create a better model for realistically viewing franchise material and the Lego video games.

Adapting Transmedia with Paratexts

This study focuses more on Gray's notion of paratexts as a way to view these texts. The meaning construction allowed by paratexts is more inclusive in this area than it is with transmedia. Individual consumers are able to use their own imagination to internalize cross-promotional franchise products more freely than in the episodic fiction that is spread across various media platforms in a transmedia system. Gray sees cross-promotional products and advertising as an important part of consumers' meaning

making processes. His entryway and in media res paratexts explain that different

promotional products situate the audience to understand or decode a primary text.[7]

Entryway paratexts condition audiences on how to "read" or decode a text before it is

encountered, and in media res paratexts are those texts that affect how a work is "read" or

decoded during or after the consumption of a text.[8] There is an interesting connection

that is created with a paratextual system that is not quite the same with transmedia; the

texts of a franchise are connected in the consumers' minds as opposed to specific

narrative connections. Using paratexts to study franchises allows much more analytical

freedom for individuals to connect the strands of intertexts that form the web Meehan

speaks about with cross-promotion. With transmedia storytelling, a very specific

narrative, world-building connection is made between the different franchise products.

Each product contains new integral information that is co-created and not licensed. In a

paratextual system, a licensed product that adapts another medium's product can still

have important meaning construction value for the audience.

Gray uses *The Simpsons Hit and Run* to illustrate how an associated video game

can offer more information than a full episode of the show.[9] A paratextual system allows

an audience member to take the Simpsons video game and use it to inform his or her

understanding of the show's universe, or use a t-shirt to understand Bart's statements.

Paratexts open up a cross-promotional strategy, transmedia or not, to a meaning-making

system for the audience. Cross-promotion and synergy are typically viewed as potential

strategies for the industrial/production side of media, but if audience members are

embracing the licensing of media material because cultural meaning is being produced, a

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[7] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*
[8] Ibid., 40.
[9] Ibid.

mutual system of understanding is formed. Once again, Lucas Films and Star Wars set the standard for an example. When Lucas started licensing and producing toys based on so many secondary characters, the fans playing with toys could construct new meanings regarding the films based on the new information about the extra characters.[10]

Paratexts have another potential over transmedia in regards to primary texts. In a paratextual system, a primary text is usually established, but with adaptations, the primary text can shift significantly and change depending on user preference. A paratextual system sees the potential that adaptations hold in the process of constructing meaning around a franchise's properties. The Harry Potter franchise is an excellent example of this paratextual relationship. The novels are obviously the first or primary texts for the franchise chronologically. The films are paratexts for the novels, unless an audience member views the films before reading the novels. The paratextual relationship shifts depending on which work is consumed first. The primary text can change in this model, where reading the novels after watching the films could function as either changing the primary text or serve as a paratext that re-situates the audience to understand the films differently. If a person plays the games before reading the novels or watching the films, the games are the primary text conveying the narrative. Gray's statement on adaptation is "for players who do know the film or program, of course, this will be their de facto experience of the game."[11] Adaptations allow for expansion of meaning from one medium to another. Reading, watching, and playing the seven (eight for the films) *Harry Potter* installments offer different aspects of the main story of Harry.

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[10] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*; Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.
[11] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 192.

The paratextual system does not put emphasis on primary or secondary texts (or adaptations) over the other.

Video games have enormous potential in the paratextual system because the narrative world can be explored spatially. *The Simpsons Hit and Run* shows us Springfield in a way the television show never could.[12] Jenkins puts emphasis on spatial exploration as well in "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," but he seems to change his thinking in *Convergence Culture*. The audience's paratextual connection between the films and the games does not require a new narrative or even a massive reboot for meaning construction. Adaptation video games offer a similar experience through a different medium, but besides the issues with translation, the regurgitation of material influences and situates the primary text differently in the minds of the people consuming the games. Adaptations become complicated when the target audience is different from the original one that consumed the primary text. Think of first *Star Wars* trilogy, the original three *Indiana Jones* films, and the *Batman* movies and television show before Nolan's reboot while considering someone born in 2001 or later. These films preceded these children by up to 20 years, and the video game adaptations are not so much of regurgitation to this demographic as new material that will truly affect how the films are eventually consumed.

The Lego video games can essentially provide the de facto experience of a franchise to a young demographic by relaying almost all of a film series plot in one video game. The *Lego Star Wars* games each contained a trilogy in one video game release. *Lego Star Wars* released in 2005 was the fourth, fifth, and sixth film in one video game's content. The *Lego Star Wars: The Original Trilogy* was covered in the second release,

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[12] Ibid.

and *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga* contained all six films in the content of one video game. *Lego Indian Jones* followed the same pattern with the original trilogy being released in one video game. *Lego Harry Potter* separated the seven book installments of the series into two releases *Lego Harry Potter 1-4* and *Lego Harry Potter 5-7*. For children who have not seen these movies, an entire film series can be consumed in one or two Lego video game, which has the potential to greatly affect how these children are situated for the actual franchise material. Like a movie trailer that is edited to convey a different tone and plot, the Lego video games alter dark and violent material while focusing on problem solving, which as a paratext, alters how the audience is positioned by the games to make sense of the films' meaning.

As an example, one player named Marioboy333, posted on a *Lego Indian Jones: The Original Adventure* game forum that "If you have not seen the 3 movies U can still get an overview of it in the game…Though there is no dialogue u can still pick up what's happening…also there is no game over. Which gives you a lot of trys."[13] This quote indicated that a player, who has gotten his or her primary information on the Indiana Jones series from the Lego video game, is situating his or her understanding of the movies on the family-friendly version of the franchise. He or she has a certain expectation of the films now that he or she has played the game, and as of the posting, this person's primary text for the Indiana Jones franchise is the video game. The player does not necessarily see Harrison Ford, Sean Connery, or Karen Allen as their respective characters in the film. This player has a round-headed minifig with stubble and a whip representing Indiana Jones. This example displays that the order of consumption can

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[13] Marioboy333, "This game with so many puzzles is a success," Gamespot Forum on Lego Indian Jones: The Original Adventure, posted January 17, 2009, accessed March 28, 2013.

change how video games can function as paratexts or as primary text (that have the ability to shift).

<p style="text-align:center">How The Lego Games Are Different</p>

The Lego games do many things differently from a majority current video games on the market. While there are a vast number of licensed video games based on children's media, the Lego games are adapting a great number of older and darker films than most other games marketed toward children. The Lego video games are adhering to Lego abhorrence of war toys and violence by not having death in the video games and handling darker material with humor. Most other licensed video games attempt to recreate the tone of the original film as close as possible to capture the same excitement.[14] The Lego video games concentrate on making the licensed material family friendly and put emphasis on building solutions to problems and puzzles. This includes playing as different characters and using their individual attributes. *GamePro's* review of *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy* stated, "The most enchanting aspect of this Lego universe is the charming sense of lighthearted humor that's slathered onto everything. Characters just don't die, they explode bloodlessly into their component parts, and the injection of genuinely funny slap-stick silliness into classic and deadly serious Star Wars scenes means that these recreations are anything but dry recaps."[15] These adaptation video games accomplish more than simple cross-promotion by taking on a life of their own.

The *Lego Star Wars* games may bend the original material more than the other video games. The Star Wars franchise has many adapted video games and spin-off

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[14] Marsha Kinder, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

[15] *Gamepro* Staff, "Review *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy*: Keep Your Inner Child Happy," *AmiPro Online*, September 9, 2006. Accessed April 2, 2013.

video games, but the reviews seem not only to view the Lego games as different, but as a worthy part of the franchise. Almost every review mentions that this is not just a kid's game. *GamePro's* review states, "Star Wars has been licensed to death in the gaming world, with just about every nook and cranny mined dry of any mystery it might've once possessed. How surprising, then, was it that *Lego Star Wars*, ostensibly developed with a younger audience in mind, managed to breathe fresh air into an aging epic laden with archetypes and high drama."[16] This quote gets at the heart of why the Lego video games stand out in a sea of other licensed products. If the Star Wars fans, who are some of the most devout fans imaginable, can accept and like an adaptation that uses the famous stud and tube Lego brick, fans of other franchise should be much easier to please.

The reviews of the Lego games do assert that the formula for the games does not really change, but the titles still obtain critical and financial success because the different franchises allow for different attributes in the games. The *IGN* review of *Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4* states, "If you have played one of the past Lego games – *Star Wars*, *Batman*, or *Indiana Jones* – the setup to *Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4* should be pretty easy to wrap your head around… So if the formula is the same, what's so great about *Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4*? A bunch of stuff. For starters, the spell system is a fresh idea."[17] The changes that come from the different franchises allow the Lego games to offer something new for each release. The Star Wars mythology lets the Jedis and Sith use the force to move Lego blocks in the game. Indiana Jones has his whip to swing and move blocks. Batman has the utility belt and the gadgets to make him interesting, and the Harry Potter mythology is full of magic spells that offer a new type of interaction with

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Greg Miller, *Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4* Review: If there's no grass on the field, play Quidditch," *IGN Online*, June 29, 2010. Accessed April 2, 2013.

the Lego environment. The *Lego Harry Potter* games have a significant environmental

advantage for using the construction blocks. In the books and films, the wizarding world

is full of moving, dynamic geography, and Hogwarts castle allows the Lego games'

emphasis on building and manipulation to directly follow how the environment is

supposed to act.

Gonzalo Frasca argues for the use of simulation to analyze games, and the Lego

video games make an interesting case for this.[18] Frasca suggests that modeling and not

just representing a product is crucial to cross-promotional video games."[19] The Lego

games' environments, characters, and props are all based on physical Lego toy sets or

models, and the players and reviewers appear to share the connection with simulation.

Game Spot's reviews emphasize, "It really gives the feeling that you're playing within a

living Lego world."[20] Most games that use product placement attempt to provide a

simulation or convey the experience of using a product, and it appears that the Lego

games successfully convey using the Lego bricks and minifigs.[21] The *Lego Harry Potter*

games emphasizes that "Lego Hogwarts is the largest and most detailed Lego game

location ever built, and is brought to life as a grand, immersive 3D environment."[22]

Building large scale models from the little, plastic bricks is something that many Lego

fans (children and adults) look forward to accomplishing, and since the video game

environments are all based on physical toy sets, this game offers both digital simulation

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[18] Gonzalo Frasca, "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology," in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003), 221-235.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Phil Theobald, "Review *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy*: It's time for a return trip to the blocky, plastic version of that galaxy far, far away," *Game Spy Online*, September 7, 2006. Accessed April 2, 2013.
[21] Gonzalo Frasca, "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology," in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003), 221-235; Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Video Games* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007).
[22] http://videogames.lego.com/en-us/harry-potter/about /features.

and the basis for creating a physical Lego environment.[23] The simulated use of Lego

construction toys distinguishes the Lego releases from the other video games in each

franchise.

The reviews of the Lego games reinforce and convey to the readers that the

humorous, family-friendly editing of the stories and use of Lego blocks and minifigs

make these texts different from other licensed video games. The *Lego Harry Potter*

video games have been received critically better than the other titles in the Harry Potter

franchise. To understand why the Lego games succeed, it will be prudent to see the

criticism and reception of the licensed, adaptation games that are typically produced for a

media conglomerate's franchise. Seeing where the typical adaptation video games and

Lego versions differ will shed light upon what aspects of the Lego titles make them well

received by the players.

Electronic Arts Harry

The Harry Potter Lego and non-Lego adaptation video games make a good case

study for the series. There are eleven video game titles in the Harry Potter franchise that

are not Lego releases.[24] To see how the Lego titles differ from other licensed games in

translation, character representation, parody, puzzle solving, action, ability to use

imagination, and environmental manipulation, it will be useful to see what the other

Harry Potter releases do differently. The Harry Potter video games were only designed

after the book series was adapted to film. The first five installments for this game series

(*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, the Chamber of Secrets, Prisoner of Azkaban,*

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[23] Sarah Herman, *A Million Little Bricks: The Unofficial Illustrated History of the Lego Phenomenon* (New York: Skyhorse, 2012); John Baichtal and Joe Meno, *The Cult of Lego* (San Francisco: No Starch Press, Inc, 2011).
[24] http://www.mobygames.com/game-group/harry-potter-licensees

Goblet of Fire, and Order of the Phoenix) were each released within the advertising window of the accompanying film.[25] These games are adaptations of the film, but they do not quite fit into direct translation. These games do allow for the all-important aspect of spatial storytelling with Harry having to explore Hogwarts Castle to complete tasks and puzzles. This exploration is rewarded with points and trophies in the game.[26]

There is also an emphasis in the game on the schoolwork that is largely ignored in both the books and films. Through the Harry Potter series (book and film), very little time is spent on Harry's actual studies, but these video games puts emphasis on Harry learning magic to complete tasks, which progresses the player through the game and opens up other parts of the story world to explore. The description of the games emphasizes teamwork as the player or players can control Harry, Ron, and Hermione from the third game on.[27] These games in the series are still primarily following the narrative from the novels and films. The games all increase the explorative nature of Harry's world by going to locations further away from Hogwarts with the narrative. These five titles are still primarily puzzle-solving games that require the players to educate both the characters and themselves through play.

The reviews (from *Moby Games*, *IGN*, *Game Spot*, *GameSpy*, *Nintendo World Report*, and *Cheat Code Central*) of the first five EA games in this series all point out that these games are adaptations that do not live up to the books and the films. The EA adaptation games include many of the same characteristics as the Lego video games including: allowing players to spatially explore Harry's universe, concentrate on puzzles and solutions, and use the licensed material from the films and books. The direct, film-

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[25] www.imdb.com; www.mobygames.com

[26] http://www.mobygames.com/game/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerers-stone___

[27] www.mobygames.com

adaptation video games have not had the critical or financial success that would be expected with this franchise. The video games did not produce and perform well enough to reach an audience past the consumers that are brand loyal to the Harry Potter franchise.

The sixth game in the series, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, starts to change the theme of puzzle solving and education in the series. The game loses its puzzle-based aspect for more action.[28] The seventh and eighth games continue this trend making a full departure from the puzzle-solving game by becoming shooter games. The last novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, is adapted into two films and in turn, two games, which the games follow most likely in an attempt to synergistically profit from the films' releases. The seventh game is a first-person shooter that still contains quests to progress the game play, but the puzzle aspects have been removed. The eighth game switches to a third-person shooter. The last three direct adaptations change the video game series from child-friendly, puzzle-based games to shooter games that concentrate on advancing through exchanges that are more violent. While the novels and films ultimately follow this form, the games moved from being a neutral game that welcomes anyone that would like to participate in the narrative world, to a male-gendered, shooter game that takes cognitive learning aspects of the earlier titles and replaces them with more violent, adolescent action.

Another possibility for the final three licensed, adaptation video games is they target an older audience, while the younger-child oriented Lego video game titles were already in development or being released. The last three video game adaptations were *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* in 2009, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows:*

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[28] http://www.mobygames.com/game/harry-potter-and-the-half-blood-prince_

Part 1 in 2010, and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* in 2011.[29] The *Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4* video game was released in 2010 and *Lego Harry Potter: Years 5-7 in 2011*.[30] The dual titles in 2010 and 2011 indicate that the games were not cannibalizing each other's sales, but were each targeting different audiences. The traditional adaptation games were going for older children and adolescents while the Lego titles were going for the younger children and family audiences.

Looking at the video games that were produced by Electronic Arts and the Lego titles show that the translation of material directly from one medium to another is not enough to please audiences or critics, and both types of games prove this. Both the Lego and EA games provide puzzles or challenges that require skills, have the important elements from the franchise, and allow for spatial exploration of the narrative universe. The difference between the two games is that the Lego titles contain parody-style humor, the ability to greatly manipulate the environment with Lego blocks, projecting imagination onto the games through the Lego building canvas, and the association with Lego as a brand. Every review of the Lego video games contains a statement about the elements of humor and parody. Whether the reviewer mentions building minifigs with the head of Darth Vader and the metal bikini body of Princess Leia or the comical glossing over of dark material, the Lego games' use of updating the franchise material with humor is well met by the critics. Another common theme that is lauded in the reviews for the Lego games is the use of Lego blocks to build solutions to the puzzles and challenges in the games. The puzzles and challenges are not hard since the games are rated for ten year olds, but the response to building with Lego blocks to change the

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

game's design is highly regarded in the reviews of these games. The blank canvas attributes of these games allow for a great understanding of the material, but a minifig is not Harrison Ford, Sean Connery, Daniel Radcliffe, or Johnny Deep. The cartoon-style Lego graphics allow players to insert some of their own imagination onto the characters even if they have seen the films, but the lack of dialogue in cut scenes also allows the story to be changed to some degree, especially for people who are entering the franchise through the Lego games.

The EA games use the likeness of the actors and dialogue from the films, which leaves almost no room for projecting imagination into the narrative universe. The EA games do offer an immersive environment that players can explore, but without the freedom to build any additions or create something else inside the game. The EA games only allow players to walk a strict pathway that follows the films version. It is exactly this pre-programmed path and lack of creativity that separates the two types of games. The Lego brand inspires a sense of creativity and building with its physical toys (even the licensed, themed sets), and those same values are entrenched in the video games.

Are The Lego Games Just Promotional?

The Lego video games are definitely the products of synergistic co-branding since they license existing media properties and are the result of combining Lego with other media conglomerates' brands. Being synergistic and co-branded products, the Lego video games function as cross-promotional texts, but do they operate as more than this? Can these games stand on their own (succeed without needing the primary text's content to understand the game) in a consumer marketplace that is flooded with licensed products? As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the first game in each franchise is

released within a blockbuster film's advertising window, which makes the games function well as cross-promotional products. To be successful critically and financially, these games need to do more than just regurgitate the films. The Lego games recreate the film experience but provide extra game play opportunities with openings to let the players individually expand the narrative.

The reviews of the Lego video games by the people buying these games (at Amazon and Game Stop) indicate that these games provide more than just a translation of the films. Many of the user reviews explain that parents are buying these games for children that desire them, that the parents are not only happy with the game and the content, but the parents are happy to be playing the games with their children. Reviews of the Lego video games come from parents, children, and adult players that are not parents. The reviews usually state the participant's situation (parents buying for children, children reviewing themselves, or older adult couple playing together) and their feelings about the product, so that other people can make an informed decision about purchasing the games. The reviews for the Lego games are extremely positive, which is interesting because the numbers are so one sided. Even the reviewers that post a less positive critique explain that they are doing so because only posting positive reviews does not add anything to the discussion of the games for the people looking to buy. Just to provide an example, the number of Amazon.com reviews for *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga* released on the Wii total 508. There are 366 five-star reviews, 91 four-star reviews, 26 three-star reviews, 8 two-star reviews, and 17 one-star reviews. The breakdown of ratings for this game title is consistent across every platform. The other Lego releases have similar ratings breakdowns with a relatively small amount of negative reviews.

A few specific titles on specific platforms have different ratings, but that is usually due to some glitch that has yet to be fixed. *Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4* released on the PS3 received a number of negative reviews regarding a software issue until a downloadable patch through the Playstation Network became available. The other version of *Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4* released on other platforms did not have any of these problems. The consistency of the Lego titles to have a 90 percent positive feedback is noteworthy with so many reviews. The amount of reviews and feedback for EA Harry Potter games on the same sites is drastically lower. The EA games typically did not get more than 25-35 reviews for any game on any platform, and the reviews are much more negative with a lower rating.

The reviews of the Lego video games usually mention that the game is an adaptation, but that the games are great on their own. Parents' reviews state that they are happy with the censoring of some of the material, which only makes the games better for their kids. The parents like the fact that they can sit down with their kids and play a game that is familiar and new at the same time. These statements run through all of the reviews for these games on every platform. There is also a clear sense of brand loyalty to the Lego video games. A large number of reviews state that the *family* has bought and played other Lego video games. The family-friendly editing that the Lego brand brings to these franchises allows parents and kids to bond with these games.

Analyzing the user reviews, the Lego video games have developed their own brand, brand recognition, and brand loyalty that are not tied to the franchises they are licensing. The Lego video game brand is the family-friendly, light-hearted, video game series that uses parody to present film material through playing with the digital Lego

blocks and minifigs. The Lego brand recognition comes from the positive experiences the players have with the games, which makes the series identifiable to the consumers. The Lego brand loyalty is displayed with the user reviews claiming that people are returning to buy the games in this series. Parents, children, and any other players are stating that they are buying these games based on their own merit, especially repeat Lego video game buyers. Some of the new buyers do state that the franchise may have originally been a selling point, but it seems from the review, that it is never the sole reason for purchasing the games. The games are not just promotional products to these franchises. The Lego video games are a series of interlinking titles that support each other. People that started with the *Lego Star Wars* games have continued to buy the other Lego video games, and the players who came into the brand later with *Lego Harry Potter* or *Lego Batman* are stating that they are going to find the earlier games. The Lego video games have grown into their own individual series that functions like a franchise.

<div align="center">*Paratext or Stand-alone Products*</div>

While the Lego video game titles are part of licensed franchises, these games do situate people to understand the films in different ways. These games act as paratexts providing people with spatial exploration of the narrative universe to which they belong. In a manner similar to Gray's analysis of *The Simpsons Hit and Run*, the Lego games let a player explore the spaces that are not available in a film or print version of the world.[31] This added sense of meaning and information allows the consumers of each franchise to construct greater meaning out of the narrative world. The lack of dialogue in the Lego games lets younger children internally insert their own details into cut scenes and additional material that are in the games but not in the films. One common statement in

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[31] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.

the user reviews of the *Lego Indiana Jones* games is that people get to explore Barnett

College where Indiana Jones works when he is not off on an adventure or the ability to

fully explore Hogwarts in the *Lego Harry Potter* games. The meanings that can be

constructed around a narrative universe from being able to view the geography previously

unavailable adds significance to the franchise material. Fans of a franchise desire the

added details about their favorite fictional world whether the additions are in geographic

exploration, back story, or continuation of the story.[32]

The Star Wars licensed toys provide a good example of fans desiring more

narrative details, so much so that the toys allowed fans to continue the Star Wars story

beyond what was available after the first trilogy but before the second.[33] The emphasis

on secondary character toys that both Jenkins and Gray point out displays the small

spaces and details that might be thought to be looked over but are focused on by fans. An

interesting facet of the Lego video games is that all of the licensed franchises have the

kind of dedicated following that desires these details. Lord of the Rings, the Hobbit,

Batman, Harry Potter, Star Wars, Indiana Jones, and the Pirates of the Caribbean all have

a dedicated fan bases that almost guarantee interest in exploring the narrative universe

that Lego and its collaborators have created.

These games do function as paratexts that help the audience make sense of the

films. The family-friendly censorship of the material may cause some first-time viewers

to expect a more light-hearted version of the films though. According to the user reviews

on Amazon and Game Stop, the *Lego Indiana Jones* games remove the scene in *Temple

of Doom* where Mola Ram rips the heart out of the man's chest, the Nazi symbols from

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[32] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*; Grays, *Shows Sold Separately*.
[33] Ibid.

the bad guys, and the scene where the Nazis are melted by the Ark. These are obvious scenes to cut for a family-friendly game, but when younger children watch the films associated with the games they love, they may not to expect these kinds of scenes. These games have positioned the players to read or reread the films in different ways. The Lego video games allow for a total understanding of the environment and the characters surroundings and quests.

After *Lego Star Wars*, the first game released with the Lego brand on a licensed game, the user reviews indicate that these games are bought more for their own brand than their relationship to franchise material. The reviews do stress that people who are not already into the Lego games would enjoy the franchise content and like the game, but the video game is worth buying or playing regardless of the adaptation. The Lego video games build the brand of both Lego and the franchises the company collaborates with but have become their own series to follow.

Recruiting and Rejuvenating

The Lego video games work on several levels as far as rejuvenating older franchises and recruiting people into gaming. The Star Wars and Indiana Jones Lego video games expose the children playing to franchise material that they have probably not been exposed to before. The Harry Potter franchise would function differently on this point since a major motion picture has been released with no more than two years between the eight films and multiple video games and has not died down enough yet to need to be revived. The Star Wars and Indiana Jones franchises have both gone a few years without a significant film release, and the newer installments have not had the staying power the original trilogies for both series had. The Lego games are also

returning many adults to the narrative world of Star Wars and Indiana Jones that they might not have been interested in for some time whether through playing with children or as adult video game players. The Lego video games true recruiting potential is getting people, especially parents/adults, to play and buy video games. The number of adult reviewers that claim to have never played video games until they started playing a Lego video game is worthy of discussion.

The *Lego Star War* and *Indiana Jones* games are providing younger children with the chance to learn to construct meaning surrounding these older franchises through means other than just the games' narrative adaptation. Many of the user reviews on both Game Stop and Amazon are written by parents who explain that they have bought these games for children ranging from 5-15 years of age. The reviewers will then explain that the parents and the children are playing the games together, and the children are learning the franchise material from their parents. To display a typical comment about the children learning the Star Wars narrative and franchise material one reviewer wrote, "My daughter loves this game, she is 6 and she and my husband are having such a great time playing it together. They are having their own special nerd time together. I will listen to them laugh when she asks her Daddy…"do they have the force?" Or…"When are we going to fight Senator Palpatine?" And I just think…oh goodness. There's another Star Wars nerd in the world."[34] This type of comment is repeated again and again. The parents buying and helping their children advance through these games are expanding the franchise details where the Lego video games leave the source material vague.

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[34] Heather F, "May the force be with you when your child starts playing this," Amazon Review *Lego Star Wars: the Complete Saga*, April 17, 2012. Accessed April 20, 2013. http://www.amazon.com/Lego-Star-wras-complete-nintendo-wii/product reviews/B000R3BNDI/ref=cm_cr_pr_top_link_3?ie=UTF8&pagenumber=#&showviewpoints=0

The user reviews reveal that the Lego video game brand is the main source of desire for children and the parents approve of the games' family-friendly material. The franchise material seems to be a secondary consideration with many of the parents buying these video games. Their children desire the Lego brand video games that are current in the marketplace rather than importance being placed on what franchise is being licensed. As the children make their way through the games, they develop a sense of the plot and the character arcs that are important, which is recruiting people further into the franchises and refreshing the original film series the game is based on. The children grasp the protagonists and antagonists of the story and desire to play as both of these types of characters in the video games. The ability to play as any character in the game is a feature the Lego titles allow, and both children and adults take advantage of being able to play as these characters.

In the user reviews, most of the parents claim to start playing the games to help their children at the start, and then truly come to love the games. A majority of the parents posting the user reviews claim to like the game as much as their children and admit to playing the game after the children go to sleep. The Lego video games are actually recruiting non-gaming adults into gaming. So many of the reviews tell a story of how they bought this game for a child, and as the child played the game, the parent started to play with the child in two player-cooperative mode. The parents express that they end up playing the Lego video games more and more. A second common recurring and recruiting story that appears in the user reviews is the wife that buys the game for a husband and begins to play with him. For both of these stories, the parents and child or husband and wife usually refer to other Lego games that they have played or will buy.

The ability of the Lego video games to recruit non-gamers into gaming brings these people into a new medium. Children that move from playing adaptation video games to watching the movies is a more natural occurrence since children are familiar with both types of media. Adults moving into a new media form that they previously did not use for one brand of video games shows the recruiting potential of the brand. The games must have elements that the new users are comfortable with and the games must be user-friendly. I have personally seen many adults shy away from video games that are too intricate and busy to be understood in a short amount of time. All of the Lego video game magazine reviews explain that the controls for the games are simple and the game play concentrates on puzzle solving. The user-friendly controls and the type of game play welcome everyone into the Lego video game brand and the accompanying franchises.

Video games are usually marketed to a niche market that will be attracted to specific content,[35] but the Lego series of games have a family-friendly, broad content that appeals to a mass audience. The Lego franchise provides content that is not only popular, but that parents and children accept and want. The ability of the Lego titles to recruit people of all ages lies in the capacity to provide a gaming formula that is user friendly enough to make transitioning to video game playing easy, offers content that is family-friendly, and offers licensed content that interests the players. From the user reviews, the licensed content is the "icing on the cake" that allows the narrative to become more than any single video game. The mythology from the licensing franchises allow the Lego video games to capitalize on work that is already iconic with generations and are counting on these extremely popular works to resonate with the younger generation.

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[35] Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 161.

In conclusion, I have argued that the meanings constructed from the Lego video games are opened up by viewing them as paratexts. The original material is translated well enough to makes these games the de facto experience of the franchise requiring no help from the original films. As cross-promotional paratexts, the Lego video games are able to stand on their own and are popular enough to be their own brand and franchise. Even if the Lego games' releases are outside of a blockbuster, advertising window, the games do not suffer. The reviewers of these games (user and professional) laud these games for adapting the franchise material well, but the Lego video games differ from traditional adaptation in several key ways according to the reviews. The Lego games add a sense of humor to the franchise material. The parody of the characters and plot are key ingredients for the children and parent/adult players these games attract. Another key aspect of the Lego video game formula is the family-friendly edited material. Many parents that review these games welcome these games into their children's lives before the actual films because of the censoring of questionable material, and the unique way that the family-friendly editing usually fits directly into the humor of the games.

In addition to the humorous, family-friendly content, the Lego games provide enough vagueness to allow new users to alter the storyline just enough to make the narrative individualized or to allow others (such as parents) to fill in the gaps creating a shared mythology between parents and children. These video games also tap into the Lego toy brand that focuses on building and manipulating the environment. I have also argued that as a recruiting tool the Lego games are welcoming to all players, even non-gamers, with easy controls and thought-provoking puzzles, which differs from many other video games that focus on violence or competition. This video game brand is

collaborative for the players, which builds rapport instead of animosity. The formula for these games is successful enough to have multiple other releases scheduled for the future. The Lego formula is distinct and will welcome any players that look for all of these aspects.

Conclusion – The Final Block

I have argued that the Lego brand allows the collaborating media conglomerates access to a child audience in exchange for promoting Lego's physical and digital toys and the film franchises as well. The Lego games have a great potential in recruiting audiences to the franchise material, but one of the greatest functions of these games is their ability to recruit non-gaming adult or parent players into gaming through the nostalgic use of familiar and iconic franchise material and a graphic-representation style that is reminiscent of earlier video games. In addition, I have pointed out that the Lego games have grown into their own franchise that can succeed independently from the licensing material. After releasing adaptations of several franchises, the Lego video games have developed into their own series that bolsters the original licensing franchise and sells Lego products simultaneously. The Lego video games are the result of a complex relationship between at least two and sometime three companies that all have a stake in the production of these games. Lego and Warner Bros.' TT Games are both connected to every release with Disney and Lucas Arts (now a Disney company) collaborating on specific games. The power dynamics in this relationship favor Lego because its brand carries the media franchise material to a new customer base. Lego's power is shown with its alteration of the original content, which tones down any violent or dark material to make it appealing to both the children playing these titles and the parents buying the games. Without the alterations of the original material, Lego would most likely think twice about licensing these titles. The company did seriously consider not collaborating with Lucas Arts because Star Wars contained the word "war." With the

Lego name on the video games, parents feel assured that this franchise of games is acceptable for their children.

Lego recommends that the video games are acceptable for eight-year-old children, and according to the user reviews on the Amazon and Game Stop websites, many parents buy these games for children younger than that. Without the media conglomerates allowing these content changes for Lego, the new consumers would not be accessible, but at the same time, Lego would not have a share in the video game market or the profits from licensing. The co-branding strategy of these texts allows Lego to sell its products and promote the franchise material. The media conglomerates get their franchises renewed and get new customers that are receiving a positive brand experience. While the corporate entities are satisfied with this collaboration, the fans are able to either enter the film franchise or continue the film's experience. The industrial strategy allows the audience to construct new meanings and build new possibilities into the original film content through paratextual experiences. This study focuses more on Gray's notion of paratexts more than on Jenkins' transmedia storytelling. In the context of the Lego video games, transmedia paratexts provide the best lens for analyzing how these games position their audiences to understand any connections and meaning created with the film franchises. The Lego video games' cross-promotional status allows commercial business to build its profits and the audience to construct its media experience at the same time.

The brilliance of the Lego video games co-branding strategy, compared to any other examples, lies with the modeling and simulation of the Lego brand. Lego's construction sets (a physical product) provide both the environment and the characters for the games. The products are not just placed for view in the games; the digital versions of

these toys are used in the games. Players that own a *Lego Star Wars*, *Lego Harry Potter*, or *Lego Indiana Jones* toy set can literally build a physical version of the video games (at a high cost). As Lucas Films showed with licensing so many secondary Star Wars characters as toys, the world of these games can find life in a new medium and its fans imaginations. The Lego games provide these iconic films with the chance to transition to games and climb out of the digital Lego world and into a physical one. The other cross-promotional examples listed cannot extend this kind of opportunity to their texts. The modeling and simulation that Lego has using a minifig and blocks in both the video games and physical toy set would be hard to match with any other toys translation.

The Lego video game franchise provides a great example of co-branding between a toy company and multiple media conglomerates. This franchise's well-developed industrial strategy is displayed by the games' popularity and critical success. The industrial co-branding strategy benefits all of commercial interests of adapting films into video games while adding a crucial product placement element to target young children. Even while the industrial strategy exploits a young consumer market, these games provide products that are very popular and desired by consumers. The players receive a unique experience that allows them to occupy the familiar fictional world of popular film franchises and develop a different sense of these worlds and characters. These games provide both the industry and consumers a desired outcome at one time, which supports the argument that the Lego franchise sets a precedent for industrial strategy and audience address in the video game market.

This study has been an attempt to understand how the Lego video games as cross-promotional franchise products function in the current marketplace. This work has

analyzed these games through both Jenkins' transmedia storytelling and Gray's paratexts. Gray's paratexts provide a better tool for understanding how audiences construct meaning around licensed video games in this study. This study has shown why the Lego video games stand out compared to other licensed video games. These releases began as cross-promotional products, but they have grown into their own franchise with a dedicated following. The Lego games have built on the successes of other popular licensed games to create a unique formula that brings together several significantly large companies. The scholarly sources used provided a good base to understanding how media conglomerates spread their brands, franchise, and consolidate their images, which informed me of how unique the level of co-branding found in the Lego video games is within the current market.

There are several limitations in this study. The user reviews from the Amazon and Game Stop web sites serve as a good source of the discourses surrounding these video games, but including reception data from actual players of these games may provide additional insight into these series of texts. It would be interesting to view these games in the family context to see how children may be teaching their parents how to play the games or how parents are teaching their children the original franchise material. While some of the children are not ready for it, it would be interesting to view how children may react to watching the films after only having been exposed to the franchise material through the Lego video games. It is this type of reception data that I think would have strengthened this study and truly got to the heart of studying these games using Gray's paratext model.

I also think a limitation of this study is the lack of a comparison between the content in the films and the video games. It would be valuable to understand exactly how family friendly the games are compared to the movies. A critical analysis of both the films and the games would provide any ideological differences in race, class, or gender between the texts. This study was not concerned with the race, class, or gendering of Lego's physical toys or the video games, but it is an important aspect that could shed light upon what makes these texts family friendly over many other video games.

For future research, I would continue researching the differences between advergames and cross-promotional games. While the Lego video games do function as promotional texts with significant product placement, they accomplish more in the way of continuing and extending the films and franchises rather than just selling consumer merchandise. Many other licensed video games sell advertising space without providing any type of meaningful experience within the interpretation, but as the Lego video game example shows, the consumers respond financially and critically to the games that do more than simply sell merchandise.

In my own future research, I would also like to conduct more qualitative research with the gamers (children and parents). I would want to conduct an ethnography that views these gamers in their own surroundings interacting with the texts. I would want to interview the players about the theoretical assertions in the current study, which would correct one of the limitations I feel is found in this study. In the coming year, several more Lego video games are scheduled for release with new collaborators to the Lego formula, which is an area of future research in the Lego video game series. Lego video games provide an excellent site of brand and franchise expansion for all of the media

conglomerates and the toy company. The formula (game play, use of parody, the minifigs, and Lego building environment) for these games has stayed consistent, but it will be interesting to see this series continue to grow and display more of its own franchise characteristics in the film adaptations. The players of these games continue to want their favorite films redone in this format, and it will be interesting to watch the child audience grow with this franchise in the coming years.